

# Review of the School Completion Programme

Emer Smyth, Joanne Banks, Adele Whelan,  
Merike Darmody and Selina McCoy

RESEARCH SERIES  
NUMBER 44

*October 2015*



# Review of the School Completion Programme

Emer Smyth, Joanne Banks, Adele Whelan, Merike Darmody and Selina McCoy

*October 2015*

Available to download from [www.esri.ie](http://www.esri.ie)

© The Economic and Social Research Institute  
Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2

ISBN 978-0-7070-0388-7

## The Authors

Emer Smyth is a Research Professor, Joanne Banks is a Research Officer, Adele Whelan is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Merike Darmody is a Research Officer and Selina McCoy is an Associate Research Professor at the ESRI.

## Acknowledgements

The authors are very grateful to members of the study steering group, particularly Marian Brattman, who gave advice and feedback during the course of the study. We are very grateful to the coordinators, chairpersons, school principals, local management committee members and education stakeholders who completed questionnaires and interviews. The report has benefited greatly from comments from one external referee and two ESRI reviewers.

*This report has been peer-reviewed prior to publication. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.*

# Table of Contents

GLOSSARY.....	VII
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	VIII
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Context.....	1
1.2 School Attendance and Retention in Ireland.....	2
1.3 Research Aims and Questions.....	25
1.4 Data Sources and Methodology.....	8
1.4.1 Desk Review of Irish and International Literature on Combating Educational Disadvantage .....	8
1.4.2 Analysis of Administrative Data Collected by the NEWB/Tusla .....	9
1.4.3 A Survey of SCP Local Coordinators and Chairpersons .....	9
1.4.4 Case-Studies of Ten SCP Clusters .....	10
1.4.5 Interviews with National Stakeholders .....	12
1.4.6 Approach to Data Analysis .....	12
1.5 Outline of the Report .....	12
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
2.1 Introduction .....	14
2.2 Research on Early School Leaving.....	14
2.2.1 Early School Leaving.....	14
2.2.2 Individual and Social Factors .....	14
2.2.3 Education and School Structures .....	15
2.2.4 Impact of Early School Leaving.....	16
2.3 Initiatives to Counter Early School Leaving.....	17
2.3.1 National Policies .....	17
2.3.2 Evaluation of Interventions.....	22
2.4 Conclusions .....	24
CHAPTER 3 THE SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME.....	25
3.1 Introduction .....	25
3.2 Overview of SCP .....	25
3.2.1 Specific Aims.....	25
3.2.2 Eight Principles of the School Completion Programme .....	26
3.2.3 SCP, DEIS and the NEWB .....	26
3.2.4 SCP Management Structure .....	27
3.2.5 Components of Prevention And Support .....	29
3.2.6 Identification and Targeting of Students .....	30
3.3 Perceptions of the Aims of SCP on the Ground .....	31

3.3.1	A Programme to Track and Monitor Attendance .....	32
3.3.2	A Caring, Social Support for Students at Risk.....	33
3.3.3	An Holistic School Engagement Programme.....	34
3.3.4	A Mechanism to Bring Outside Agencies into the School.....	35
3.4	Conclusions .....	36
<b>CHAPTER 4 TARGETING AND PROVISION .....</b>		<b>38</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	38
4.2	Criteria for Identifying the Target Group.....	38
4.3	The Size and Composition of the Target Group.....	43
4.4	Balance of Provision.....	51
4.5	In-school Provision.....	53
4.5.1	Primary Schools.....	53
4.5.2	Second-Level Schools .....	57
4.6	After-School Provision .....	61
4.7	Holiday Provision .....	64
4.8	Out-of-School Provision.....	65
4.9	Conclusions .....	67
<b>CHAPTER 5 CLUSTERING AND DEIS PROVISION.....</b>		<b>68</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	68
5.2	Cluster Size and Composition .....	68
5.3	The Integration of SCP with other Dimensions of the DEIS Programme .....	72
5.4	Conclusions .....	77
<b>CHAPTER 6 GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF THE SCP COORDINATOR.....</b>		<b>78</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	78
6.2	Role of Coordinator.....	78
6.2.1	Varied Duties and Responsibilities.....	80
6.2.2	Reporting and Administration.....	84
6.2.3	SCP, HSCL and EWO.....	86
6.3	Conclusion.....	88
<b>CHAPTER 7 GOVERNANCE: THE CHAIRPERSON AND LOCAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE .....</b>		<b>90</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	90
7.2	National Governance .....	90
7.2.1	Employment Structures and Human Resources .....	91
7.3	Role of the Chairperson .....	94
7.4	Division of Labour Within Clusters.....	99
7.5	Role of the Local Management Committee (LMC) .....	100
7.5.1	The Content of LMC Meetings .....	110
7.5.2	Sharing Information/Collegiality .....	112
7.6	Reporting Arrangements .....	113

7.7	Conclusions .....	115
<b>CHAPTER 8 FUNDING AND RESOURCES.....</b>		<b>117</b>
8.1	Introduction .....	117
8.2	Staffing.....	117
8.3	Premises.....	119
8.4	Expenditure.....	120
8.5	The Recession and School Context .....	125
8.6	Perceptions of Funding Adequacy .....	127
8.7	Conclusions .....	132
<b>CHAPTER 9 STUDENT OUTCOMES .....</b>		<b>133</b>
9.1	Introduction .....	133
9.2	Perceived Student Outcomes .....	133
9.3	Internal Evaluation Practices .....	142
9.4	Conclusions .....	145
<b>CHAPTER 10 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SCP .....</b>		<b>147</b>
10.1	Introduction .....	147
10.2	Strengths.....	147
10.2.1	Flexibility in Supports for Children at Risk .....	147
10.2.2	Additional Support for Principals, Teachers and the School.....	148
10.2.3	SCP Has Changed the Way Schools Operate.....	149
10.2.4	Valuable Information Gathering .....	149
10.2.5	A Non-Teaching Role .....	150
10.2.6	Instant Support for Schools (Counselling).....	151
10.2.7	Easy Access to Small Funds / Subsidies.....	153
10.2.8	Monitoring and Tracking Attendance .....	154
10.2.9	Creates a Positive View of School and Community to Parents and Children.....	154
10.3	Weaknesses .....	156
10.3.1	Poor National Governance.....	156
10.3.2	Funding Cuts.....	157
10.3.3	A Lack of National Vision.....	158
10.3.4	Lack of Human Resources Structures.....	159
10.3.5	Lack of Expertise/Diversity on LMC.....	162
10.3.6	Cluster Arrangements .....	163
10.3.7	Using Evidence .....	164
10.3.8	Inconsistency in Provision Among Clusters.....	165
10.4	Conclusions .....	165
<b>CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>		<b>167</b>
11.1	Introduction .....	167
11.2	Aims and Purpose .....	168

11.3 Targeting .....	168
11.4 Clustering .....	170
11.5 Governance and Structures .....	171
11.5.1 The SCP Coordinator .....	171
11.5.2 Management and Governance .....	172
11.5.3 Integrated Service Delivery .....	174
11.6 Funding .....	175
11.7 Provision .....	176
11.8 Student outcomes.....	179
REFERENCES.....	182

## List of Tables

Table 1.1	Characteristics of the Case-Study Clusters .....	11
Table 1.2	Case-Study Interviews .....	11
Table 2.1	Selected Interventions Designed to Combat Early School Leaving Across Europe .....	21
Table 3.1	The Four Pillars of SCP Provision .....	30
Table 5.1	Proportion of Post-Primary Schools and Students in the Cluster Across Clusters .....	69
Table 8.1	Staffing Models in SCP Clusters .....	118

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Proportion of Students Absent for 20 Days or More in the School Year for DEIS and Non-DEIS Primary Schools Between the Academic Years 2005/06 and 2011/12 .....	4
Figure 1.2	Proportion of Students Absent for More Than 20 days in the School Year in DEIS and Non-DEIS Post-Primary Schools .....	5
Figure 1.3	Average Percentage Retention to Junior Certificate for the 1995-2008 Cohorts in DEIS and Non-DEIS Schools .....	6
Figure 4.1	Criteria Used ('To a Great Extent') to Identify the Target Group .....	39
Figure 4.2	Criteria Used ('To a Great Extent') by Cluster Size .....	40
Figure 4.3	Individuals or Groups Involved in Identifying At-Risk Students (% 'To a Great Extent') .....	42
Figure 4.4a	Number of Primary Students Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13 .....	43
Figure 4.4b	Number of Post-Primary Students Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13 .....	44
Figure 4.4c	Number of Out-Of-School Children and Young People Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13 .....	44
Figure 4.5	Gender Profile (% Male) of the Target Group .....	45
Figure 4.6	Age Profile of the Target Group .....	46
Figure 4.7	Ethnic Profile of the Target Group by Cluster .....	46
Figure 4.8	Proportion of Students Targeted by Cluster .....	47
Figure 4.9	Intensity of Targeting by Cluster Size .....	50
Figure 4.10	Proportion of All Students in Each Age-Group Targeted by Cluster Intensity .....	51
Figure 4.11	Mean Proportion of Provision in the Different Pillars by Cluster Typology .....	52
Figure 4.12	Mean Proportion of Provision in the Different Pillars, Comparing Current and Ideal Balance .....	52
Figure 4.13	Approaches Used Across Different Forms of SCP Provision (% 'To a Great Extent') .....	53
Figure 4.14	Type of In-School Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster) .....	54
Figure 4.15	Proportion of In-School Provision Which Focuses on Learning Activities .....	56
Figure 4.16	Extent to Which Activities are Provided by all Primary Schools in the Cluster, if Provided .....	57



Figure 4.17	Extent to which Activities are Provided by all Second-Level Schools in the Cluster, if Provided (Clusters with two or more Second-Level Schools Only) .....	59
Figure 4.18	Type of After-School Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster) .....	62
Figure 4.19	Type of Holiday Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster) .....	65
Figure 4.20	Type of Out-Of-School Provision (Only for Those Clusters with At Least One Young Person in Receipt of Out-Of-School Provision) .....	66
Figure 5.1	Satisfaction with Present School Clustering Arrangements .....	69
Figure 5.2	Coordination and Collaboration with Other Aspects of the DEIS Programme .....	74
Figure 5.3	Dissatisfaction with the Coordination of the Full Range of DEIS Supports .....	76
Figure 6.1	Role of the Coordinator (% 'To a Great Extent') .....	79
Figure 6.2	Average Time Per Week Spent on Different Activities by Coordinators .....	83
Figure 6.3	Average Time Per Week Spent on Selected Activities by Cluster Size .....	84
Figure 6.4	Agreement with the Statement that 'Sufficient Training is Provided to Local Coordinators' .....	86
Figure 7.1	Role of the Chairperson (% 'To a Great Extent') .....	96
Figure 7.2	Time Allocated to Various Activities by the Chairperson (Minutes Per Month) .....	97
Figure 7.3	Main Responsibility for Specific Functions: Coordinator Perspective .....	100
Figure 7.4	Main Responsibility for Specific Functions: Chairperson Perspective .....	100
Figure 7.5	Size of LMC (Number of Members) by Size of Cluster (Number of Schools) .....	101
Figure 7.6	Composition of LMC (Mean Number Involved) .....	102
Figure 7.7	Agreement with the Statement that 'Committee Members are Clear About the Functions of LMC' .....	107
Figure 7.8	Agreement with the Statement that 'I get Sufficient Support from the Local Management Committee' .....	108
Figure 7.9	Agreement with the Statement that 'The Committee Members have the Necessary Skills to Conduct all Matters - Legal, Financial, Employment etc. Appropriately' .....	109
Figure 7.10	Chairperson's Satisfaction with the Performance of the LMC .....	110
Figure 7.11	Agreement with the Statement that 'I'm Satisfied with the Current Reporting Structures Regarding SCP' .....	114
Figure 8.1	Ratio of Targeted Students to Staff Numbers (where there is One or More Staff in a Cluster) by Cluster Size .....	118
Figure 8.2	Having any Full-Time, Part-Time or Sessional Staff, 2011/12 and 2014/15 .....	119
Figure 8.3	Coordinator Satisfaction with Current Premises .....	120
Figure 8.4	Total Spending on Staff Costs, 2011/12 .....	121
Figure 8.5	Proportion of Budget Spent on Staff Costs by Cluster Characteristics .....	121
Figure 8.6	Proportion of Budget Spent on Project Activities by Cluster Characteristics .....	122
Figure 9.1	Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent') .....	134
Figure 9.2	Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent') by Urban and Rural Location .....	140
Figure 9.3	Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent') by Cluster Typology .....	141

## Glossary

BITCI	Business in the Community Ireland
BOM	Board of Management
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ESL	Early School Leaving
ESLI	8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative
ETB	Education Training Board
EU	European Union
EWO	Educational Welfare Officers
FAST	Families and Schools Together
HR	Human Resources
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSCLC	Home School Community Liaison Coordinator
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied Programme
LMC	Local Management Committee
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
SAFEChildren	Schools And Families Educating Children
SCP	School Completion Programme
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SOAR	Skills, Opportunities and Recognition
SSRI	Stay in School Retention Initiative
VET	Vocational Education and Training
PEIP	Prevention and Early Intervention Programme

# Executive Summary

---

## INTRODUCTION

This report provides an in-depth examination of the operation of the School Completion Programme (SCP). SCP is organised in terms of 124 'clusters' (also called 'projects') which are run by a coordinator and a local management committee and consist of a group of primary and second-level schools within a local area. While the schools involved in SCP clusters are mainly DEIS (designated disadvantaged) schools, some non-DEIS schools are part of SCP clusters, reflecting patterns of transfer between local schools.

The research has used a range of data sources, including administrative data from SCP itself, a new survey of SCP coordinators and chairpersons, in-depth qualitative interviews with SCP coordinators, chairpersons, school principals and members of the LMC in ten case-study clusters, and interviews with key stakeholders. Using this detailed information, the research seeks to review existing provision and provide recommendations regarding appropriate structures and provision for the future. More specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What are the aims of the School Completion Programme from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including coordinators, Local Management Committee chairpersons and school principals?
- What criteria do local projects use to target children and young people?
- What kinds of activities are provided as part of SCP? How successful are they deemed by stakeholders? Do activities vary across different clusters?
- How do clusters vary in size and composition? What are the implications of such variation for targeting and provision?
- How does the programme relate to other aspects of DEIS provision?
- What issues arise in relation to project governance and the roles of the coordinator, chairperson and Local Management Committee?
- How are resources used by clusters?
- What do stakeholders see as the outcomes of SCP?
- What do they see as the key strengths and weaknesses of the programme?

## THE STUDY FINDINGS

### The Aims of SCP (Chapter 3)

Our findings highlight wide variations in the perceived aims of SCP among those surveyed and interviewed. SCP is widely regarded as being an effective means through which to coordinate both in- and out-of-school supports for the benefit of children and young people who are at risk of disengagement and early school leaving. There appears to be some variation between primary and post-primary schools in how SCP is conceptualised, with primary schools more likely to emphasise school engagement and social and emotional supports whereas at post-primary level the focus is more on attendance and student retention. Findings show that although funding for additional supports is valued by schools, skilled personnel are seen by principals and other stakeholders as key to the success of SCP at school level.

### Targeting (Chapter 4)

SCP clusters use a range of criteria to select children and young people for the programme. There is a particular emphasis on student attendance history, the child's family circumstances and their socio-emotional health and wellbeing. The process of identifying target children is driven by school principals, Home School Community Liaison Coordinators (HSCLCs) and, where present, school pastoral care teams. Our analysis shows some variation in the proportion of the school population targeted across clusters, with many clusters having to balance providing intensive supports for students in crisis situations with the risk of students experiencing stigma as a result of being withdrawn or separated from their peer group. Many clusters appear to combine both models, targeting large groups for some activities, such as after-school homework clubs, while retaining more intensive one-to-one work with a small number of students. The relative size of the target group also appears to reflect differences in the level of need across schools: schools with larger target numbers are more likely to require therapeutic supports. Schools are found to allow for flexibility in the size of the target group during the academic year where new issues arise among children and supports are required.

### Provision (Chapter 4)

The four pillars of SCP provision, as outlined in policy documents (SCP, 2008), include in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school supports. Considerable variation is found in the balance of provision across clusters but the majority of provision in recent years, following cuts to the SCP budget, is in-school. The emphasis on in-school supports is of concern to some who stressed the importance of after-school and holiday provision in making school a positive

place and promoting school engagement for targeted children and their families. Decision-making around the type of interventions and supports offered appears to lie with the SCP coordinator and school principals. This provides much flexibility to respond to local needs at both cluster and individual school level. Findings show, however, that there is a lack of continuous professional development (CPD) or opportunities to exchange knowledge for SCP coordinators. The report finds that the interventions provided by SCP fall into three complementary categories of provision: attendance monitoring, involving both in-school and after-school support; fostering socio-emotional wellbeing through in-school support and therapeutic interventions; and providing learning support through in-school interventions and supports such as homework clubs. These kinds of practices are internationally proven to improve child outcomes for children at risk of disengagement from school.

### Clustering (Chapter 5)

The report examines the nature of clustering arrangements in SCP and points to variation in the size and composition of clusters nationally. Differences are evident in the overall number of schools in the cluster but also in the balance between primary and post-primary schools, and DEIS and non-DEIS schools, in the same cluster. Four-in-ten clusters, particularly rural clusters, are found to have a non-DEIS school.<sup>1</sup> Findings also highlight issues in relation to cluster boundaries where children are transferring into or out of schools outside the cluster. The qualitative interviews highlighted the increased risk this can pose to vulnerable children and young people moving to non-DEIS schools where SCP supports are not available. In relation to cluster size, there appears to be a trade-off for the SCP coordinator in the extent to which they have direct involvement in students (evident in smaller clusters) or play an administrative or project management role (more common in larger clusters).

### SCP and Other Aspects of DEIS Provision (Chapter 5)

In DEIS schools, the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla have responsibility for operational management of two school-based support services: the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. The research findings highlight the shared objectives of SCP and other components of the DEIS programme in promoting school engagement and learning for at-risk children and young people. The SCP coordinator often works alongside the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator and Education Welfare Officer to integrate

---

<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that these schools do not have children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research indicates that a significant proportion of children and young people from semi/unskilled and non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools (Smyth et al., 2015).

supports, potentially strengthening their impact. However, there is variation across clusters, and among schools within clusters, in the involvement of the SCP coordinator in formal DEIS planning within the school.

### **Governance: The Role of the SCP Coordinator (Chapter 6)**

The SCP coordinator is primarily responsible for managing the project within the cluster. Although aspects of the role vary across clusters, coordinators are involved in liaising with principals, external agencies, parents and the children themselves. Furthermore, they are responsible for managing finances, managing SCP staff, setting up and monitoring programmes in the cluster, and reporting their activities to head office. Much of the variation in the role of coordinators relates to the size of the cluster, with those in larger clusters more likely to have a management role compared to those in smaller clusters where they work more closely with target children.

### **Governance: The Role of the Chairperson and Local Management Committee (Chapter 7)**

There is variation across clusters in the legal and employment arrangements for SCP employees, with some operating under Education and Training Boards (ETBs), some working under the Local Management Committee (LMC), and some operating under the Board of Management (BOM) of one of the schools in the cluster.<sup>2</sup> All of the clusters have a local management committee but in some clusters, the LMC acts as the employer as well as taking responsibility for monitoring cluster activities, identifying local need and deciding upon provision. The nature of governance in SCP emerged as a major issue in this study. Findings highlight weaknesses in current national governance structures, with some stakeholders arguing that there is a lack of a clear national vision for the programme. Cases where the employer is the LMC present particular challenges for governance given that members of the LMC may lack the skills to deal with complex financial, legal or HR issues.

The size and composition of local management committees is found to vary across clusters, with notable variation in the involvement of statutory and community agencies. LMC meetings are found to play an important role in creating a support structure for school principals who use them to exchange views and provide advice to one another. The role of chairperson also varies across clusters but typically involves monitoring expenditure, activities and

---

<sup>2</sup> A handful of clusters have other arrangements, for example, working through Teacher Education Centres.

programmes, and evaluating quality of provision. Many of the coordinators and chairpersons interviewed were critical of reporting structures in SCP which can take up a significant amount of coordinator time. Other stakeholders pointed to the lack of strategic direction from Tusla head office and the absence of a clear national vision for the programme.

### **Funding (Chapter 8)**

Previous research has indicated that the recession resulted in worsening socio-economic circumstances for children and young people attending DEIS schools (Watson et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2015). The impact of the recession on children's living conditions emerged as a strong theme in the case-study interviews, with principals also pointing to the impact of expenditure cuts on the level and nature of public and community services. The report highlights the extent of cuts to SCP funding in recent years and the impact of these cuts on provision. Analysis shows reductions in staffing levels, particularly for preventative school engagement measures (such as after-school activities) that use paid sessional staff. Of particular concern are cuts to the more reactive therapeutic interventions and one-to-one counselling for children in crisis situations. Reductions in funding have been applied proportionately across clusters but this does not necessarily reflect the level of need and the concentration of greater disadvantage in some local areas. The report highlights the potential impact of these cuts on targeted children and young people, given the extent of deprivation among this group. Almost all clusters have had to limit the frequency and nature of provision, with (as noted above) particular implications for after-school and holiday provision. The qualitative interviews indicate that school principals consider that further budget cuts to SCP or its withdrawal altogether would have very serious implications for both student outcomes and the viability of the programme more generally.

### **Student Outcomes (Chapter 9)**

Using a range of data, this report highlights the complexities in measuring outcomes in SCP, particularly for 'softer' measures such as engagement. The difficulties in attributing causality to SCP are noted, particularly where children are also in receipt of supports through DEIS or community-based activities. The survey of coordinators and chairpersons does provide evidence that SCP is seen as positively impacting on attendance, students' school engagement and retention in junior cycle. Findings also show the perceived benefits of SCP in providing immediate and effective supports (such as counselling) for children in crisis. The potential to improve reporting structures in SCP is discussed as a way to improve national-level data on student outcomes.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Evidence internationally shows that school extension and engagement programmes are an effective way to encourage active participation in school for children and young people at risk of early school leaving. It is vital therefore that similar school community-based programmes in Ireland operate as effectively as possible. International best practice highlights how the flexibility that exists within the School Completion Programme model has the potential to address school engagement and retention and therefore prevent early school leaving. The findings of this review of the School Completion Programme have clear implications for policy and provide an evidence base for specific recommendations regarding its future development.

### The Aims of SCP

Given the broad aims of SCP, the research finds that they are not accurately reflected in the title of the programme. A new title which takes account of the role of SCP in improving student engagement and enriching their school experience would provide clarity and help guide the national vision for the programme.

### Targeting

International research highlights the effectiveness of early intervention in reducing costs and addressing school disengagement (and subsequent early school leaving). This evidence would suggest that a greater emphasis on SCP provision for younger children should be more effective in preventing at-risk students becoming disengaged and improving their social and academic achievement in later life. A review of existing provision for this younger cohort would ensure they are being provided with the most appropriate supports.

Although there is much variation in approaches to targeting by clusters, the general approach used by schools taking part in SCP is effective. The report finds that varying the target group according to the type of provision available is the optimal approach. In this way, larger target groups can attend more general school activities such as homework clubs and smaller numbers of children can still benefit from more intensive one-to-one supports. It also recommends that the greater level of disadvantage in some schools should be reflected in the size of the target group. Furthermore, schools and clusters should be allowed flexibility to increase the size of the target group, and to access resources to support this, where issues emerge during the school year.



### **Provision**

In terms of provision, a better balance of programmes across the four pillars of SCP is advised, particularly in light of evidence that after-school and holiday supports can create a sense of belonging among students and improve interaction between parents and teachers at the school (see, for example, Posner and Vandell, 1994). In particular, it is recommended that a review of out-of-school supports be undertaken in light of the other SCP pillars of support and other existing forms of out-of-school provision. The report indicates that continuous professional development could have an important role to play in improving programme provision and allowing SCP staff to exchange ideas and provide examples of good practice.

### **Clustering**

The study highlights issues regarding cluster boundaries and students transferring into and out of SCP clusters. It is therefore recommended that these cluster boundaries be revisited to better reflect local neighbourhoods and school communities and provide greater continuity of support as students move through the system. In re-examining cluster boundaries, it is also recommended that the size of the cluster is considered, paying attention to possible trade-offs in larger clusters between economies of scale and issues around cohesion among schools in the cluster.

### **SCP and Other Aspects of DEIS Provision**

In relation to integrating SCP supports with other school supports, the report recommends that SCP provision becomes an integral part of DEIS planning through consultation with SCP coordinators regarding target setting and programme provision. Furthermore, it is essential that any changes to the SCP programme be considered in the context of the broader review of the DEIS programme.

It is recommended that the services of the SCP coordinator, the HSCL and EWO should be integrated at a formal level with immediate effect. In doing so the three roles should be more clearly defined to avoid overlap or duplication.

### **Governance and Roles**

In relation to SCP coordinators, it is recommended that their role should be more clearly defined. However, it is essential that flexibility is maintained to allow them

to respond to local needs. By defining the boundaries of their role, the working relationship with other services such as the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator and Educational Welfare Officer would become more transparent.

In relation to legal and employment structures in SCP, it is recommended that clear and consistent governance and employment structures be used across all clusters. Assessing three potential models, the study highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each:

- Local management committee structure or an allied structure which would involve an extension of the current LMC model to cover all SCP clusters.
- Regionally or locally based supports through existing structures such as the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) or Teacher Education Centres which would involve an extension of the current model where clusters can receive administrative and human resources supports.
- Direct employment of all coordinators (and project staff) by Tusla. This new structure would enable a clear line of accountability and provide clusters with centralised support for payroll, HR and legal functions. It would also potentially foster greater integration of SCP with other Tusla supports for children and families.

The report recommends that, regardless of the contractual model adopted, the LMC structure should remain in place, given its role in identifying local need and deciding on provision. Many LMCs have, over the last decade, developed important school and community networks which should be maintained. Furthermore, the LMC appears to play a vital role in providing a support structure for principals working in schools with a disadvantaged intake.

### **Funding**

The findings suggest that funding cuts in SCP are impacting on the ability of the programme to fulfil its aims. It is argued that any further cuts in expenditure might seriously compromise the programme's viability. There is a need for rebalancing, or increasing, funding for schools with high levels of disadvantage and complex student needs. The distribution of funds between clusters at national level also needs to be re-examined, particularly in relation to the targeting of resources towards clusters and schools with greater levels of need.

### **Student Outcomes**

The report highlights the need for better understanding of the impact of SCP on student outcomes. It recommends further research to facilitate a rigorous

assessment of the impact of the programme on a range of student outcomes using a longitudinal study. Furthermore, it is recommended that SCP is included in DEIS and DES inspectorate school evaluations.

# Chapter 1

---

## Introduction

### 1.1 CONTEXT

Early school leaving (ESL) is regarded as a major problem not only in Europe but across the developed world. In the EU in 2012, 12.7 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 had not completed upper secondary education and were no longer in education and training (European Commission, 2013). Rates of early school leaving have declined from 17.6 per cent in 2000. The further reduction of early school leaving to less than 10 per cent of the relevant population by 2020 is a headline target in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (Brunello and De Paola, 2013). In Ireland, rates of early school leaving have declined since the early 2000s, with 89.4 per cent of 20-24 year-olds currently having a Leaving Certificate or equivalent compared with 82.6 per cent in 2000 (DES, 2015). Ireland has lower rates of early leaving than the average for EU27 countries, with similar rates to those in Austria and Finland. The Irish government plans to reduce early school leaving to 8 per cent by 2020 (Morris and Parashar, 2012).

A number of initiatives have been undertaken in Ireland to tackle the issue of early school leaving. The focus of this report is the School Completion Programme which was first introduced in 2002 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and was subsequently expanded in 2006 as part of the School Support Programme under the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). On its establishment the SCP subsumed a number of earlier schemes with related objectives, namely, the 8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative (ESLI) and the Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI). From 2009, the SCP came under the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). In 2011 the SCP, alongside the related integrated services under the NEWB, was placed under the policy remit of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Responsibility for SCP transferred to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, on its establishment in January 2014.

The School Completion Programme focuses on young people aged 4-18 who are at risk of leaving school early. It is organised in terms of 'clusters' (also called 'projects') which are run by a coordinator and local management committee and consist of a group of primary and second-level schools in a local area. While the

schools involved in SCP clusters are mainly DEIS schools, some non-DEIS schools<sup>3</sup> are part of SCP clusters, reflecting patterns of transfer between local schools as well as the fact that clusters were determined prior to the current DEIS designation of schools. There is variation across clusters in the legal and employment arrangements for SCP employees, with some operating under Education and Training Boards (ETBs), some working under the Local Management Committee (LMC), and some operating under the Board of Management (BOM) of one of the schools in the cluster.<sup>4</sup> All of the clusters have a local management committee but in some clusters, the LMC acts as the employer as well as taking responsibility for monitoring cluster activities, identifying local need and deciding upon provision. Currently, the 124 projects or clusters comprise 470 primary schools and 224 second-level schools, and employ approximately 248 full-time staff and almost 3,000 part-time or sessional staff. Figures from 2011/12 show that local SCP projects supported approximately 36,000 children and young people within the school system and almost 800 young people who were out of school.

The overall aim of the programme is to improve levels of student retention in primary and second-level schools by encouraging inter-agency involvement to address the inter-related factors which influence early school leaving. It seeks to develop a framework through which schools, families, pupils, community organisations and state bodies will work together effectively to decrease the risk of educational disadvantage, retain young people in education to the end of senior cycle, and improve the quality of educational participation and attainment among targeted groups (DES, 2008). Provision under SCP is made up of four main strands, termed 'pillars' (SCP, 2008): in-school; after-school; holiday-time activities, designed to make school more engaging for at-risk groups of children and young people; and out-of-school provision, aimed at those young people who have already left the mainstream school system. In order to further understand the context within which SCP operates, Section 1.2 outlines patterns of school attendance and retention in Ireland. Section 1.3 describes the aims of this study of the School Completion Programme in greater detail while Section 1.4 outlines the methodology used in the study.

## 1.2 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION IN IRELAND

Attendance can be regarded as an indicator of school engagement and early school leaving has been found to be preceded by poor attendance over a

---

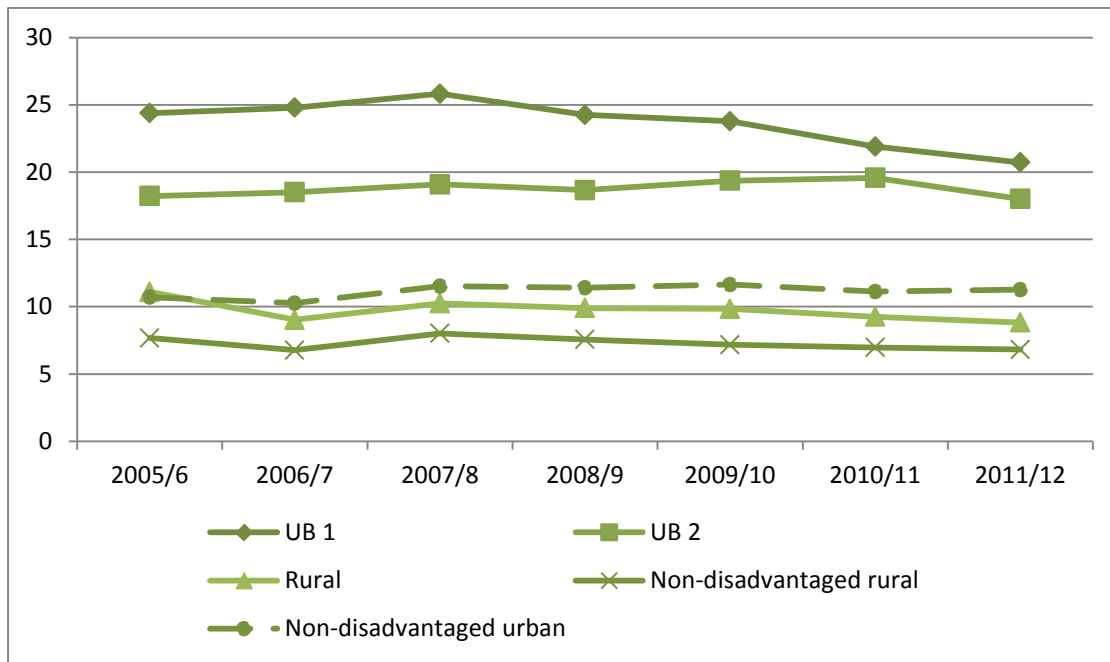
<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that these schools do not have children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research indicates that a significant proportion of children and young people from semi/unskilled and non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools (Smyth et al., 2015).

<sup>4</sup> A handful of clusters have other arrangements, for example, working through Teacher Education Centres.

prolonged period of time (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). The improvement of attendance rates is seen as a central aim of the DEIS programme, especially the School Completion Programme. The DEIS planning process requires schools to set targets for improved attendance rates and to devise and implement strategies to achieve these targets.

Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of students who missed 20 days or more in the school year for DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools between the academic years 2005/06 and 2011/12, the most recent year for which published figures are available. DEIS schools are further differentiated between urban Band 1 (the most deprived), urban Band 2 and rural schools. A marked difference is found in the attendance rates of urban Band 1, urban Band 2 schools and all other schools. Overall 20-day absences are higher in DEIS and non-DEIS urban schools than in rural DEIS and non-DEIS schools. In particular, students in urban Band 1 schools report the highest non-attendance rate; data indicate that just under 21 per cent of pupils in DEIS Band 1 schools were absent for 20 days or more in 2011/12. Looking at trends over time, there has been a decrease in non-attendance in urban Band 1 schools between the academic years 2005/06 and 2011/12. There was a slight increase in non-attendance for urban Band 2 schools up to 2010/11, with a fall-off in the most recent time-point, meaning that the gap in non-attendance between these groups has narrowed in this time frame. Findings by Inspectorate evaluations in relation to planning found that overall primary school level planning in relation to attendance has improved, as supported by an increase in overall attendance rates (DES, 2015).

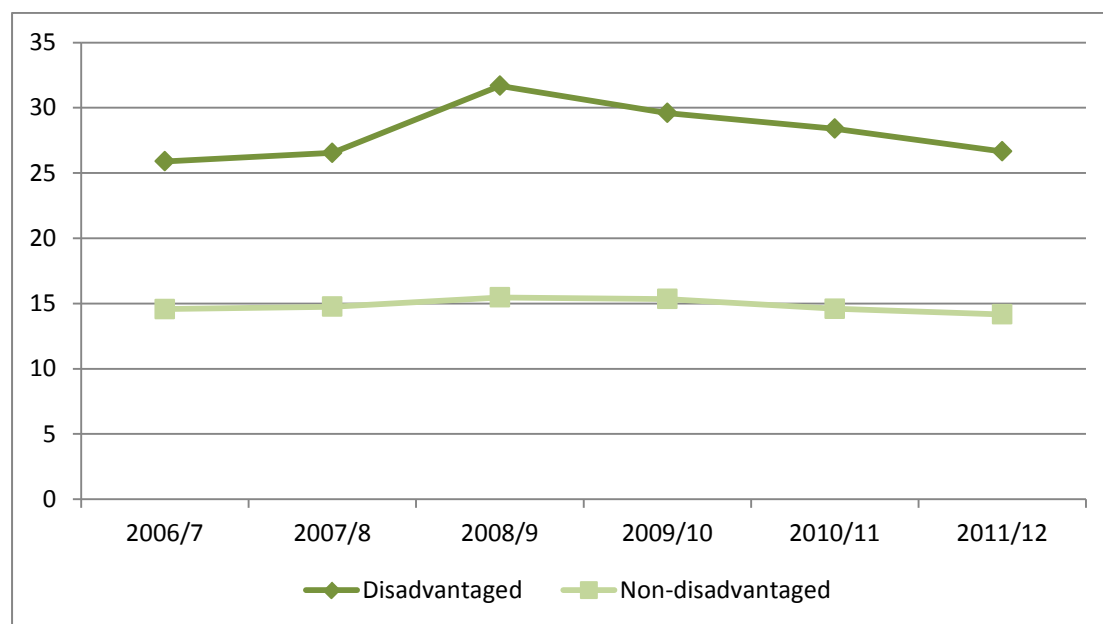
**FIGURE 1.1** Proportion of Students Absent for 20 Days or More in the School Year for DEIS and Non-DEIS Primary Schools Between the Academic Years 2005/06 and 2011/12



Source: NEWB Annual Attendance Reports, various years.

Figure 1.2 shows non-attendance figures for DEIS and non-DEIS post-primary schools between the academic years 2006/07 and 2011/12. As with the primary data, the lines show the percentage of students in the school who missed 20 days or more in the school year. The average number of students per school missing 20 days or more is almost twice as high in DEIS schools compared to other schools (Millar, 2015). Over a quarter (27 per cent) of students in disadvantaged schools were absent for 20 days or more in 2011/12. Attendance rates are relatively constant in non-DEIS schools while in DEIS schools, they increase between 2006 and 2008 and then fall to 2012.

**FIGURE 1.2** Proportion of Students Absent for More Than 20 days in the School Year in DEIS and Non-DEIS Post-Primary Schools

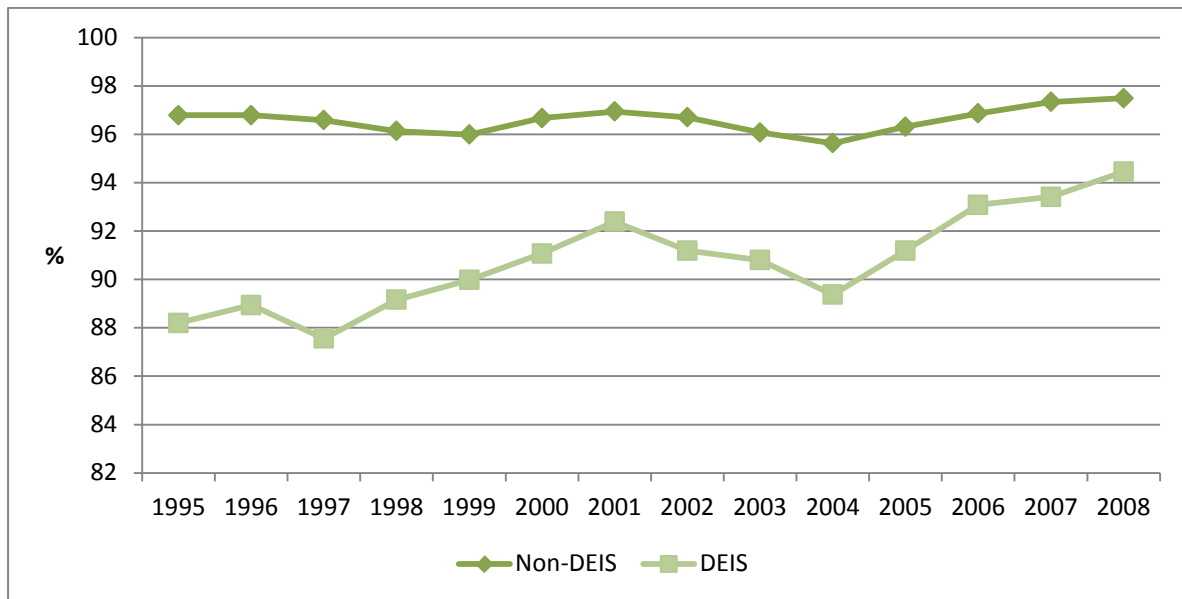


Source: NEWB Annual Attendance Reports, various years.

Retention levels at junior and senior cycle were among the educational indicators used to identify schools for participation in the DEIS programme. The most recent report by the DES on the retention rate in second-level schools looked at the retention of the cohort of young people who entered second-level education in 2008 (DES, 2015). For the 2008 cohort, 94.5 per cent of students in DEIS schools remained in school to the end of junior cycle compared with 97.5 of students in non-DEIS schools. The improvement in DEIS schools' junior cycle retention rates in recent years has been significantly higher than the overall improvement nationally, with the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools narrowing from 8.6 to 3 per cent over time (Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.3** Average Percentage Retention to Junior Certificate for the 1995-2008 Cohorts in DEIS and Non-DEIS Schools



Source: Weir et al. (2014); DES (2015).

For the 2008 cohort, 85.6 per cent of DEIS students stayed in school until the end of senior cycle compared with 92.9 per cent of those in non-DEIS schools. After stagnating rates of retention in the 1990s, there has been a clear upward gradient in retention rates since the 2004 entry cohort (Figure 1.3). The trend has been upward in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools but the rate of increase has been somewhat higher in DEIS schools, with the gap in retention rates narrowing significantly from 16.8 per cent for the 2001 cohort to 10.5 per cent for the 2008 cohort.

In summary, there is evidence that primary school non-attendance levels have declined, and retention rates increased, over the period since the introduction of DEIS and the School Completion Programme. The multi-faceted nature of provision in DEIS schools means that it is difficult to attribute changes in attendance and retention to one particular aspect of provision (see Smyth et al., 2015). Other policy changes over the period as well as contextual factors, especially the impact of declining employment opportunities and access to social welfare payments since the recession, will also have had an impact. However, it is worth noting that the rate of change in retention is greater in DEIS than in non-DEIS schools, suggesting that these initiatives have made a difference to patterns of school completion. Analyses of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study also suggest that interventions such as SCP may be helping to bridge the social gap in participation in cultural and sporting activities (McCoy et al., 2012). However,

little is known about how the SCP operates and its potential for providing a more engaging school experience for students. This study addresses this gap in knowledge by providing a detailed review of the School Completion Programme (SCP) and presenting recommendations to guide future policy development.

### 1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to review the School Completion Programme (SCP) in order to assist in developing best practice to improve educational outcomes for children at risk of early school leaving and educational disadvantage. More specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What are the aims of the School Completion Programme from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including coordinators, Local Management Committee chairpersons and school principals?
- What criteria do local projects use to target children and young people?
- What kinds of activities are provided as part of SCP? How successful are they deemed by stakeholders? Do activities vary across different clusters?
- How do clusters vary in size and composition? What are the implications of such variation for targeting and provision?
- How does the programme relate to other aspects of DEIS provision?
- What issues arise in relation to project governance and the roles of the coordinator, chairperson and Local Management Committee?
- How are resources used by clusters?
- What do stakeholders see as the outcomes of SCP?
- What do they see as the key strengths and weaknesses of the programme?

These research questions are in response to the original terms of reference in the study call for tender which were as follows:

1. Examine the strengths and weaknesses of the existing programme structures;
2. Recommend appropriate programme structures which build on existing strengths and streamline the administrative and governance arrangements;
3. Define roles, responsibilities and reporting arrangements within the proposed structures;
4. Evaluate the targeting of resources and clustering arrangements;
5. Conduct an analysis of interventions and supports in projects funded under the SCP;

6. Recommend SCP interventions and supports;
7. Specify outcomes-focused performance measures.

Assessments of programmes such as SCP often rely on detailed information on student outcomes before and after programme participation, comparing their outcomes to comparable students who had not taken part in the programme. Such an approach is not possible in this instance for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike the DEIS programme, evaluation was not built into SCP from the outset so systematic data on the full range of student outcomes have not been routinely collected. Secondly, as will be evident from findings presented in the remainder of the report, the goals of SCP have been much broader than ‘retention’ alone, including aiming to enhance school engagement. Engagement can be more difficult to measure than attendance and retention but is the key driver of these behaviours. Thirdly, students may take part in multiple SCP activities over time and may also receive other supports through DEIS and non-school services. This makes it extremely difficult to assess the ‘impact’ of SCP in a narrow way. Because of these complexities, the study focuses instead on documenting the processes through which SCP operates.

The study is based on a rich combination of administrative information, survey data, detailed analyses of ten case-study clusters and information from in-depth interviews with stakeholders. The detailed methodology used in the study is outlined in the following section.

#### **1.4 DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

The study was comprised of six main phases in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the current operation of the SCP.

##### **1.4.1 Desk Review of Irish and International Literature on Combating Educational Disadvantage**

This involved an in-depth analysis of a range of empirical, policy and theoretical studies and reports on educational disadvantage and initiatives addressing disadvantage to provide an important context for the study. The study adopted a comprehensive conceptual framework which views non-attendance and early school leaving within the context of processes shaping broader disengagement from school.

### 1.4.2 Analysis of Administrative Data Collected by the NEWB/Tusla

Here we utilised the rich data already collected by Educational Welfare Services, especially the Annual Progress Reports for four years and the governance survey 2012/13 supplied by local projects, to compile baseline data on the following topics:

- Personnel
- Project governance
- Interagency co-operation
- Identification of young people at risk of early leaving
- Review practices
- Interventions
- Local training.

### 1.4.3 A Survey of SCP Local Coordinators and Chairpersons

This phase involved a postal survey to all 124 local SCP coordinators and chairpersons to provide more detailed information than is available from administrative data. The questionnaires focussed on:

- Perceptions of current governance structures;
- Use of resources and any recent changes in resource allocation;
- Contact with other agencies;
- Perceptions of current provision, strengths and weaknesses;
- Satisfaction with access to CPD and perceived training needs;
- Perceived relationship with other parts of the DEIS programme and with mainstream educational provision;
- Perceived outcomes for students and use of targets/performance measures.

The study received an extremely high response to the survey, with detailed questionnaires completed by 95 per cent of coordinators and 77 per cent of chairpersons. Survey findings were used to document the prevalence of different practices (e.g. types of provision) and to examine variation across different types of clusters (e.g. cluster size) in provision and perceptions, using cross-tabulations. While by necessity the number of responses is small, tests of statistical significance are used to compare different types of clusters.

#### 1.4.4 Case-Studies of Ten SCP Clusters

The survey data collected in Phase 2 was then used to identify ten clusters for in-depth case-study analysis. These clusters were selected to represent important dimensions of variation in the operation and practice of SCP at the local level. Analyses of the survey research indicated three main sources of variation across clusters:

1. Intensity of targeting: very significant variation was found across clusters in the extent to which they involve large groups of children and young people in SCP activities or target a small group for more intensive involvement.
2. The balance of provision: two main groups of clusters were evident, one which emphasises in-school support and another which has a greater balance between in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision.
3. Cluster size: cluster size was determined on the basis of the number of schools in the cluster. Just over a fifth (21 per cent) of clusters could be characterised as small (with three or fewer schools), almost half (47 per cent) as medium (four to six schools) and a third as large (with seven or more schools).

In addition, previous research on educational disadvantage has indicated clear differences in the experience of urban and rural DEIS schools. Furthermore, the survey data indicated differences between urban and rural coordinators in their satisfaction with clustering arrangements and the level of funding apportioned to their cluster. As a result, urban/rural location was included as a further criterion for case-study selection. Finally, data from the governance survey of 2012/13 indicated a variety of employer and legal arrangements in place, making it crucial to capture diversity in such arrangements.

The ten case-study clusters were selected to capture these dimensions; Table 1.1 presents an outline of cluster characteristics. The names of the clusters have been randomly selected and do not represent cluster locations around the country. In-depth face-to-face interviews were held with SCP coordinators, chairpersons, principals of schools in the cluster and members of the Local Management Committee (LMC). The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with a list of themes and key questions serving to guide the interviews. Given the wide range of factors and processes influencing how the SCP is delivered, researchers ensured that the interviews were sufficiently fluid to allow for a full exploration of the issues. Following some initial 'warm-up' questions, the interviews sought information on:

- Perceptions of current governance structures;

- Perceptions of current provision, strengths and weaknesses;
- Perceived outcomes for students and use of targets/performance measures;
- The extent to which school staff are aware of, and co-operate with, SCP interventions;
- The relationship between the SCP and other parts of DEIS provision at the local and school levels.

**TABLE 1.1** CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASE-STUDY CLUSTERS

Cluster name	Size	Location	Employer	Intensity of Targeting	Balance of Provision
Bere	Medium	Rural	ETB	Low	Diverse
Basket	Medium	Urban	LMC	High	Diverse
Arranmore	Small	Rural	LMC	Low	Diverse
Dursey	Large	Rural	ETB	High	Diverse
Gorumna	Large	Urban	School BOM	High	Diverse
Inishmore	Medium	Rural	School BOM	High	In-school
Lambay	Medium	Urban	ETB	High	Diverse
Lettermore	Small	Urban	School BOM	Low	Diverse
Rathlin	Medium	Urban	ETB	Low	Diverse
Valentia	Medium	Urban	LMC	High	In-school

Note: ETB (Education and Training Board); LMC (Local Management Committee); School BOM (Board of Management).

The total number of interviews is given in Table 1.2. These numbers are grouped in order to avoid identifying the individual clusters.

**TABLE 1.2** CASE-STUDY INTERVIEWS

Category	Number of interviews
Coordinators	10
Chairpersons	9
School principals (other than chairperson)	38
Members of the Local Management Committee	17

Using multiple perspectives within a cluster allowed for a more comprehensive examination of the SCP where commonalities and differences within the same cluster could then be explored. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were later analysed using the QSR NVivo 8 software to identify emerging themes. Each interviewee was assured confidentiality and all efforts have been made to protect their identity.

#### 1.4.5 Interviews with National Stakeholders

In-depth interviews with national stakeholders were conducted with 15 individuals (in 13 interviews). Those interviewed included senior Tusla staff, Department of Education and Skills (DES) officials, inspectors and organisations representing principals, and provided additional insights into the way in which the SCP relates to broader educational policy and provision in relation to educational disadvantage.

#### 1.4.6 Approach to Data Analysis

The study involved the collection of a range of data, both quantitative and qualitative, from a number of sources, including SCP coordinators, chairpersons, school principals and the broader stakeholder community. Rather than present information from the different sources as separate accounts, the analytical approach sought to integrate insights from different forms of data and relate these to the central aims of the research. The central themes were identified as follows:

- Identification and targeting of students;
- The nature of provision and decision-making around which activities and interventions are provided;
- The role of the coordinator;
- Governance, including the role of the chairperson and LMC and reporting arrangements with EWS/Tusla;
- Funding and resources;
- Student outcomes;
- Overall strengths and weaknesses of SCP.

Before presenting the main findings, we place this study in the context of previous research on early school leaving and policies designed to address it.

### 1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 places this study in the context of previous research on early school leaving. Chapter 3 outlines the nature of the School Completion Programme and draws on qualitative data to explore the perceived aims of SCP on the ground. Chapter 4 looks at the criteria used to identify at-risk students, the relative size and composition of the target group and the kinds of interventions put in place for target students. Chapter 5 examines the nature of clustering arrangements for SCP and places SCP in the context of other dimensions of the DEIS programme.

Chapter 6 focuses on the role of the coordinator while Chapter 7 examines the role of the chairperson and the Local Management Committee as well as the nature of reporting to SCP management. Chapter 8 examines resources in terms of staffing and levels of funding. Chapter 9 explores perceived student outcomes and the challenges involved in assessing these outcomes. Chapter 10 draws together information on the different themes of the study to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of SCP. The final chapter indicates the implications of the study findings for policy and presents recommendations regarding future development of SCP.



# Chapter 2

---

## Literature Review

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter places the study in the context of previous national and international research. The first section looks at the research findings on the factors influencing early school leaving and the impact of school drop-out on future life-chances. The second section presents an overview of initiatives to counter early school leaving across different national contexts, placing particular emphasis on interventions which share the focus of SCP on a multifaceted approach which involves interagency co-operation.

### 2.2 RESEARCH ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

#### 2.2.1 Early School Leaving

Across different social contexts and educational systems, early school leaving is found to be disproportionately concentrated among young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with special educational needs. In contrast, the extent to which early school leaving rates differ by gender and ethnicity is found to vary across countries. Research has shown that early school leaving is the culmination of a longer term process of disengagement from school, reflecting the interaction of individual and school experiences as students move through the educational system (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Some commentators have traced educational disengagement to cognitive and socio-emotional patterns established even before school entry (Dale, 2010). In contrast, others have emphasised the role of school factors, particularly school social mix and the quality of relationships between teachers and students, in influencing school retention (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Dale, 2010; Smyth, 1999). There is now a large body of research which highlights the inter-related factors which shape patterns of school dropout. These can be classified into three categories: individual or social factors, school factors, and systemic factors.

#### 2.2.2 Individual and Social Factors

The extent to which educational outcomes reflect individual or social factors has been the subject of much debate. Research from a psychological perspective has often focused on identifying a set of risk factors based on family context and relationships. From this perspective, the child's early home environment, including family stress and the quality of care-giving, are found to significantly

influence school retention (Garnier et al., 1997; Jimerson et al., 2000). Other research has highlighted the role of a young person's own temperament, particularly their levels of aggression, in shaping later drop-out (Cairns et al., 1989). This approach has been criticised for adopting a 'deficit' model of early school leaving and for failing to recognise the social context within which decisions to withdraw from education are made (Brown and Rodriguez, 2008; Smyth, 2005).

In contrast, sociological research has examined the way in which educational outcomes are shaped by broader social structures, particularly social class. Earlier studies of social inequality suggested that educational attainment is the outcome of the joint effects of family background and cognitive ability (Blau and Duncan, 1967), which are brought about by the mutual reinforcing influences of expectations and aspirations for the future (Sewell et al., 1970; Sewell et al., 1969). However, subsequent research indicated the importance of taking account of broader social structures. Broadly, there are two competing explanations for social differences in educational outcomes: one focused on socio-cultural reproduction, the other on rational choice. Reproduction theory, most famously advanced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), focuses on the unequal distribution of economic, social and cultural resources across classes and their transmission from parents to children. Familiarity with the dominant culture operates as a form of 'cultural capital' and school success is predicated on such cultural capital. From this perspective, early school leaving and/or underperformance among working-class children is seen as a product of a 'mismatch' between the cultures of home and school. In contrast, the rational choice perspective argues that class inequalities in educational attainment arise because of the differential costs and benefits involved for different social groups (Boudon, 1974; Goldthorpe, 1996). Children from middle-class families risk social demotion from professional occupations by not going on to higher education while working-class students may evaluate their chances of college success more negatively (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). From this perspective, large-scale change in social class differentiation in educational outcomes will only arise when the relative costs and benefits of educational participation alter significantly.

### **2.2.3 Education and School Structures**

Research on school effects has generally focused on achievement (Teddle and Reynolds, 2000) but several studies have focused on the influence of school organisation and process on school retention. A number of studies have focused on the social composition of the school, finding that a concentration of students from working-class backgrounds is associated with higher rates of early school leaving for all students (Ayalon, 1994; Goldsmith, 2003; Kerckhoff, 1986; Ryan,

1999). Research has also shown the way in which school policy and practice can contribute to, or counter, school drop-out (Coleman et al., 1982; Rutter et al., 1979). In terms of formal structures, the differentiation of students into separate tracks or ability groups is found to contribute to early school leaving (Berends, 1995; Bryk and Thum, 1989). Social distance from other students, along with lower teacher expectations, fosters student alienation and disengagement, leading to school dropout (Oakes, 2005; Rumberger, 1995). The school climate, in particular, the nature of student-teacher relations, is found to have a significant influence on school retention (Bryk and Thum, 1989; Davis and Dupper, 2004; Lee and Burkham, 2003). Students are half as likely to drop out if they feel their teachers support their efforts to succeed in school and provide guidance to them about school and personal issues (Croninger and Lee, 2001). Furthermore, students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have experienced academic difficulties are found to be the most responsive to teacher support (ibid.).

In the Irish context, studies support the view that the social mix of the school has an impact on student retention (Byrne, 2008; McCoy, 2000). Smyth (1999) found that the social class composition of a school has a significant impact on the intention to leave school before the end of senior cycle, with higher rates reported in predominantly working-class than middle-class schools, even controlling for the individual social background of students. Using longitudinal data, school policy and practice are found to have a significant influence on student drop-out, with greater retention in schools where there is a positive school climate with good relations between teachers and students, and a greater sense of ownership on the part of students over school life. The quality of relationships with teachers emerges as a crucial component in the narratives of early school leavers (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). A 'strict but fair' disciplinary climate also contributes to student retention. Ability grouping, in contrast, is associated with greater drop-out of students from lower stream classes (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Smyth et al., 2007).

#### **2.2.4 Impact of Early School Leaving**

Early school leaving is associated with a range of poor outcomes in adult life, including higher unemployment rates, poorer quality employment and low pay, poorer physical and mental health, and higher crime rates (Belfield and Levin, 2007). Across OECD countries early school leavers earn less on average and have higher unemployment rates than those who complete upper secondary education (Lyche, 2010). There is now a large body of international research literature on poor school attendance and its impact on student outcomes (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Rothman, 2004). Persistent absence from school is seen as

having serious costs at the societal and individual levels, impacting on young people's life-chances and potentially requiring additional expenditure in the form of social welfare and health services (Kearney, 2008; Wagner et al., 2004). Moreover, early school leaving and persistent absenteeism can also be associated with other negative outcomes such as antisocial behaviour and crime (NIAO, 2004; Robins and Radcliffe, 1980).

In Ireland, research also shows how early leavers are more likely to experience disadvantages in relation to access to further education/training, employment chances, employment quality and broader social outcomes. In terms of labour market outcomes, early leavers are much more likely to experience unemployment than their more highly educated counterparts in the immediate post-school period. The gap in unemployment rates by education has increased over time, during the boom years as well as the recession (Byrne et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2014, 2015). Such differences persist into adult life, with higher rates of overall and long-term unemployment among early leavers across all age groups. These differences are quite marked in a comparative context, with a greater disparity in unemployment risks between the early leaver group and those with higher levels of education in Ireland compared with many other OECD countries (OECD, 2014). Early leaving is also associated with lower job quality, with early leavers disproportionately found in less skilled manual and service occupations, and as having lower pay levels (Smyth and McCoy, 2009).

Early school leaving is also predictive of a range of broader social outcomes in Ireland (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Early leavers tend to experience poorer health status, even controlling for age, gender and current social class (Layte et al., 2007). Young women who leave school early are more likely to become lone mothers. In addition, imprisonment rates differ markedly between early leavers and other groups of men. In summary, early leavers experience a range of disadvantages in relation to adult life-chances. Such disadvantages involve substantial costs to society as a whole in the form of social welfare expenditure, health services and imprisonment rates (Levin, 2009; Morgenroth, 1999; Smyth and McCoy, 2009).

## **2.3 INITIATIVES TO COUNTER EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

### **2.3.1 National Policies**

The disengagement and/or exclusion of children and young people from education has been a long-standing concern for policy-makers, school principals and teachers, and other practitioners working with children and young people (Stamou et al., 2014). There is a general recognition that early school leaving is

not an event but rather a process reflecting the individual characteristics of the young person, the school and wider societal structures (Dale, 2010). Policy approaches to early school leaving can be grouped into three broad categories: (i) Strategic level responses; (ii) Preventive strategies; and (iii) Reintegration strategies.

#### 2.3.1.1 Strategic Level Responses

In a review of policies to counter early school leaving, some European countries (such as the Netherlands) are described as having a 'strong' commitment to addressing ESL with the creation of explicit, comprehensive policy frameworks on ESL, bringing together key stakeholders and programmes under one overarching policy. However, most countries are described as having an approach that is fragmented, involving multiple stakeholders and leading to a duplication of activity in some areas and gaps in services in others (GHK Consulting Ltd, 2011). This review also highlighted the tendency for governments to rely on one-off initiatives or projects rather than developing an integrated and coherent framework for policy and practice (GHK Consulting Ltd, 2011). European countries differ in the relative focus on preventive measures designed to keep at-risk young people in the education system and those focused on reintegration or compensatory approaches, putting in place provision for young people who have already left formal education.

#### 2.3.1.2 Preventative Strategies

Preventive measures can be further sub-divided into those targeted towards at-risk students and those which are designed to bring about an improvement in schools overall. Targeted measures include:

1. The targeting of additional resources to schools and/or communities with a concentration of disadvantage;
2. Early warning systems which monitor and track attendance;
3. Mentoring programmes, including peer support;
4. Individualised learning support or learning programmes;
5. Transition support programmes which assist the transition into or out of secondary education;
6. Financial support to remain in school;
7. The provision of after-school activities.

There has been a lack of systematic evaluation of many of these measures. There have been a number of research, policy and practice reviews in recent years, however (Downes, 2011; Morris and Parashar, 2012). Morris and Parashar (2012) identified a number of 'effective interventions' in addressing participation, attendance and retention. Using a range of international and individual country sources, they identified strategies that used a combination of approaches to tackle early school leaving, including a supportive school culture, connectedness with family and community, awareness of need, early and sustained intervention, and student-focussed strategies. Other reviews have also pointed to the value of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches in preventing early school leaving. Examining a range of international evidence, Downes (2011) highlights the need for any preventative strategy to address a number of different dimensions of young people's experiences:

- Attendance (e.g. by monitoring and follow-up of absenteeism)
- Behaviour (e.g. by focusing on conflict resolution and alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures within schools)
- Emotional/mental health (e.g. by the availability of within and outside school supports such as counselling)
- Cognitive achievement (e.g. additional learning supports for SEN groups or those experiencing academic difficulties)
- Language/multi-culturality (e.g. language supports for parents and children)
- Motivation (e.g. recognition of achievements through an award system)
- Social (e.g. after-school clubs)
- Family (e.g. family literacy programmes and outreach to families with specific difficulties)
- Physiological (e.g. breakfast and lunch clubs)
- Transitions (e.g. programmes to facilitate the move from primary to post-primary school) (Downes, 2011).

### 2.3.1.3 Multi-Agency Supports

Other models, especially extended or full service schools, have sought to extend the remit of schools and use a multi-agency school-based approach to address the needs of disadvantaged students and their families. Such an approach is seen as providing a more holistic way of addressing young people's needs by facilitating inter-professional collaboration among principals, teachers, social workers, health professionals, counsellors and others (Edwards and Downes, 2012; EU, 2011). In an evaluation of full-service schools in England, Cummings et al. (2007) found some improvements in educational attainment among students

in the case-study schools while these schools also reported improved engagement and social outcomes among students. The effects were seen as stronger for those who had previously been experiencing academic and/or behavioural difficulties. The extended school model was also seen as having facilitated better relations with the local communities as a result of outreach activities such as parenting programmes. The success of the programme was found to be predicated on the quality of school leadership and closely linked to the priorities set by school principals and other key staff.

Other programmes focus on targeting financial support to individual students or schools (Morris and Parashar, 2012). A number of countries, including France, Belgium and the Netherlands, have given additional resources to educational priority areas selected on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage and concentration of ethnic minority students. Unlike the DEIS programme in Ireland, evaluations of these interventions have shown little significant effect on student outcomes (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Other financial supports target individual students such as the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme in the UK. This provides means-tested weekly payments to 16-18 year-olds in post-compulsory education in selected areas, in an effort to improve levels of educational participation.<sup>5</sup> The scheme was found to increase the likelihood of remaining in education in the English pilot areas, with the strongest effects found for those from the lower income groups (Dearden et al., 2005). Research in Scotland also pointed to significant increases in attainment and participation in pilot EMA areas compared to control areas (Croxford and Ozga, 2005). In the US context, research has indicated that the attendance of low-income children at formal after-school programmes is associated with better academic achievement, motivation and social adjustment (Posner and Vandell, 1994).

#### 2.3.1.4 Reintegration Strategies

Reintegration measures offer young people who have dropped out of mainstream education a second chance to learn or achieve a qualification. They vary in the intensity of support provided to participants. In many European countries, the emphasis is on reintegration rather than prevention; Table 2.1 presents some examples of the kinds of policies and programmes in place across different European countries. An emphasis on post-dropout support is evident despite a large body of research which indicates that early intervention is more effective in terms of impact on outcomes but also in terms of cost-effectiveness (Belfield and Levin, 2009).

---

<sup>5</sup> The scheme has been discontinued in England but is still provided in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**TABLE 2.1** Selected Interventions Designed to Combat Early School Leaving Across Europe

Responses (EU Framework)	Name, country	Core Elements of Good Practice
<b>Preventative</b>		
Targeted area based interventions	Zones d'Education Prioritaire, France	Channelling of additional resources (10-15 per cent) to schools in priority areas based on the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
	Dropout Covenants, The Netherlands	Financial incentives to regions to reduce the number of dropouts: the Ministry of Education offered municipalities €2,000 for each early school leaver less in 2006/2007 than in 2005/2006.
	PROA programme, Spain	Programme provides extra resources to secondary schools with a high concentration of socially and educationally disadvantaged students; it also provides a mentorship programme for older primary students experiencing difficulties.
Holistic family school programmes	Families and Schools Together (FAST), UK, Austria	Family strengthening and parent involvement programme to help children succeed in school. Parent identification and recruitment through home visits. Multifamily group sessions and monitoring by FAST Centre staff.
	Extended School Initiative, UK	Supports the development in every local authority of one or more schools which provide a comprehensive range of services, including access to health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and childcare.
Early warning systems (EWS)	Risk of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) indicators, England	Indicators and tools designed to assist secondary schools to identify students at risk of becoming NEET once they leave compulsory education.
	EWS, Croatia	EWS is linked to the school's responsibility to monitor the number of classes missed by students. If the number increases, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure the involvement of parents, teachers, management and other professionals.
Financial Support for children	Tanoda Centres, Hungary	Extra support for disadvantaged children (mainly but not exclusively Roma) and young people to complete schooling.
	EMA - Educational Maintenance Allowance, UK	Means-tested conditional cash transfer paid to 16-18 year-olds for staying in full-time education; abolished in England but still in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
<b>Reintegration</b>		
Second chance schools	Micro Lycées, France	Permanent structures attached to secondary schools that offer possibilities for early school leavers to finish upper secondary education.
	Certificate of Practice, Norway	Two-year practice-based prog. at upper secondary level; enables students to leave upper secondary education early but with possibility of re-entry.
Guidance	Youth Guidance Centres, Denmark	Provide guidance for young people under 24 in their transition to the labour market
	Bildungsketten, Germany	The initiative, 'Educational Chains', is designed to improve the transition between school and vocational education and training through the provision of individual guidance and help.
	Luxemburg Action Locale Pour Les Jeunes, (Luxembourg)	Contacts young people who have dropped out of school and facilitates reintegration into education/training.
Practical (vocational and work-based) learning opportunities	Production Schools, Denmark, Austria	Provide young people under 25 who have not completed a qualifying education with a different learning experience through practical work in a real work setting.
	KUTSE Programme, Estonia	Gets students who had dropped out of vocational education to complete their studies by creating additional study places, launching a campaign to make young people interested in VET, giving study grants etc.
	Initial Qualification Programme, Spain	Helps young people who have already dropped out of education re-enter by offering more practical courses tailored to their needs.
	School and work alternation, Italy	Designed to introduce flexible learning options, which combine education and work-based skills, for those aged 15 to 18.

Source: Adapted from DICE Database (2012), European Commission (2013).



### 2.3.2 Evaluation of Interventions

This section outlines some of the results of evaluations of measures in different countries, focusing on those which take a preventive and multi-agency approach similar to that taken in SCP.

#### 2.3.2.1 FAST

Originating in the United States, the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme aims at building stronger bonds between parents, schools and communities to make sure children get the support they need to do their best at school. The programme consists of an eight-week cycle of activity sessions, as well as help for parents to develop learning at home and ongoing support at school and within the community. The programme has been subject to a number of systematic evaluations in the UK and US, the results of which point to positive effects for children and their families (AbtAssociates, 2001; Kratochwill et al., 2004). A mixed-methods evaluation of FAST in UK primary schools found that parents reported stronger bonds with their child, greater personal resilience in dealing with day-to-day parenting challenges, and stronger social networks with parents of children in the same school. The development of these networks was seen as providing the necessary 'social capital' at community level to sustain positive outcomes into the future. The impact of the programme on child well-being was measured on the basis of teacher and parent completion of the internationally well-regarded Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) questionnaire before and after the programme. Teachers reported a reduction in the level of total difficulties among children in the programme, along with improvements on specific dimensions, namely, improved pro-social behaviour and reduced hyperactivity. Teachers also reported an increase in children's academic competence as well as greater contact and improved relationships with parents (McDonald and Fitzroy, 2010).

#### 2.3.2.2 SAFEChildren

Schools And Families Educating Children (SAFEChildren) is a US family-focused preventive intervention designed to increase educational achievement and reduce behavioural difficulties, including substance abuse (NREPP, 2007). The 20-week programme is aimed at young primary school children and their families living in inner-city neighbourhoods and involves supports for parents through weekly sessions on parenting skills with a group leader as well as a reading tutoring programme for the child. An evaluation of the programme indicated positive benefits along a number of dimensions six months after programme participation (NREPP, 2007; Tolan et al., 2004). Firstly, participating children

showed an improvement in reading scores, roughly equivalent in progress to almost half a school year. Secondly, some differences were evident in children's behavioural and emotional outcomes after participation. Children who had taken part in the programme showed an improvement in concentration. Some improvements were confined to those groups initially identified as high risk in terms of family relationships; children in these groups showed a decrease in aggression levels. Thirdly, parenting behaviours changed among the high risk group, with greater parental monitoring and a slight increase in involvement in their children's education.

### 2.3.2.3 Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition (SOAR)

In the United States, the Skills, Opportunities and Recognition (SOAR) programme was designed for primary and middle school (lower secondary) students. The programme is targeted at both teachers and parents. Teachers receive professional development that focuses on classroom management and teaching methods. They are also supported in teaching children 'soft skills' such as communication and conflict resolution. Programmes for parents focus on supporting children's learning, discipline and monitoring. Evaluations have shown an impact of programme participation on academic performance, the quality of family relationships, and young people's levels of substance abuse (Hawkins et al., 2005, 2007). In particular, there were significantly increased levels of school engagement and reduced levels of aggression, anti-social behaviour and levels of drinking among young people after programme participation. The extent of family communication and closeness also improved after programme participation.

### 2.3.2.4 Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)

In Ireland, independent evaluations have been conducted on a number school-based early interventions aimed at children living in disadvantaged communities carried out as part of the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI). Such initiatives include the Doodle Den Literacy programme, the Mate-Tricks pro-social behaviour after-school programme, the Early Years Programme, the Healthy Schools Programme and the Community Safety Initiative (CSI). The Early Years Programme is a two-year intensive early childcare and education programme focussing on improving children's cognitive, language and social outcomes. An evaluation of this programme indicated mixed results; there was a positive impact on the quality of curriculum planning and of the activities offered, but no effects on children's cognitive or language test scores were found (Hayes et al., 2013). Another CDI programme, the Healthy Schools Programme, was aimed at improving children's health and well-being (Comiskey et al., 2012). An evaluation found no significant differences in the outcomes of students in the sample and

the control schools across a number of health indicators. However, a sub-component of this programme, which focused on speech and language therapy, reported positive outcomes in terms of referral, assessment and intervention with children (Hayes, Keegan, and Goulding, 2012). Other CDI programmes focus on literacy and social skills (Biggart et al., 2012; O'Hare et al., 2012). An evaluation of the Doodle Den programme found that the programme resulted in moderate improvements in children's literacy levels as well as improved concentration and a reduced incidence of behavioural problems (Biggart et al., 2012). In contrast, for the Mate-Tricks programme, which aimed at enhancing pro-social behaviour among children, the evaluation found no significant differences between the children who attended the programme and those in the control group across the majority of outcomes (O'Hare et al., 2012).

## 2.4 CONCLUSIONS

Previous national and international research has pointed to the complex interplay of individual, family and school factors in shaping patterns of early school leaving. Early school leaving is found to have high costs for the individual and for society as a whole. Across Europe, policies to combat early school leaving have tended to emphasise reintegration, that is, provision for those who have already left full-time education, rather than prevention. There are, however, a number of interventions which have taken a preventative approach. These initiatives share a number of common features. Firstly, they take a partnership approach, involving schools, parents and communities. Secondly, they adopt a multi-pronged approach, with different aspects of the interventions targeted at children, parents and teachers, albeit within a common and coherent framework. Thirdly, they have an impact on a range of behaviours not just school retention, adopting a holistic approach to promoting child well-being. Evaluations of area-based early intervention programmes in the Irish context have also highlighted the importance of these features in improving outcomes but have indicated the challenges in developing a genuinely multi-agency approach (Sneddon and Harris, 2013; Statham, 2013) (see also Galvin et al., 2009, on the potential barriers to school-centred partnership). The research suggests, however, that no single strategy is considered to have worked unilaterally in addressing the participation, attendance and retention of children in education (Morris and Parashar, 2012).

# Chapter 3

---

## The School Completion Programme

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the School Completion Programme (SCP) by firstly providing a summary of the objectives, guidelines and structure of the programme. Section 3.2 outlines the core aims and the eight principles of the programme. We outline the relationship between SCP and the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme. The chapter then provides an historical overview of SCP to date and examines the management structure, including the formation of SCP clusters and local management committees. We then outline the guidelines regarding identification and targeting of students in SCP. Section 3.3 focuses on the perceived aims of SCP and is based on qualitative interviews with staff, principals and committee members from ten case-study SCP clusters.

### 3.2 OVERVIEW OF SCP

#### 3.2.1 Specific Aims

The SCP is a target support service which ‘aims to have a significant impact on levels of young people’s retention in primary and second-level schools and on numbers who successfully complete Senior Cycle, or equivalent’ (DES, 2008). The programme provides a range of local interventions in disadvantaged schools and communities designed to support the retention of young people in education. It involves the targeting of in-school, after-school and out-of-school supports towards children and young people who are at risk of disengagement and early school leaving. According to DES (2008), its specific aims are:

- To retain young people in the formal education system to completion of the Senior Cycle, or equivalent;
- To improve the quality of participation and education attainment of targeted children in the education process;
- To bring together all relevant stakeholders (home, school, youth, community, statutory and voluntary) to tackle early school leaving;
- To offer supports in primary and post-primary schools towards the prevention of educational disadvantage;
- To encourage young people who have left mainstream education to return to school;

- To influence in a positive way policies relating to the prevention of early school leaving in the education system.

### 3.2.2 Eight Principles of the School Completion Programme

The SCP guidelines and documentation (see, for example, DES, 2008) outline that the SCP is based on eight guiding principles:

1. The programme is based on the principle of partnership, involving collaboration between schools, parents and relevant agencies.
2. The programme is centred on the child and young person. Each targeted young person at risk of early school leaving has supports tailor-made to suit his/her personal and academic needs.
3. The programme is preventative, recognising that home, school, environmental, social and economic factors influence the likelihood of early school leaving.
4. The programme is based on a bottom-up approach, with different supports offered in each cluster, reflecting local needs.
5. The young person's inclusion in the programme is based on an agreed set of criteria targeting those most at risk of early school leaving.
6. A 'whole school' approach can be utilised in order to minimise the potential stigmatisation of young people at risk of early school leaving.
7. Supports are offered in-school, after-school, out-of-school and during holiday time in recognition of the fact that continuous support must be given to young people at risk of early school leaving.
8. Breaking the pattern of early school leaving and educational disadvantage is seen as key to the programme.

### 3.2.3 SCP, DEIS and the NEWB

In 2006, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) plan, a policy instrument for educational inclusion, was introduced. The DEIS Action Plan brought together a range of school-based supports, including SCP, aimed at improving educational outcomes in some 878 targeted schools throughout the country. The SCP predominantly serves schools participating in the DEIS strategy, although a number of non-DEIS schools are included in local cluster arrangements. In 2009, four education services were integrated under the responsibility of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB): SCP, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers (VTST) and the Educational Welfare Service (EWS). The VTST was subsequently discontinued with effect from September 2011. In May 2011 responsibility for the

NEWB and the Integrated Education Services was transferred to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

The NEWB practice model known as *One Child, One Team, One Plan* was designed to facilitate the integrated working of NEWB services with the school and the home where individual children and their families require additional support around school attendance, participation and/or retention. The three strands of the *One Child* practice model are the statutory Educational Welfare Service (EWS), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL). The model is designed to provide a systematic and consistent approach to working with a child and/or their family, incorporating a continuum of intervention ranging from the universal through the targeted to the intensive. The pilot phase of the implementation of the One Child model has recently been subject to an evaluation and this as yet unpublished report has been used to inform the next steps in model development.

The Government's Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) for 2012-2014 signalled the need to undertake a programme review of the SCP element of the School Support Service in order to achieve greater consistency and efficiencies in service delivery and clarify roles and responsibilities. Such a review was also intended to further develop best practice by building on the learning and experience gained to date across the programme. When published in December 2011, the CRE set out the 6.5 per cent per annum savings required in the SCP in each of the years 2012-2014; a total adjustment of €5.5 million. The current study is a response to this call for a review of the programme and is designed to inform the future development of the programme.

On the establishment of the Child and Family Agency in January 2014, the NEWB was disbanded and responsibility for the Integrated Educational Welfare Services, comprising the EWS, the HSCL Scheme and the SCP, were transferred to the new agency. Funding for SCP was €26.456 million in 2013 and reduced to €24.756 million in 2014 (Tusla Business Plan, 2014).

#### **3.2.4 SCP Management Structure**

At a national level, SCP is supported by a national leadership team within the Senior Management Team of the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla, with responsibility for overseeing the operation and work of the local projects. At local level there is a Local Management Committee (LMC) and a Local Coordinator/Project Workers. The LMC is comprised of representatives of the schools involved and may include representatives from parents and other local

voluntary and statutory services. The role of the LMC within the SCP is to oversee the delivery of the programme to at-risk children and their families at local level and to be accountable for decisions in relation to such provision (SCP, 2012a, *Bulletin no. 2*). The LMC is thus responsible for the local governance of the project, including the use of project resources and accountability for public funds. It is also responsible for developing an annual retention plan, which specifies appropriate supports for the targeted children and sets targets in relation to specific outcomes. This plan is subject to a cyclical process of planning, implementation and review.

According to SCP *Bulletin no. 2* (SCP, 2012a), the role and responsibilities of the local management committee are to:

- ‘Develop, approve and implement a Retention Plan which will constitute an effective local School Completion Programme for the area;
- Develop and provide job specifications for the project staff;
- Recruit project staff in line with the approved plan. The project staff will report to and work under the direction of the Management Committee;
- Oversee, monitor and evaluate the work of the project and project staff against objectives and proposed outcomes outlined in the plan. Target-setting is prioritised in the most recent Retention Plan in line with reporting requirements;
- Facilitate the participation of parents in the project;
- Establish a cohesive approach to networking and active partnership involving relevant statutory, voluntary and community groups in supporting the project in the integration of current services and community-based activities;
- Ensure effective accounting and administration systems are developed and implemented;
- Co-operate with requirements in relation to the evaluation and audit of the Programme and the collection of data and furnishing of reports required on a timely basis;
- Contribute to the development of good practice and policy in relation to early school leaving.’

In the development and implementation of its programme, each LMC is required to take account of personnel and financial resource requirements. The LMC, or at its decision another agent retained to act on its behalf, is the body responsible for the recruitment, management and payment of its staff. Relevant procedures in

this regard have been laid down since the establishment of the programme (SCP, 2006a). The Local Coordinator leads the development and implementation of the programme in consultation with the national EWS and in consultation with the school principals.

### **3.2.5 Components of Prevention and Support**

The SCP provides a range of supports for students at risk of early school leaving. These supports fall within four main pillars or strands: in-school, after-school, out-of-school and holiday provision (see Table 3.1). In-school supports include breakfast and lunch clubs, attendance tracking and programmes to facilitate the transition from primary to post-primary school. After-school interventions include homework clubs and after-school clubs. Holiday provision centres on summer projects and camps. Out-of-school provision provides targeted support for young people not currently in mainstream education (SCP, 2005, 2008).



**TABLE 3.1** THE FOUR PILLARS OF SCP PROVISION

<p><b>1. In-School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transfer / transition programmes</li> <li>• therapies / therapeutic interventions</li> <li>• attendance tracking and monitoring</li> <li>• counselling</li> <li>• breakfast / lunch clubs</li> <li>• mentoring programmes</li> <li>• literacy / reading programmes</li> <li>• drama, music, art</li> <li>• learning support</li> <li>• family / parent support</li> <li>• lunch clubs</li> <li>• behaviour programmes</li> <li>• Incredible Years Programme.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<p><b>2. After-School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homework clubs</li> <li>• after-school clubs</li> <li>• parental support</li> <li>• study support</li> <li>• sports programmes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Holiday-Time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summer programmes (projects, programmes, camps)</li> <li>• Easter programmes</li> <li>• holiday provision</li> <li>• Christmas programmes</li> <li>• literacy programmes</li> <li>• trips</li> <li>• mid-term camp.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Out-of-School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• liaison with Educational Welfare Services</li> <li>• family/student support</li> <li>• self-esteem programme</li> <li>• home tuition/home visiting service</li> <li>• Ballymun Educational Support Team (BEST) SCP Out of School Group</li> <li>• identifying and linking with key agencies</li> <li>• incentive trips</li> <li>• individual educational and social plans</li> <li>• networking with Youthreach/SOLAS/Employers</li> <li>• one-to-one mentoring and tuition</li> <li>• out-of-school programme with Acorn Project (Justice)</li> <li>• personal development programme</li> <li>• referrals</li> <li>• suspension intervention programmes</li> </ul>

Source: SCP (2008).

### 3.2.6 Identification and Targeting of Students

The process of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving within SCP is agreed by the SCP LMC. Those involved in targeting include school personnel (such as principals, learning support/resource teachers, and Home School Community Liaison Coordinators) and local representatives of relevant voluntary and statutory agencies (such as HSE personnel, community Gardaí, St. Vincent de Paul etc.). There are two main groups of young people targeted by the programme:

<sup>6</sup> This is a programme involving children, parents and teachers, and designed to reduce the incidence of behaviour problems and enhance social competence.

### 1. Targeted Young Person 'Out-Of-School'

A targeted young person 'out-of-school' is a young person who has left the system and is still under the legal age at which (s)he may do so, in keeping with the provisions of the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, whereby young people are required to remain in full-time education until the age of 16 or the completion of three years' second-level education, whichever is the later.

### 2. Targeted Young Person 'In-School'

A targeted young person 'in-school' is a young person who is at risk and requires intense support.

In 2006 the SCP published a set of guidelines for Local School Completion Programme (SCP) Coordinators which identified good practices for targeting young people at risk of early school leaving and offered practical advice on targeting (SCP, 2006b). In identifying an at-risk young person, the SCP use a range of criteria, including:

- may come from a family with a history of early school leaving;
- may be a member of a minority group, e.g. Traveller child, asylum seeker, refugee;
- may have a mental or physical disability;
- may come from a community with a tradition of early school leaving;
- may show disruptive behaviour, may breach school discipline;
- may have a history of poor attendance;
- may have severe literacy problems/learning difficulties;
- may be identified as having a 'specific learning difficulty';
- may be withdrawn, silent, non-participative;
- may be identified as participating in anti-social behaviour or as a 'young offender';
- may be susceptible to economic stress/distress in the family background. (SCP, 2006b).

### 3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF THE AIMS OF SCP ON THE GROUND

Interviews with SCP coordinators, chairpersons, primary and post-primary school principals and other members of the LMC carried out as part of this study

highlight the range of views about what the aims of the programme actually are. Although there was much repetition about the purpose of SCP across clusters, different clusters and even different schools within clusters appeared to emphasise different aspects of SCP. This section outlines some of these views which include seeing SCP as a programme which monitors and tracks attendance; a support which provides a watchful eye on students at risk of disengagement or school leaving; and a flexible support with the advantage of tailoring provision to match need.

### 3.3.1 A Programme to Track and Monitor Attendance

At post-primary level, principals were more concerned with SCP being focussed on student retention and getting at-risk students through the Junior and Leaving Certificate exams:

The overall aim is to keep kids, who otherwise might drift off, keep them up as far Leaving Cert. And get them through it as best we can. In some cases you'd be looking at trying to keep kids in to the Junior Cert, where you know that they're really struggling to stay in. But overall our aim is to get them to Leaving Cert. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

One principal argued that attendance was not enough but that young people in post-primary education could be encouraged to reach their potential through SCP supports:

It's also about kids when they stay in school actually maximising their potential... and actually achieving, you know, what it is they should be achieving. Not, and, and no disrespect to say the likes of JCSP [Junior Certificate School Programme] and LCA [Leaving Certificate Applied] but that these kids actually go on and achieve what it is they should be achieving...when you see them in fifth and sixth class in primary school, they should be going on and doing their Leaving Cert and they should be going on and going to third-level college, you know. I suppose it's about, you know, just putting the building blocks in place to ensure that that happens and I think SCP has a key role to play around that. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school).

Other principals felt that improving student attendance could only happen when schools engaged with families:

The biggest part really is support attendance, that's really, really important. And also to engage families, who may not be highly interested, or may not have the resources to engage fully in education. So it's really to tap into those who are most vulnerable, those who are most on the edge, and to just increase the level of participation in education. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

Well obviously to keep children in school but... it's not so much just having the body there, it's to get them to engage in the school, you know, and to succeed, you know, and to feel part of a community which is, I think, the big goal in education is to get people to feel part of a community. Because if they don't engage, you've no chance. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

### 3.3.2 A Caring, Social Support for Students at Risk

At primary level the core aims of SCP were seen as less to do with retention than at post-primary level. SCP objectives for younger children seemed to be far more subtle, encompassing aims such as school engagement and making school a happy welcoming environment:

And we're just glad then sometimes that they're in for the six hours a day because we know where they are. We know they're being fed that they're safe ... that they're being looked after and they're having a laugh like, you know, we're just glad sometimes that they're just there. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

SCP contributes to making schools a great place for children who come from homes that aren't great places... [it's] so important for our children, you know... where they feel welcomed, and, and important and... where they achieve their best and... where they're valued. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

It might come down to children who are suffering some sort of psychological pressure you know because of circumstances that they live in, and therefore not happy at school, or whatever... so the whole idea is to try and make school as attractive a place for them as possible. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

SCP was viewed as a mechanism which can ease the burden for children who were socially disadvantaged:

It would be to look after, I suppose, the underprivileged. The people that are not, not well looked after otherwise, to try and give them something extra, to help them on their way. And to make them feel wanted and to encourage, to get them over the line. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

To be able to look at a student and just say hello to them and they know that there's somebody in the school who knows who they are, who knows where they come from, who knows about their problems you know. Doesn't necessarily have to be a whole class sharing of information. I think that is key, you know. It's key to getting these kids through in my opinion. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

One principal and chairperson felt that the SCP acted as a 'support for maybe what might be missing in families' (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, school BOM, low intensity, diverse). SCP was not considered to be solely for children but also their parents who many principals felt were key to promoting student engagement and retention:

It's the positive atmosphere that it helps create as well in terms of how people view their education. And again bear in mind that you know many of our parents have a fear of coming into the school, do you know the way, now that has changed, it has improved over the years, again as a result – I don't want to solely say as a result of School Completion, it's as a result of a number of factors – of the staff here, of how the school works, again Home School – like all that sort of stuff. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

One principal described SCP as a scaffold that supported some children as they progressed through the education system:

I'm sure the whole theme and bottom line is the same, keeping them there, supporting, that there is a purpose and kind of breaking that cycle and it takes a lot, without the scaffolding it would go, they'd be gone. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

Others also felt that without SCP addressing the critical issues of poverty, deprivation or mental health issues, real learning could not take place:

Can you take up what education is to be there if you're emotionally under siege? (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

Dealing with students' basic needs such as food and clothing was viewed as essential in order to enable learning to take place:

I suppose it's a mainstay in terms of ensuring that (A) the kids are coming in (B) that they are properly fed when they go into class. (Durseley, LMC member, rural, large size, diverse).

### **3.3.3 An Holistic School Engagement Programme**

When asked about the scope of SCP, those interviewed found it difficult to define, with many suggesting that lack of precise definition is one of the main benefits of the programme.

There's no real limit to it. ... That's the beauty of it. It's whatever we decide we want to do ... And assuming that we can do it. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

It's very broad actually, yeah, I mean to be honest what I love about the scope of SCP at the moment is that it can be down to the micro level of dealing with one particular child who has one particular issue about something or other and that you can organise the bit of one on one support, confidence building, yeah, no, self-awareness, whatever the issue is, even maybe uncovering what the problem is if there's an issue around attendance or whatever like that. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Other principals felt that the varied and holistic nature of supports for targeted children in SCP was the reason for its success:

[It's a] holistic approach to... their wellbeing... And that's the advantage of it. (Durseley, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

### 3.3.4 A Mechanism to Bring Outside Agencies into the School

The SCP appears to provide a structure for schools to engage with a range of external statutory and community/voluntary organisations. Data from the Annual Progress Reports indicate that each cluster works with an average of ten different agencies. These include other youth services, local partnerships, Juvenile Liaison Officers from the Gardaí, the Health Services Executive (HSE) and voluntary organisations such as Barnardos and Vincent de Paul (see SCP 2012b *Bulletin no. 3*). Many of those interviewed felt that this component of SCP distinguished it from other school supports:

I think another huge thing that School Completion has kind of brought in as well is a more multi-agency approach within a school, that you're not working in isolation and you're establishing links with other supports within the community. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Some argued that the inter-agency component of SCP resulted in better services for the children and young people involved:

It's all inter agency. And it's great because we all know each other; all you have to do is lift the phone ... There's a great connection, we all have the same agenda. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

In some cases working with outside agencies was seen as financially beneficial as well:

They [community development organisation] were doing a lot of after-school supervisions in our site schools, very badly right, they were doing it to a level...it wasn't appropriate...and we were running homework club site beside it so we've subsumed our homework clubs into their after-school

clubs. ..so we'll pay half, one of our teachers goes to that to make sure then that's our way of ensuring that the standard... and then we've halved our bill because they're paying half and we're paying half. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

The interviews in most of the SCP clusters visited made reference to the importance of engaging the wider community through community resource centres or the community Gardaí:

We have the guards working on it [SCP camps], the community guards, and one of the major positive things I always felt was, we ran the leadership programme so we always had this thing in the school anyway about responsibility. Children doing things, you know, green schools or helping out. (Lambay, chairperson, urban, medium size, diverse).

Some clusters relied on the involvement of outside agencies to compensate for the fact that their out-of-school component is not well-developed:

We provide a lot of in school supports and provide a lot of after-school, our out-of-school is weak. But there are other agencies who can do out-of-school work like Extern, the Garda Youth Diversion...so there are services there. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school)

The engagement of outside agencies often meant that the programmes provided were not just for targeted children within SCP but rather to the benefit of the wider community:

I work closely with the community development project here. Now myself and the chairperson more or less run community-wide summer camps rather than just small SCP summer camps. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school)

### 3.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides information on the core aims of the SCP, the principles of the programme and its relationship with other programmes such as DEIS and organisations such as the NEWB (now EWS, Tusla). The chapter draws on official guidelines to consider the governance and management structure of SCP in addition to the types of supports that the SCP can provide. We then examined the nature of targeting children and young people within SCP clusters. The second part of this chapter used information gathered as part of the case-study fieldwork in ten SCP clusters to examine perceptions of SCP among those working with the programme. These interviews highlighted a variation in the aims of the programme between primary and post-primary level, with post-primary schools

more likely to emphasise retention and monitoring of attendance as priorities. At primary level, the focus of SCP appears to differ with more of an emphasis on social and emotional supports for targeted children and providing a programme for school engagement rather than school completion. At both levels, however, the SCP was noted as being a valuable means through which to engage outside or community organisations and agencies which appeared to benefit provision within the programme.



# Chapter 4

---

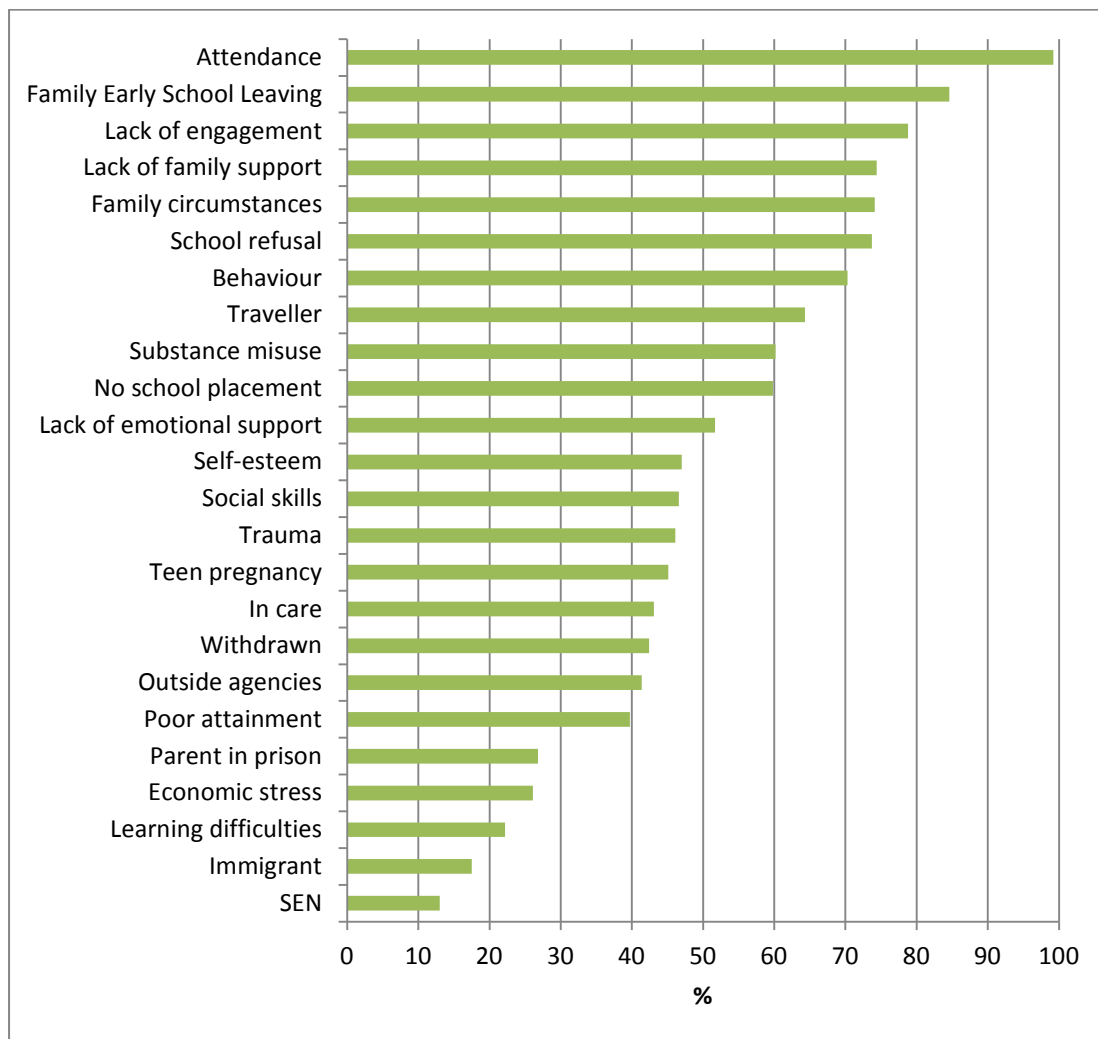
## Targeting and Provision

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how children and young people are identified for participation in SCP provision as well as the nature of that provision. Section 4.2 examines the criteria used for identifying the target group across all clusters and in the case-study clusters. Section 4.3 explores the profile of the students targeted in terms of gender, age and ethnic group. Section 4.4 looks at the balance of provision across the four pillars of SCP; in-school, after-school, holiday and out of school; and the remainder of the chapter goes on to examine the nature of such provision. The analyses examine the extent to which practices vary by cluster characteristics, including size, location and the relative balance between DEIS and non-DEIS schools as well as the cluster's governance arrangements and the professional background of the coordinator.

### 4.2 CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING THE TARGET GROUP

In the survey, coordinators and chairpersons were given a list of criteria and asked to indicate the extent to which these criteria were used in identifying students for the programme. It should be noted that some of the criteria relied on objective characteristics, such as attendance levels, while others relied on perceptions of child behaviour and family circumstances. There was a universal emphasis on poor attendance as a criterion for targeting students for SCP provision (Figure 4.1). A family history of early school leaving was seen as an important criterion in over four-fifths of clusters. Other factors seen as extremely important in two-thirds or more of clusters centred on both family characteristics (circumstances and lack of support) and child characteristics (not being engaged, poor behaviour and refusing to come to school). A range of other child characteristics were used by a significant group of clusters, particularly aspects of their socio-emotional well-being and difficult circumstances such as trauma and being in care. Aspects of the child's educational development, such as poor attainment and learning difficulties, were less likely to be considered than their socio-emotional development, although some clusters did take such educational criteria into account. Almost two-thirds of clusters targeted students from a Traveller background for involvement. However, only a small minority of clusters targeted immigrant students or those with a special educational need on the grounds of group membership alone.

**FIGURE 4.1** Criteria Used ('To a Great Extent') to Identify the Target Group

Source: Coordinator survey.

Interviews in the case-study clusters indicated the way in which multiple factors entered into the criteria for targeting.

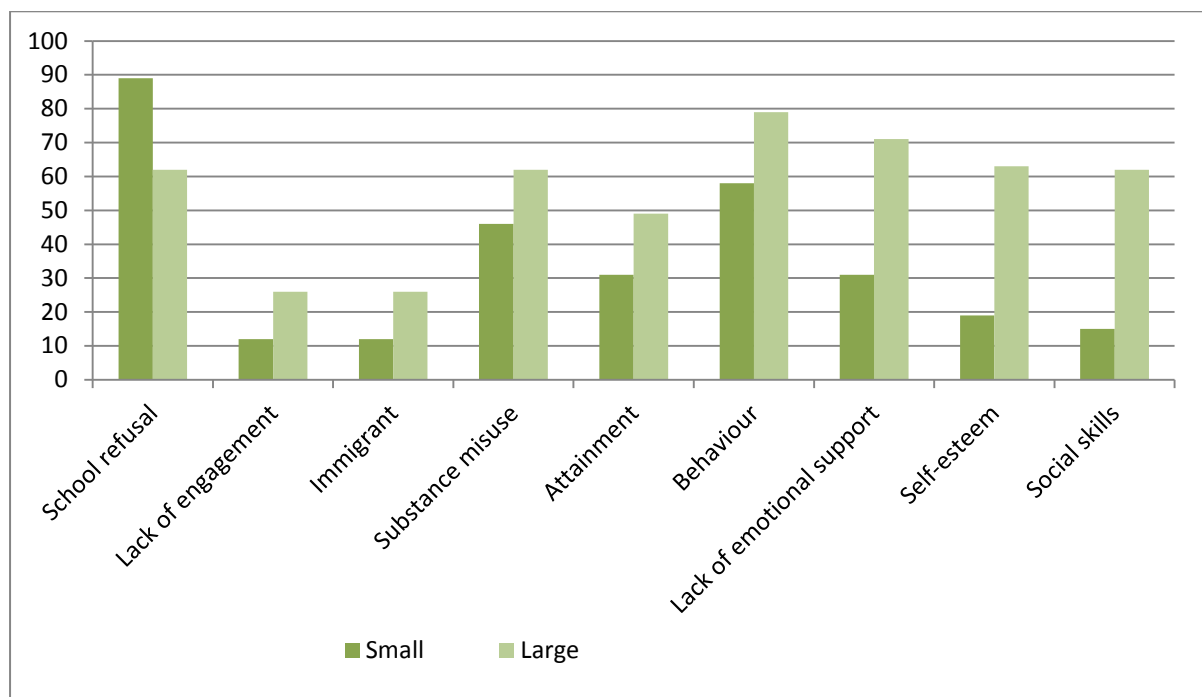
The criteria, kind of kids that missed a lot of school, kids whose siblings would have dropped out... If there was health issues, if there was issues within the family, social issues. ... Now this wouldn't be a stand-alone reason, if they were non-Irish because of the language barrier. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, in-school).

Very deprived backgrounds, huge amount of unemployment, you might have, you know, alcoholism, maybe drug abuse, violence in the home, you know, children would have been exposed to an awful lot coming to school. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Students with poor social communication skills, aggressive behaviour towards peers and staff, the quiet withdrawn students, the kids who show

signs of physical neglect, turning up with no uniform or no socks on, filthy, head lice, you know, no lunch, that sort of stuff. (Inishmore, coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

**FIGURE 4.2** Criteria Used ('To a Great Extent') by Cluster Size

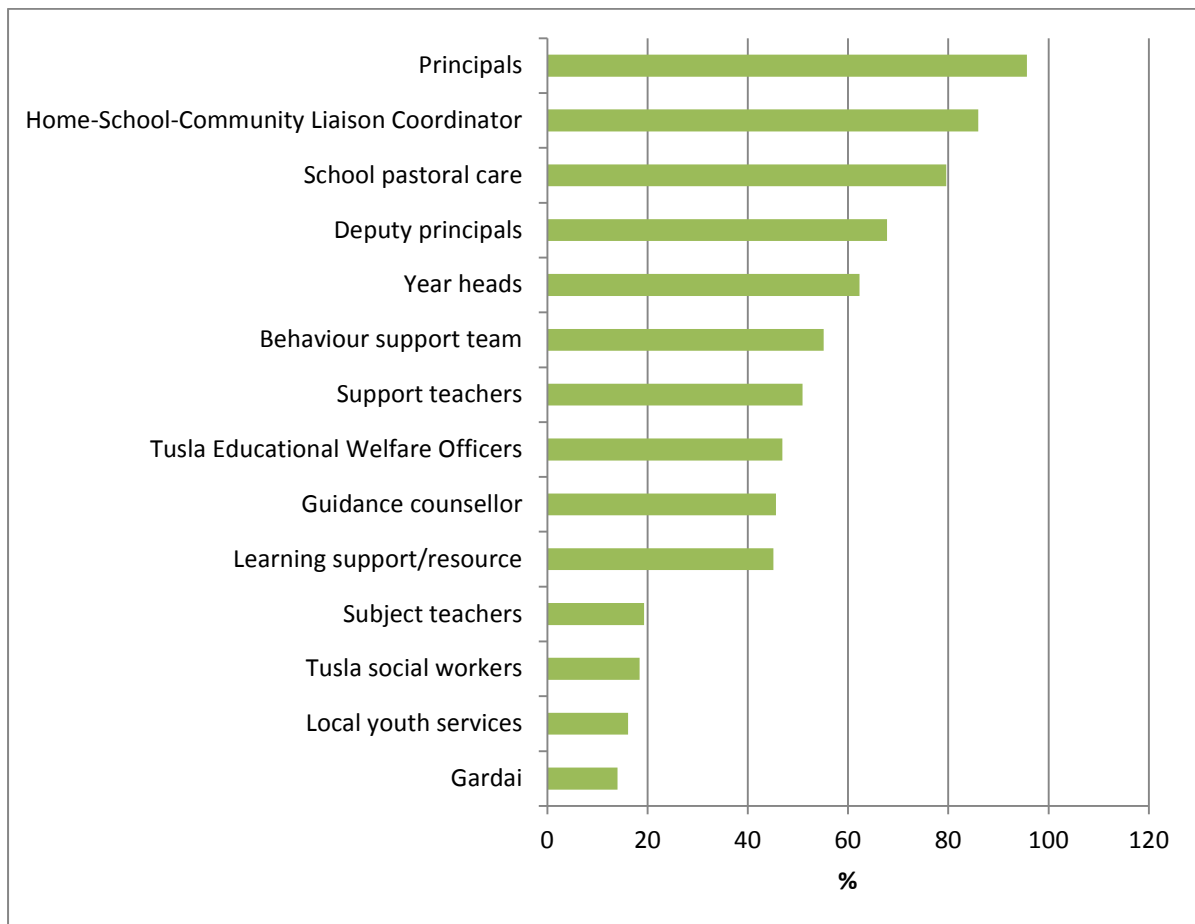


Source: Coordinator survey.

While there is a good deal of commonality across clusters in the criteria used, there is some variation in approach by cluster size. In general, larger clusters indicated that more criteria were used to a great extent. They were more likely to emphasise aspects of socio-emotional development (behaviour, self-esteem and social skills), family circumstances (lack of support, substance misuse) and migrant status while school refusal was mentioned more frequently by small clusters (Figure 4.2). Urban and rural clusters were broadly similar in the criteria used, though rural clusters were somewhat more likely to emphasise family history of early school leaving (93 per cent compared with 77 per cent) and being from a Traveller background (72 per cent compared with 57 per cent) as criteria. There are few differences in targeting criteria by the DEIS composition of the school. The exception is that clusters with at least one non-DEIS school are more likely to use experience of trauma (bereavement or separation) as a criterion to a great extent (56 per cent compared with 39 per cent) and less likely to use substance misuse (52 per cent compared with 62 per cent). In summary, the criteria used appear to reflect, at least to some extent, the socio-economic circumstances within which clusters operate.

Three-quarters of coordinators reported that the criteria used for targeting were reviewed on an annual basis; 12 per cent of clusters reviewed every two years and a further 12 per cent did so less frequently. The majority (70 per cent) of coordinators report that they use the SCP guidelines on identifying at-risk children and young people 'to a great extent'. Just over half (53 per cent) describe these guidelines as 'very useful'. Criticisms of the guidelines were that they were out of date and overly general. Coordinators of urban clusters were slightly less positive about the guidelines (42 per cent compared with 57 per cent) while those with one or more non-DEIS schools in the cluster were somewhat more positive about the guidelines (60 per cent compared with 48 per cent).

The survey asked about the level of involvement of different individuals and organisations in identifying at-risk children and young people. Figure 4.3 shows those groups who were named as involved 'to a great extent' by at least ten per cent of clusters. The main people involved in identification of at-risk students were school principals, HSCLs and the school pastoral care team. Deputy principals and year heads were also involved in a majority of clusters. Education Welfare Officers were involved in a significant minority, four in ten, of clusters. However, other external agencies played a less important role in identifying at-risk students.

**FIGURE 4.3** Individuals or Groups Involved in Identifying At-Risk Students (% 'To a Great Extent')

Source: Coordinator survey.

Interviews with staff in the case-study clusters highlighted the partnership approach taken to identifying at-risk students.

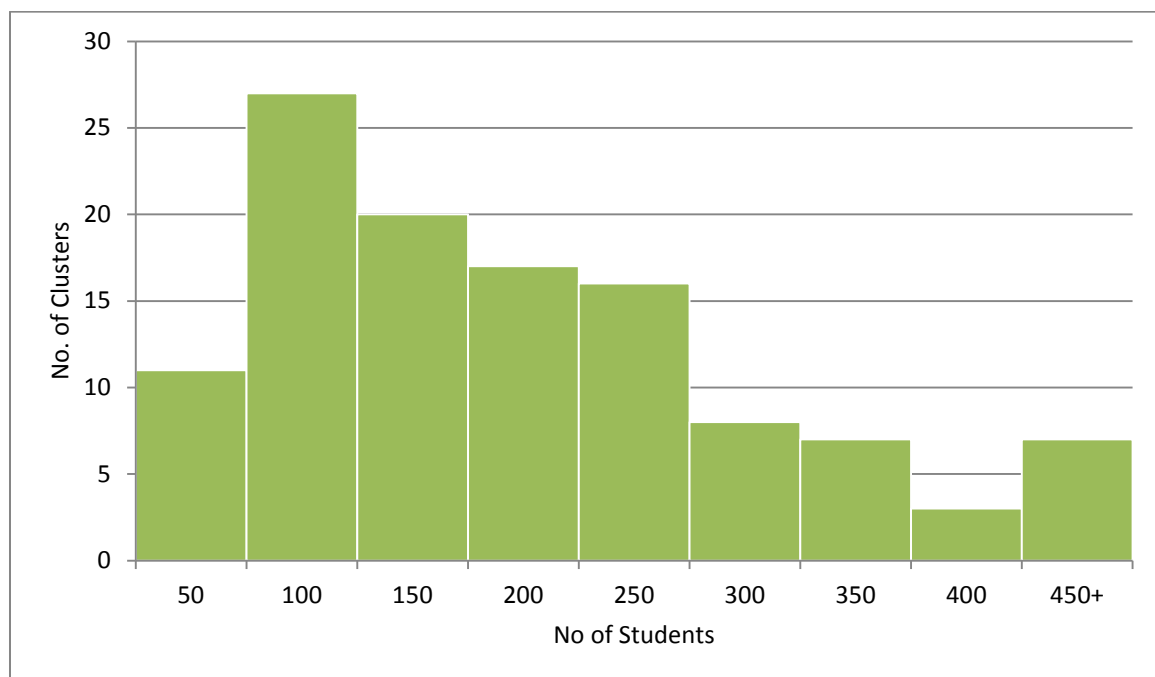
We'd have a lot of that information already on enrolment. So we would know, say, for instance, who would be working, who wouldn't be working. With regard to trauma and all the other aspects there, we would depend on the class teachers for that. Because the amount of knowledge that they have about children, is, is great. We also have the Home School Liaison Coordinator, so she would have access to a lot of information around all of that. And then of course, the attendance factor, tracking that is one of the best ways to figure out, who's actually on the edge. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

The care team, alright, which comprises home liaison, myself and school completion coordinator, and another staff member over there, depending on who is available, through a fairly consistent number of meetings in the year. We would identify people that way. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

### 4.3 THE SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE TARGET GROUP

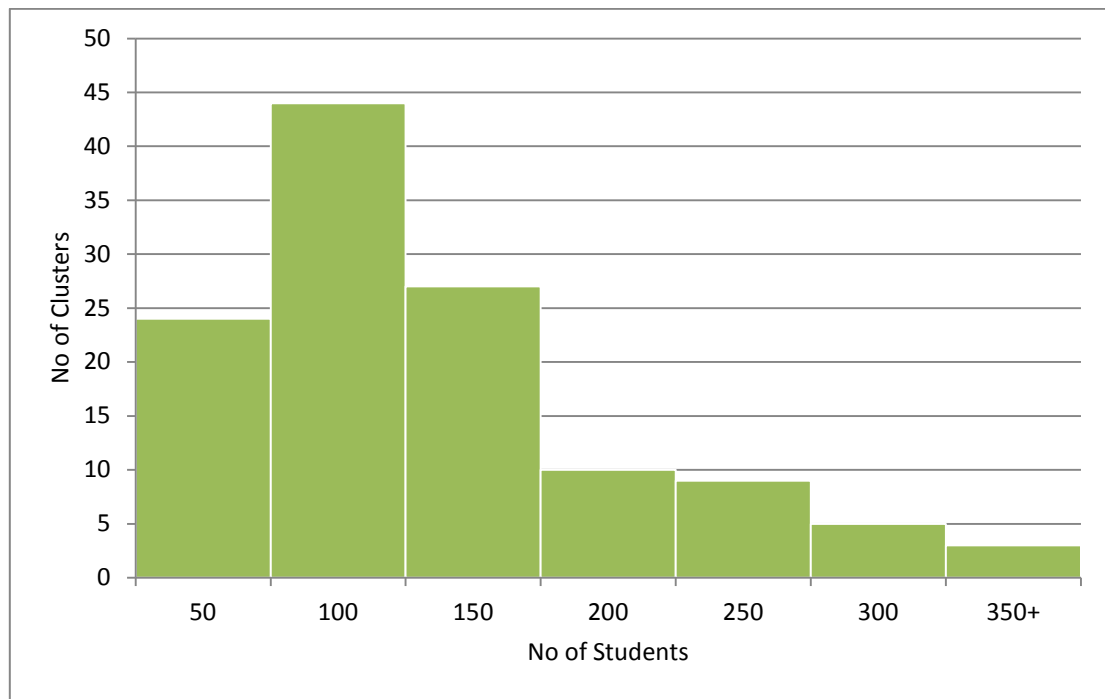
Information from the *Annual Progress Report of 2012/13* has been used to look at the size and composition of the target group as it provides detailed figures on the numbers targeted in different categories. These figures were supplemented with information on the enrolment numbers in each of the schools in the cluster in order to yield an estimate of the proportion of students targeted in each cluster. There was considerable variation in the numbers of primary and post-primary students targeted across clusters (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b). On average, 169 primary students and 114 second-level students were included in the target group. In addition, an average of six out-of-school children and young people were targeted per cluster. While clusters typically targeted only a handful of those out of school, some clusters have sizeable numbers who fall into this category (Figure 4.4c).

**FIGURE 4.4a** Number of Primary Students Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13



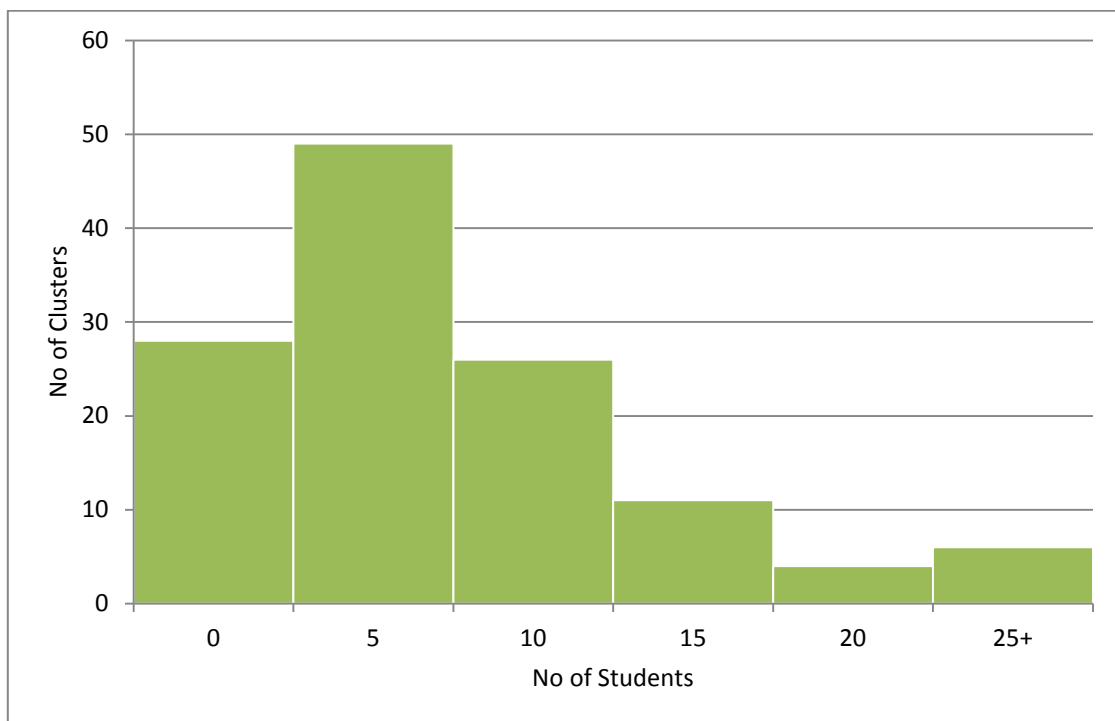
Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

**FIGURE 4.4b** Number of Post-Primary Students Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13



Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

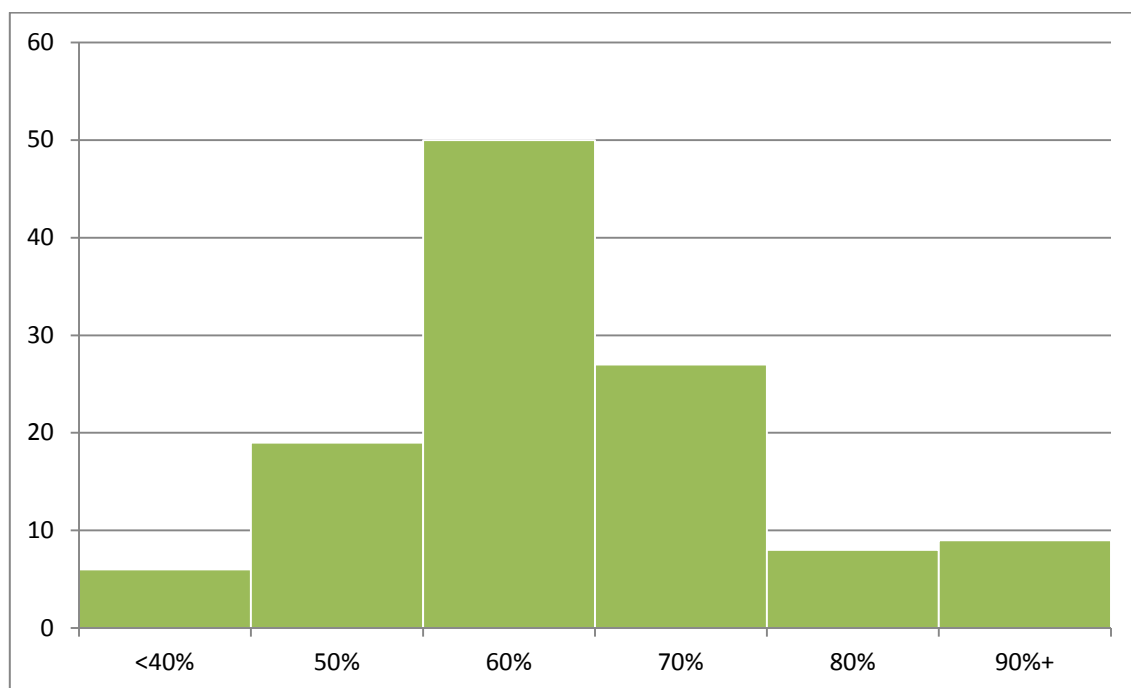
**FIGURE 4.4c** Number of Out-Of-School Children and Young People Targeted Per Cluster, 2012/13



Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

Over half (57 per cent) of the target group are male (Figure 4.5), a pattern consistent with actual patterns of early school leaving and educational disengagement. Members of the target group are fairly evenly spread across the age distribution, with a slight increase at the age 12-13 time-point (Figure 4.6), reflecting SCP provision of transfer programmes to facilitate the transition from primary to post-primary education (see below). The proportion in the older age-group (16-18 years of age) is slightly smaller than for the other age groups. Students from a Traveller background make up an average of 12 per cent of the target group, though, as Figure 4.7 indicates, some clusters have a higher concentration of Traveller students in their target group. This pattern is consistent across the four years for which data are available and shows that students from a Traveller background are disproportionately represented in the SCP target group. Over the same period, students who were non-English/Irish speaking made up 11-14 per cent of the target group, roughly in line with their representation in the total population.<sup>7</sup> The representation of immigrant students in the target group is found to vary across clusters.

**FIGURE 4.5** Gender Profile (% Male) of the Target Group

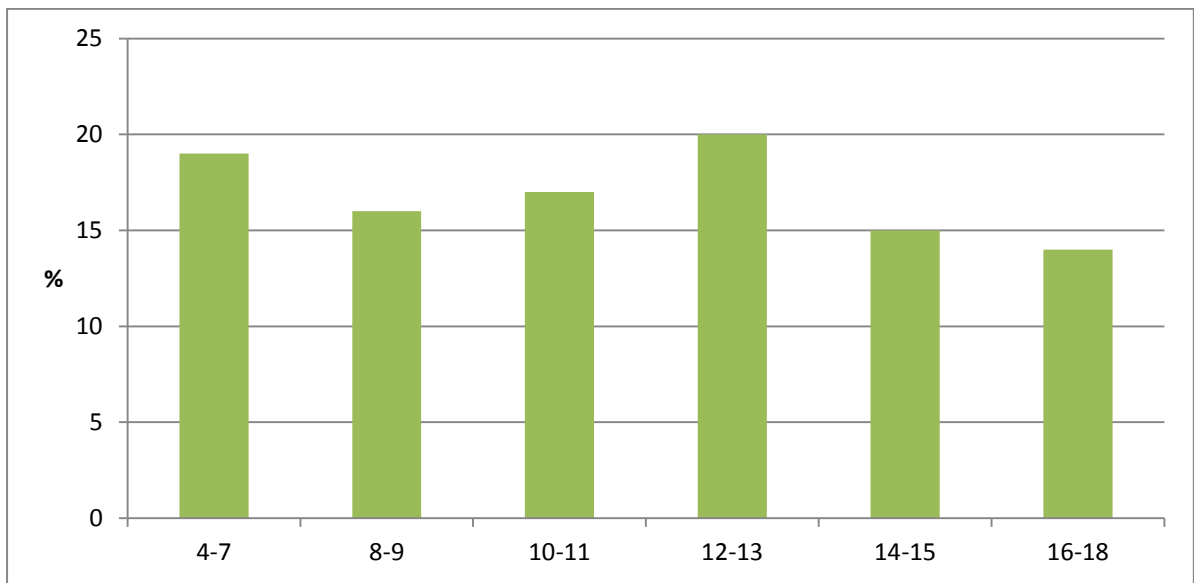


Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

<sup>7</sup> The categories used by SCP changed over time from 'international students' to 'students where English is not their first language'.

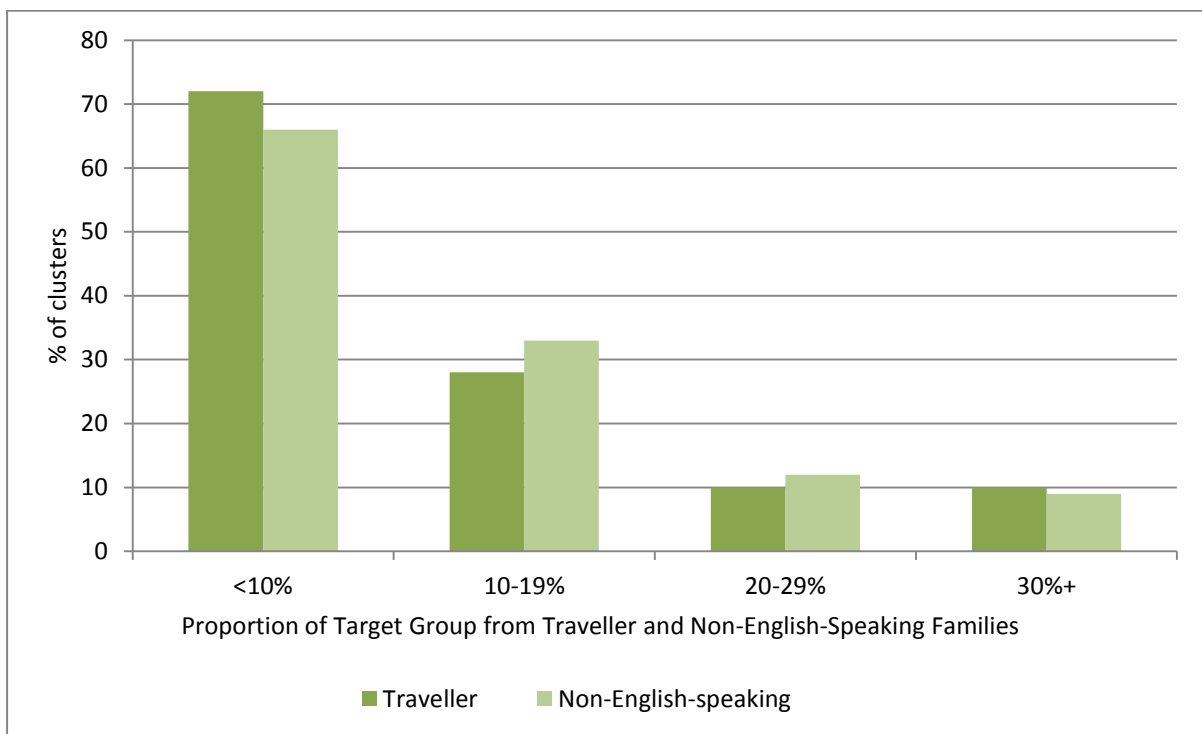


**FIGURE 4.6** Age Profile of the Target Group



Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

**FIGURE 4.7** Ethnic Profile of the Target Group by Cluster

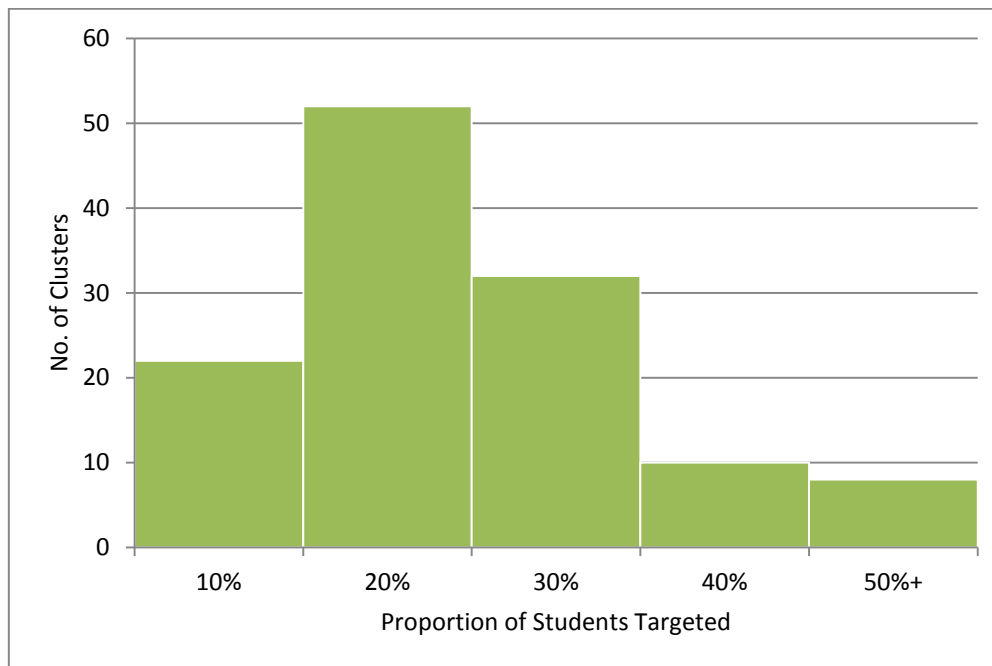


Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

Enrolment figures can be used to calculate the proportion of students targeted across clusters. This varies markedly, from 4 per cent to 93 per cent of all students, with an average of 21 per cent of the student population targeted across clusters (Figure 4.8). Overall, 23 per cent of primary students and 21 per

cent of second-level students are targeted on average. Looked at another way, 60 per cent of the target group are primary students, 38 per cent are second-level students and 2 per cent are out of school. These proportions are consistent with patterns for the previous three years.

**FIGURE 4.8** Proportion of Students Targeted by Cluster



Source: Annual Progress Report 2012/13.

In the survey, coordinators were asked whether the number of students included in the target group tended to change over the course of the school year. Sixty-one per cent of coordinators indicated that the size of the group tended to increase over the year as needs come to light and crisis situations arise, with the remainder indicating that it remained stable. Large clusters were less likely to increase the group over the school year, with 45 per cent doing so compared with 60 per cent of small and 73 per cent of medium clusters. Urban clusters were more likely to add to the target group than rural clusters (68 per cent compared with 53 per cent).

The case-study clusters differed in the proportion of students targeted (see Chapter 1). Staff in the clusters discussed the tensions in trying to balance need against the constraints of provision.

Our biggest problem is actually having to play god and choose the fifteen kids to go into it... that's the biggest problem. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school)

It's very easy to fill the 12 [places on activities] ... It's just maybe deciding why a certain 12 over another 12. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse)

We just don't have the capacity to target anymore really ... I'm sure I could think off the top of my head like in the school alone another like twenty, thirty students who should probably be targeted. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse)

The issue of how large the target group should be and the extent to which SCP activities should involve only target group students was the subject of much debate. Focusing only on the most at-risk students was seen as potentially leading to stigma.

The social activities are intended to be inclusive because obviously you're not going to make children stand out as the only ones doing Taekwondo for instance or stuff like that... also it's very good for them to be socialising with their peers regardless of target or non-targeted. (Durseley, coordinator, rural, large size, diverse).

People became obsessive about targeting, whereas actually what was needed is skilful targeting, which also included children who definitely were not targeted, because that raises the tone of the whole operation. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

Some coordinators reported that they had been advised by senior SCP managers to reduce the size of the target group but felt that this placed particular groups of students at risk.

We are being asked to reduce our lists, and to see what is targeted, and target lists. My firm belief is that the lists should be as wide as possible, and certainly focus some of the resources on the more needy people, but at the same time to spread it as much as possible, you'd never know background or anything else. ... I think it would be more effective to keep, I'm not saying everybody, because it can't be everybody, but to keep it as broad as it has been here. (Durseley, chairperson, rural, large size, diverse).

There's been a real push on in the SCP to bring down the numbers of kids. ... Initially you know when we started up I think, you know, some of our schools there was probably 80 per cent of the kids, because of the area that we're working in, they were on the target list. And they're all needing, people needing supports. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

It was also noted that clusters that involved a larger proportion of students in SCP provision usually offered some activities to a larger group while targeting a smaller group for more intensive supports.

We have a list of criteria. If the students meet any of the criteria they're on the target list. And then we break it into our traffic light system if they meet three or more of the criteria. They would be on our red list. So we do a red, amber, orange, you know, and red being the preventative and real serious interventions and then the other two being universal supports like your breakfast clubs, your homework clubs, you know, class programmes if we're targeting a whole class programme. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

The appropriate size of the target group was also discussed by stakeholders. One stakeholder emphasised the need to focus on the small group of children and young people with the greatest difficulties.

The sense of it [after-school provision] being targeted at the kids who really, really need support is questionable. In some sense there's a generic provision after school so anybody can come along. ... [Good provision has] the focus on the kids who need it most... some universal interventions funded by SCP, fair enough, but focus on these kids in particular. (Stakeholder)

But, as with SCP staff, opinions differed, with other stakeholders emphasising the need to avoiding stigmatising marginalised students:

In the best instances there is no distinction between made between target kids and others... there isn't any stigma. (Stakeholder)

We feel that it is very important to get the richness in the situation. We want to avoid at all cost that students would be stigmatised. (Stakeholder)

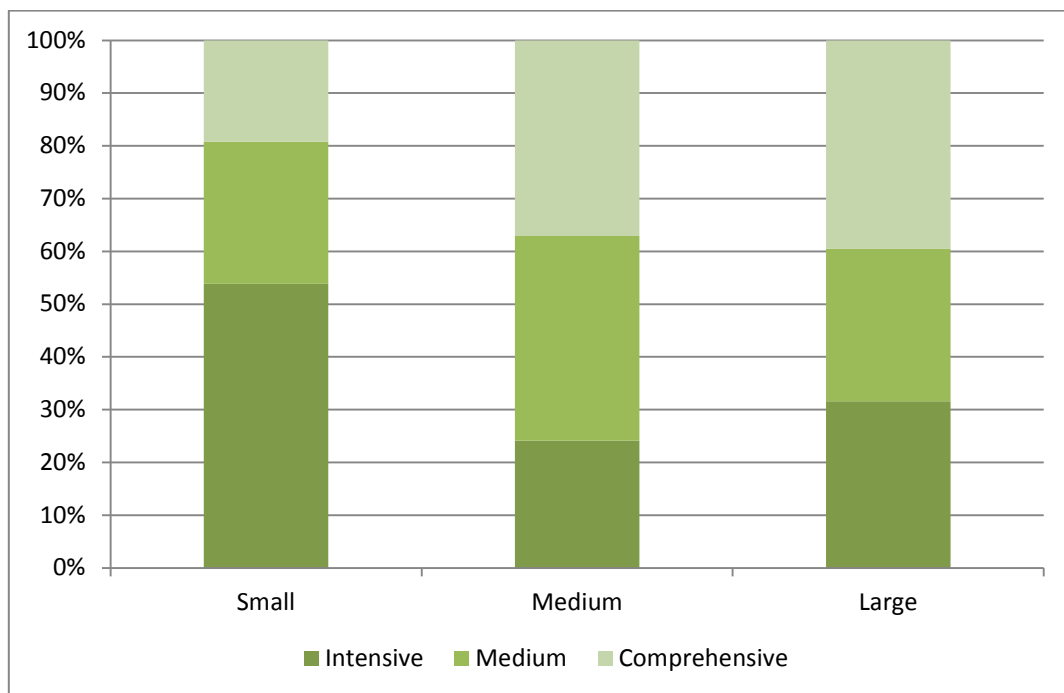
From this perspective, a combination of general and more targeted activities was seen as optimal.

There are two main areas that are most of use: one is the general prevention, being aimed at all students, and probably in primary schools it is more important, and if you move up to older students, there is merit in using more targeted support to individual students or small groups of students. (Stakeholder)

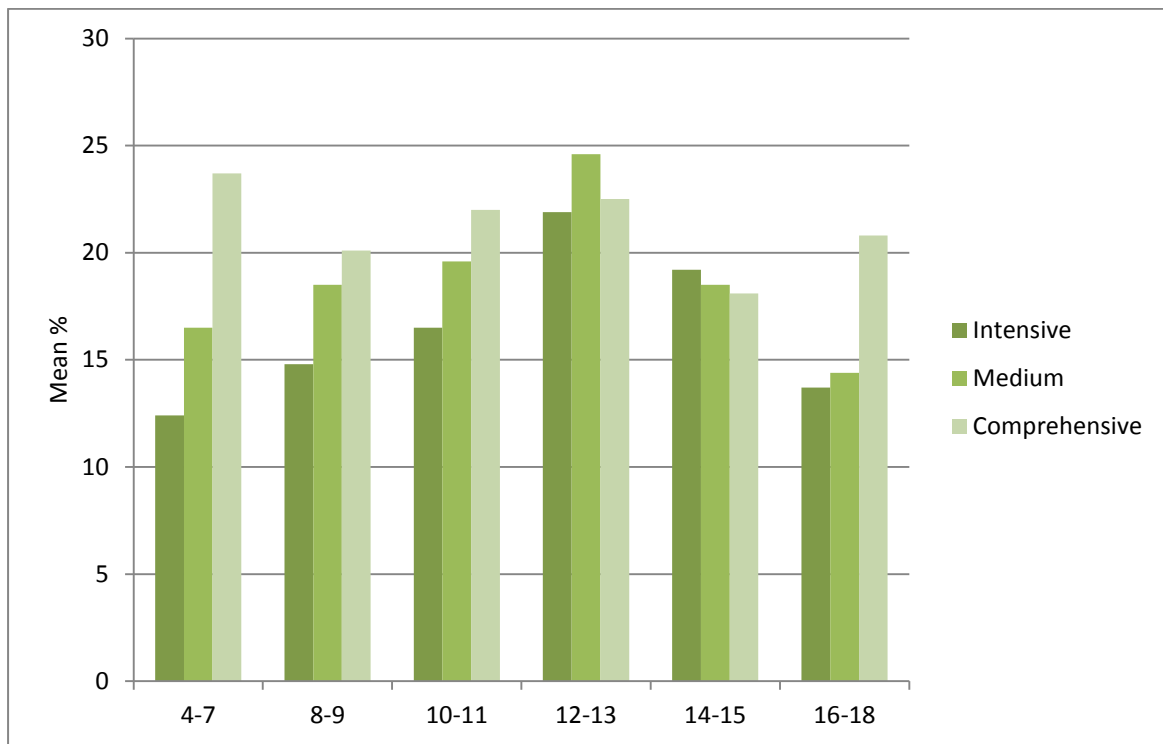
In summary, clusters vary in the extent to which they target a smaller proportion of students intensively or whether they take a more comprehensive approach to identifying the target group. Cluster size is found to be associated with the approach to targeting. Figure 4.9 shows the prevalence of intensive, medium and comprehensive approaches to targeting for small, medium and large clusters. Small clusters are much more likely to take an intensive approach; 54 per cent do so compared with 32 per cent of large clusters. In contrast, a significant

proportion (37-39 per cent) of medium and large clusters take a more comprehensive approach. Intensity does not vary by urban/rural location or by whether there is a non-DEIS school in the cluster. Lack of school engagement and learning difficulties are rated as more important criteria in clusters that take a more comprehensive approach to targeting. Clusters that target a smaller proportion of students are less likely to use the SCP guidelines on identifying at-risk children and young people to a great extent, indicating that they are most likely focusing on a subset of the guideline criteria to identify at-risk students. With the exception of the 12-15 age-group, clusters that take a more comprehensive approach tend to target a higher proportion of each age cohort on average (Figure 4.10). For example, intensive clusters target 12 per cent of all 4-7 year-olds, medium clusters target 17 per cent of this age group while comprehensive clusters target 24 per cent of all 4-7 year-olds. This difference by cluster intensity is most striking for the youngest and older age-groups; in other words, taking a broader approach to targeting draws in at-risk students from the early years and from senior cycle.

**FIGURE 4.9** Intensity of Targeting by Cluster Size



Source: Calculated from the Annual Progress Report 2012/13 data.

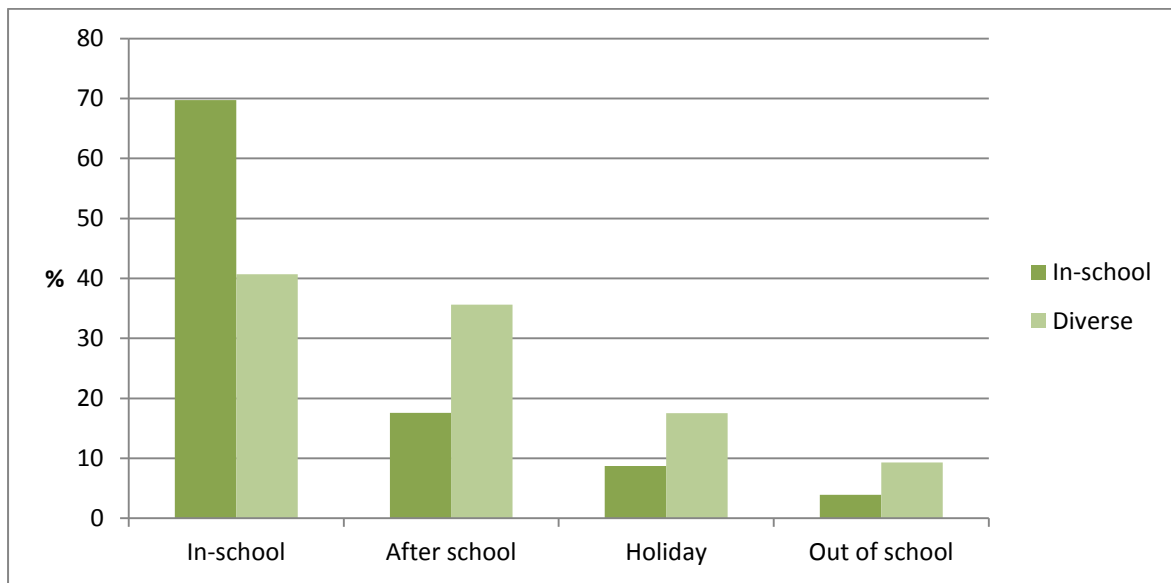
**FIGURE 4.10** Proportion of All Students in Each Age-Group Targeted by Cluster Intensity

Source: Calculated from the Annual Progress Report 2012/13 data.

#### 4.4 BALANCE OF PROVISION

The survey of coordinators and chairpersons asked about the current balance of provision across the four pillars of SCP provision; in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school programmes. Cluster analysis was used to group projects according to the balance across the different forms of provision. Two main groups were identified: those which focused mainly on in-school provision with relatively low levels of provision in the other domains, and those with a greater diversity of types of provision. Figure 4.11 shows the average proportion of activities which fall within the categories of in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision for these two groups of clusters. Thus, 70 per cent of provision in in-school clusters focuses on in-school provision while this is the case for only 41 per cent of all provision in diverse clusters. It is worth noting that diverse clusters have a roughly even balance between in-school and after-school provision (41 per cent and 36 per cent of their provision respectively). The balance of provision does not vary markedly by cluster size, though small clusters are somewhat more likely to fit into the in-school group (48 per cent compared with 58 per cent of medium clusters and 55 per cent of large clusters). There are significant differences by location, however, with urban clusters much more likely to fall into the diverse group than rural clusters (56 per cent compared with 35 per cent). This is likely to reflect difficulties in providing after-school activities for a geographically dispersed population.

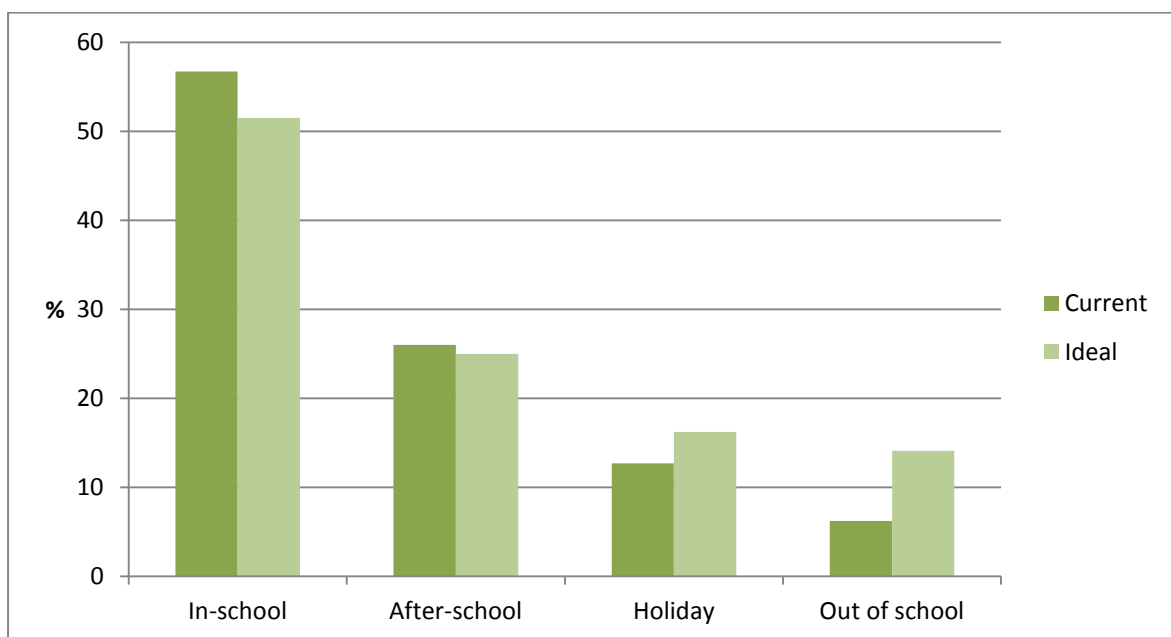
**FIGURE 4.11** Mean Proportion of Provision in the Different Pillars by Cluster Typology



Source: Coordinator survey.

As well as being asked about the current balance across the four pillars, coordinators were also asked to indicate what they felt the ideal balance would be (Figure 4.12). On the whole, coordinators expressed a preference to slightly reduce the emphasis on in-school activities to allow for more holiday and out-of-school provision.

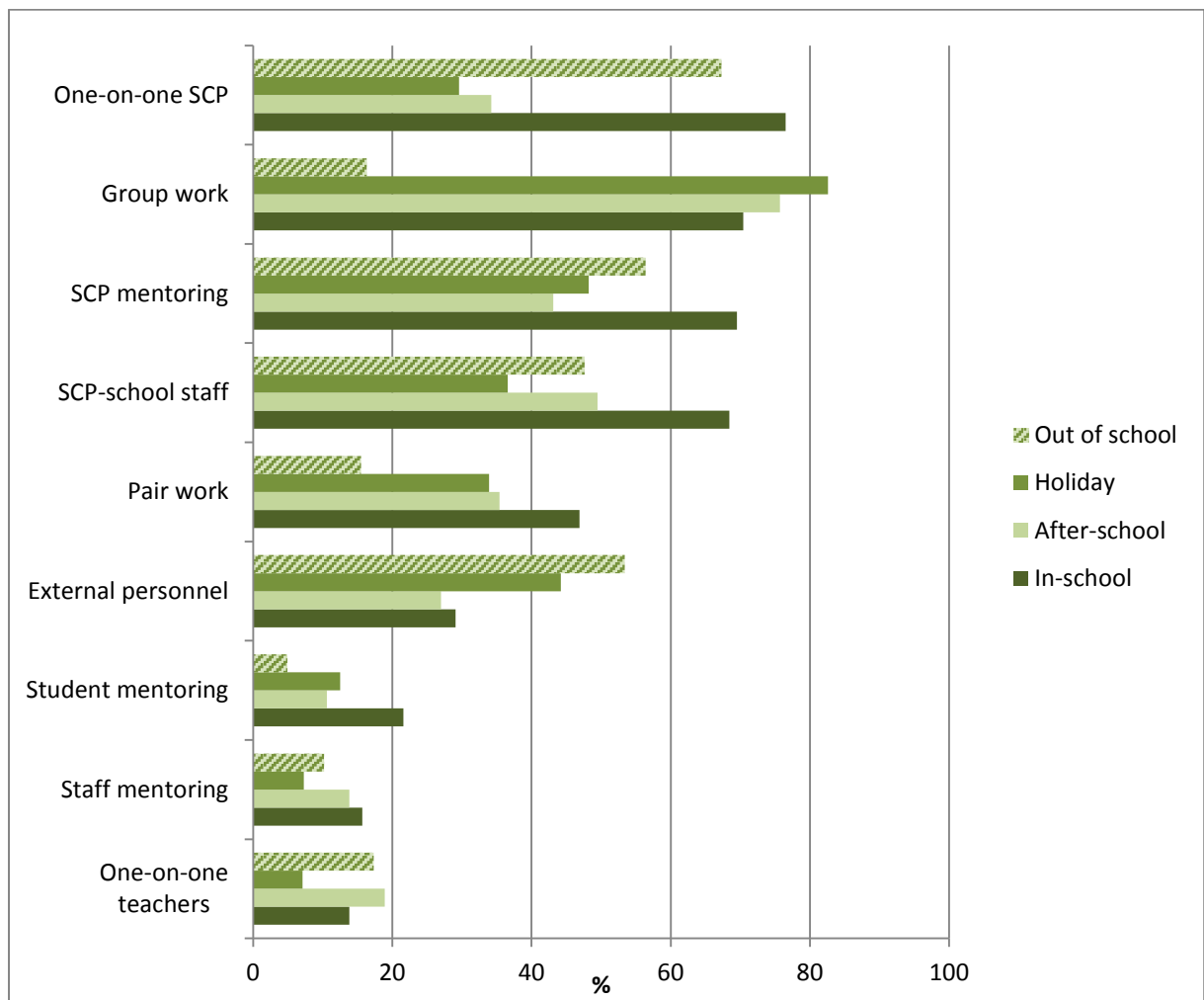
**FIGURE 4.12** Mean Proportion of Provision in the Different Pillars, Comparing Current and Ideal Balance



Source: Coordinator survey.

In-school provision is characterised by a mix of one-to-one support from SCP personnel, group work and mentoring from SCP staff (Figure 4.13). Not surprisingly, the dominant approach in out-of-school provision is one-on-one work with SCP staff. SCP personnel and school staff work most closely together in the delivery of in-school provision. Mentoring from other students or from school staff is employed in a minority of clusters, usually as part of in-school provision. External personnel are used to a greater extent in out-of-school and holiday support.

**FIGURE 4.13** Approaches Used Across Different Forms of SCP Provision (% 'To a Great Extent')



Source: Coordinator survey.

## 4.5 IN-SCHOOL PROVISION

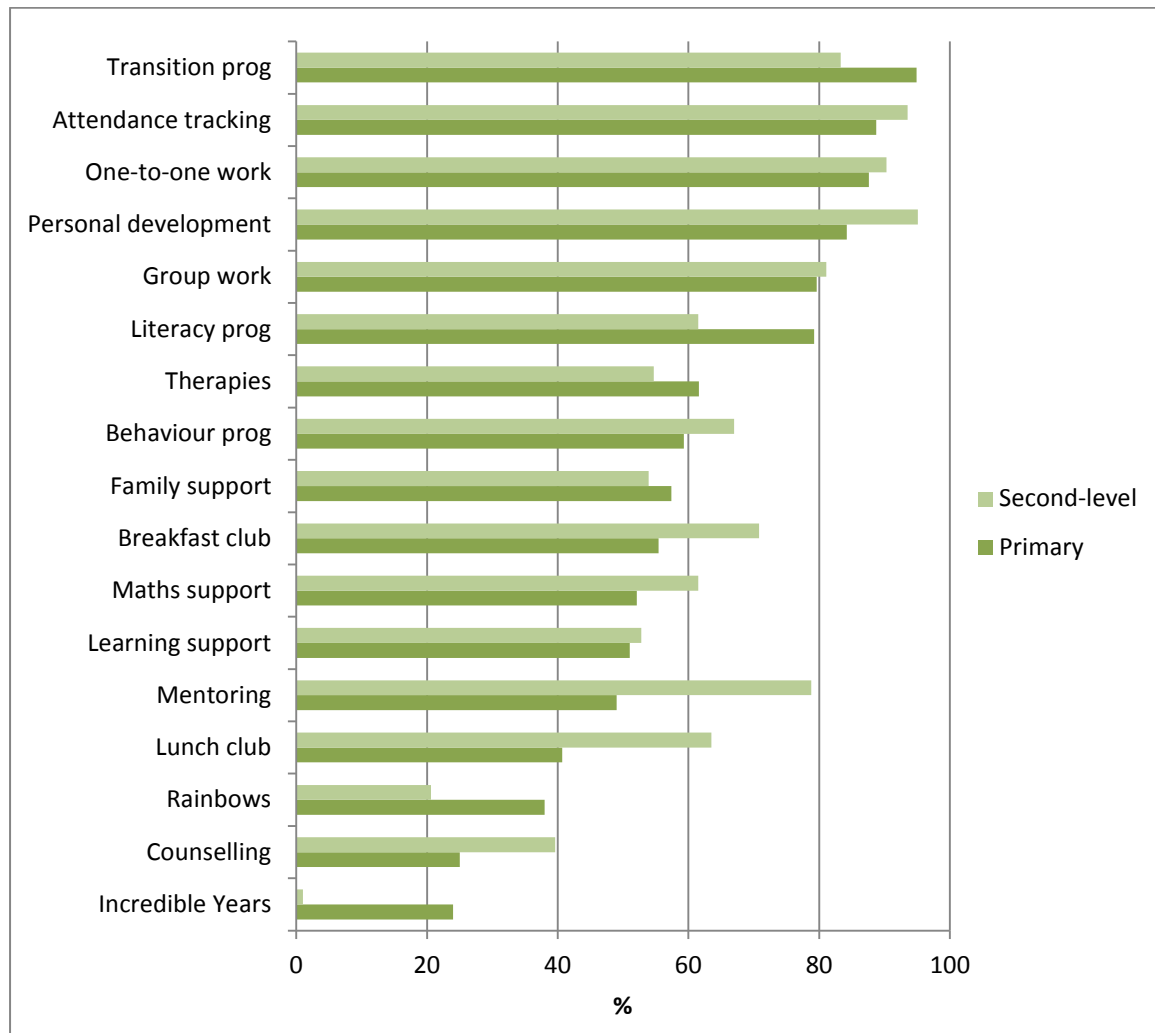
### 4.5.1 Primary Schools

Coordinators were then asked the extent to which different supports were provided in the schools in their cluster. The most commonly provided support at primary level was the transition programme (provided by almost all clusters), closely followed by attendance tracking, one-to-one work and support to foster



personal development (Figure 4.14). Literacy programmes were provided through SCP in primary schools in almost four-fifths of clusters while Mathematics support was provided in around half of clusters. Therapeutic interventions, behaviour programmes, family support and breakfast clubs were provided in over half of clusters. Mentoring was provided in around half of cases, with other provision including lunch clubs, counselling and the Incredible Years programme.

**FIGURE 4.14** Type of In-School Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster)



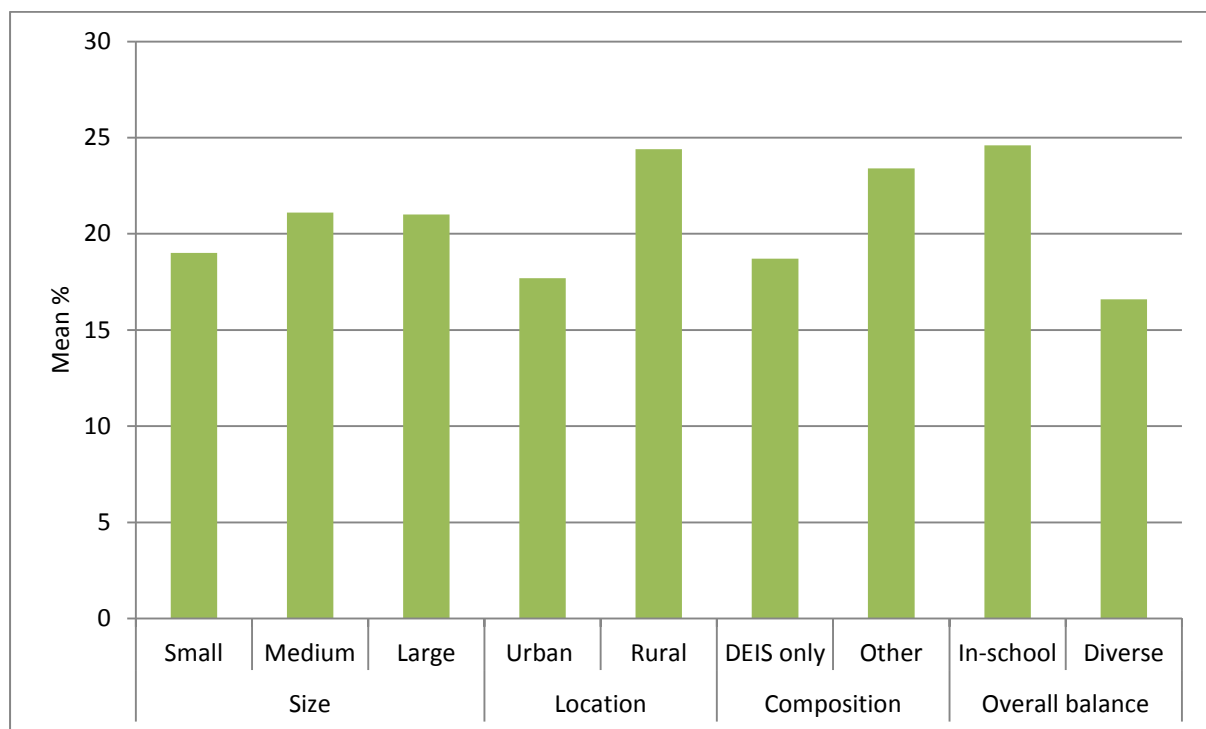
Source: Coordinator survey.

There is some variation in the nature of in-school provision for primary schools across different types of cluster.<sup>8</sup> Overall, small clusters tend to provide fewer different in-school activities (4.5 compared with 7.5 in medium clusters and 7.7 in large clusters). The analyses indicate that providing fewer activities in smaller

<sup>8</sup> Only differences that are statistically significant are mentioned in the text.

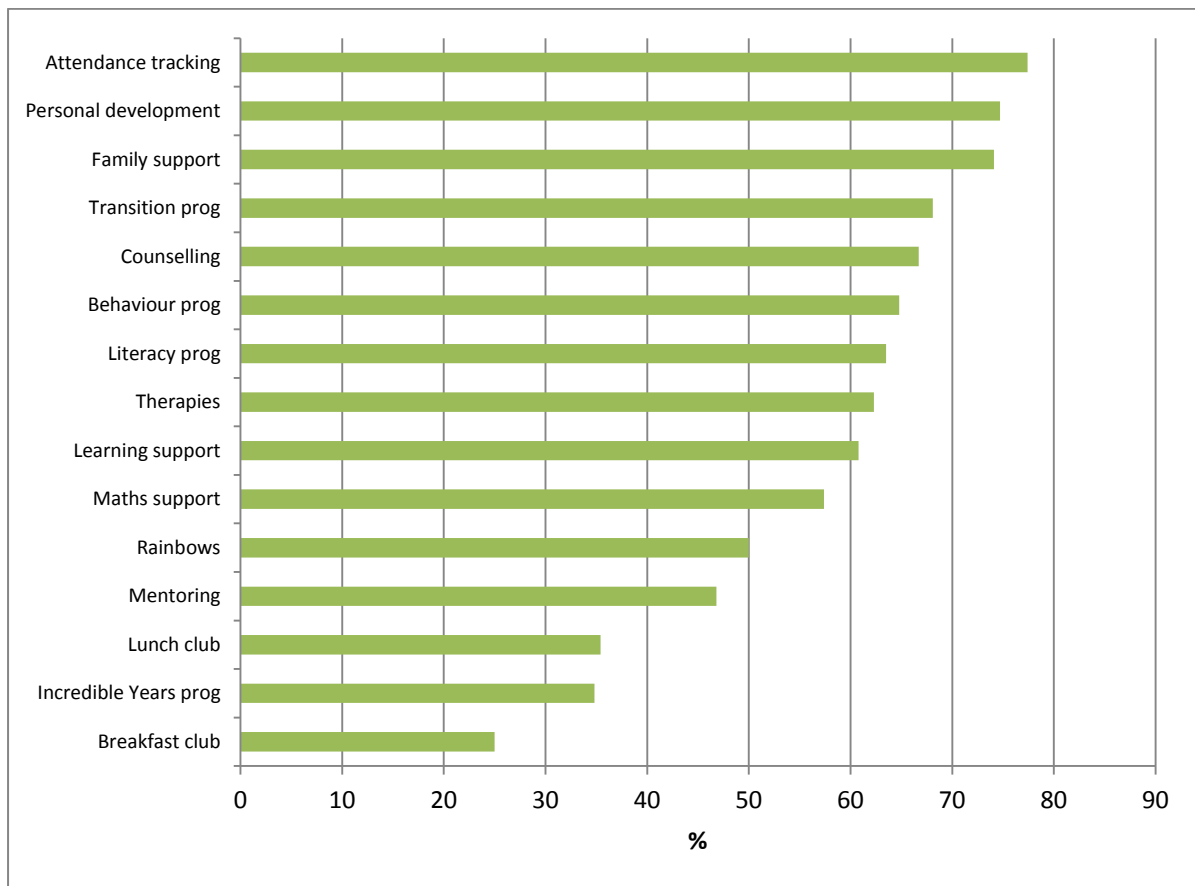
clusters means that particular interventions are not offered. In particular, small clusters are less likely to provide therapeutic interventions (41 per cent compared 67 per cent in medium clusters and 71 per cent in large clusters), slightly less likely to provide personal development programmes (69 per cent compared with 88-89 per cent of medium/larger clusters) and less likely to provide the Incredible Years programme (6 per cent compared with 33 per cent in large clusters). They are also somewhat less likely to provide Mathematics support (35 per cent compared with 53-56 per cent). Larger clusters are more likely to provide learning support (67 per cent compared with 33 per cent of small clusters) and are significantly more likely to provide behaviour programmes (84 per cent compared with 51 per cent of medium clusters and 40 per cent of small clusters). Some differences are evident by cluster location, with urban clusters more likely to provide a range of in-school activities which target different dimensions of student experience, including attendance tracking (96 per cent compared with 80 per cent), running breakfast clubs (69 per cent compared with 45 per cent), providing mentoring (61 per cent compared with 38 per cent) and providing the Rainbows programme for children coping with bereavement, loss or separation (50 per cent compared with 24 per cent). Rural clusters are somewhat more likely to emphasise activities that focus on educational development, including literacy or reading programmes (83 per cent compared with 75 per cent), learning support (63 per cent compared with 42 per cent) and Mathematics support (57 per cent compared with 45 per cent). They are also slightly more likely to provide lunch clubs (46 per cent compared with 38 per cent). The composition of schools within the cluster makes some difference. Clusters made up of DEIS schools only are more likely to run breakfast clubs (66 per cent compared with 45 per cent) and to provide the Incredible Years programme (31 per cent compared with 16 per cent).

As indicated here, the pattern of provision of different types of activities across clusters is complex. A useful summary measure is to look at the proportion of different in-school activities which relate to formal learning; literacy programmes, Mathematics support and learning support. Figure 4.15 indicates that the relative emphasis on formal learning activities does not vary by cluster size. However, rural clusters and clusters with at least one non-DEIS school are more likely to emphasise such learning activities than urban and DEIS-only clusters respectively. Clusters that focus on a balance of provision across the four pillars are less likely to emphasise formal learning activities. The relative emphasis on learning activities does not vary by the professional background of the coordinator so it is not the case that coordinators with a teaching background are more likely to favour the provision of learning activities.

**FIGURE 4.15** Proportion of In-School Provision Which Focuses on Learning Activities

Source: Coordinator survey.

The provision of in-school programmes differs not only across clusters but among schools in the same cluster. Figure 4.16 shows the extent to which, if a particular activity is provided, it is provided by all primary schools in the cluster. Activities do not tend to be universally provided across the whole cluster. Attendance tracking, personal development programmes, family support and transition programmes tend to be offered to all primary schools in the cluster, if they are offered at all. Much greater variation is evident among schools in the provision of meals (breakfast or lunch club) and in specific programmes such as Incredible Years and Rainbows.

**FIGURE 4.16** Extent to Which Activities are Provided by all Primary Schools in the Cluster, if Provided

Source: Coordinator survey.

#### 4.5.2 Second-Level Schools

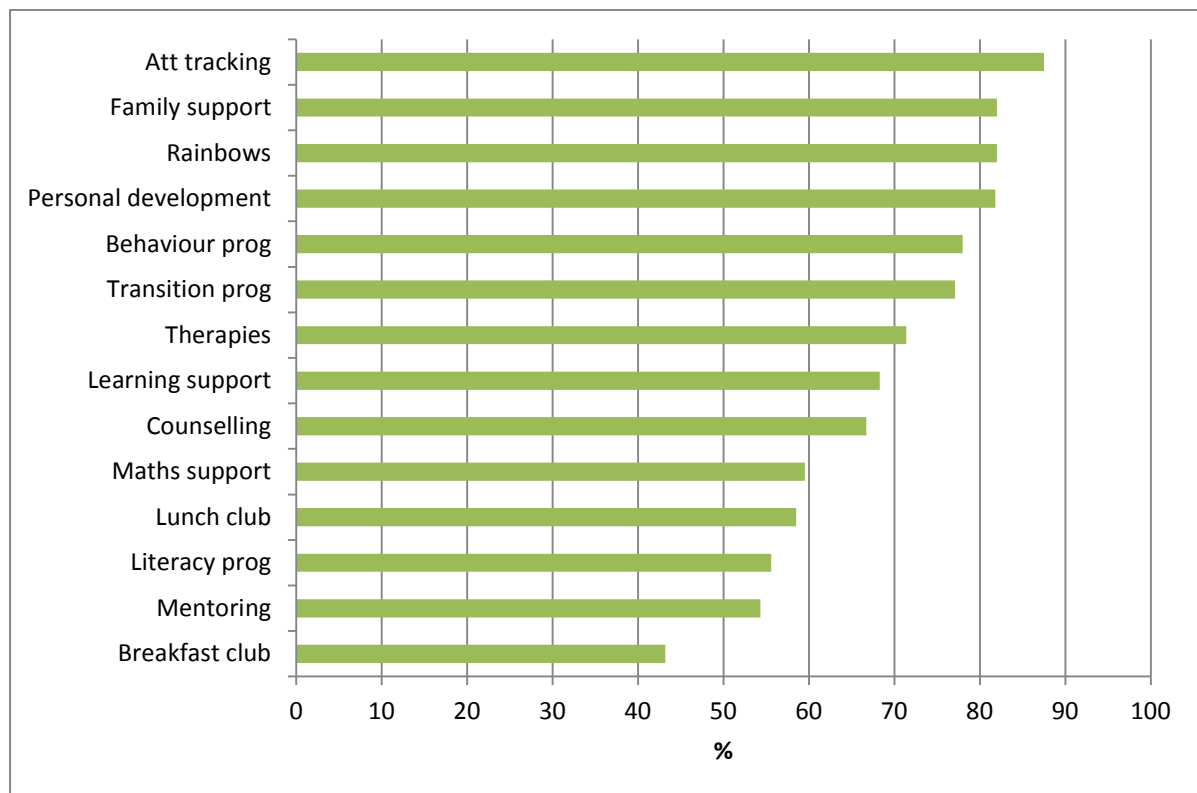
Figure 4.14 in the previous section shows the extent to which different activities are provided to at least one second-level school in a cluster. The most commonly provided activities resemble those in primary schools, with a significant proportion of clusters providing attendance tracking, transition programmes, one-to-one work and personal development programmes. Meals (breakfast and lunch clubs) are more likely to be provided within second-level schools than at primary level. The type of learning activities varies by sector with less provision of literacy programmes and somewhat greater provision of Mathematics support. Mentoring is a more prevalent feature of second-level provision and there is a slightly greater emphasis on behaviour programmes and counselling than is the case for primary schools.

In second-level schools, as with primary schools, provision varies to an extent by cluster type. Small clusters are somewhat more likely to provide lunch clubs (82 per cent compared with 68 per cent of large clusters) and less likely to provide counselling (30 per cent compared with 42-44 per cent of medium/large clusters).

They are also less likely to provide learning support (38 per cent compared with 56-59 per cent of medium/large clusters). Larger clusters are more likely to provide behaviour programmes, with 84 per cent doing so compared with 63 per cent of medium clusters and 50 per cent of small clusters. Urban clusters are more likely to provide transfer/transition programmes (88 per cent compared with 77 per cent), mentoring (87 per cent compared with 74 per cent) and family/parental support (61 per cent compared with 49 per cent). Rural clusters are more likely to provide therapeutic interventions (65 per cent compared with 48 per cent). In keeping with the patterns at primary level, rural clusters are also more likely to provide literacy/reading programmes (71 per cent compared with 52 per cent), learning support (62 per cent compared with 43 per cent) and Mathematics support (65 per cent compared with 57 per cent). Provision of breakfast clubs is somewhat more common in rural clusters (77 per cent compared with 68 per cent). Counselling is more likely to be provided in clusters where the coordinator has a background in community/youth/social work (44 per cent compared with 29 per cent); this pattern is also evident for provision of the Rainbows programme (26 per cent compared with 13 per cent).

Unlike at primary level, the number of different activities provided to second-level schools does not differ by cluster size. The relative emphasis on formal learning activities is found to be stronger in clusters that focus on in-school provision and in rural clusters.

**FIGURE 4.17** Extent to which Activities are Provided by all Second-Level Schools in the Cluster, if Provided (Clusters with Two or More Second-Level Schools Only)



Source: Coordinator survey.

There is some variation within clusters in the provision of in-school activities in second-level schools. Because a significant proportion of clusters have only one second-level school, here the analysis is confined to those clusters that have two or more second-level schools. Figure 4.17 shows the extent to which different forms of provision are offered in all second-level schools within the cluster. Attendance tracking, family support, Rainbows and personal development programmes are the most commonly provided across schools within specific clusters. There is much greater within-cluster variation in relation to the provision of meals (breakfast and lunch clubs), mentoring and formal learning activities (literacy programmes and Mathematics support).

Section 4.3 indicated that clusters differ in the proportion of the student cohort that is identified as part of the target group. Clusters that target larger proportions of students are more likely to provide therapeutic interventions, counselling and behaviour programmes (including Incredible Years); they are also more likely to provide transition programmes and the Rainbows programme for second-level schools. These patterns would suggest that some clusters are targeting larger groups of students where needs for socio-emotional support are

more pressing rather than that they are engaged in a large number of whole-school activities.

Coordinators were asked about the challenges in offering in-school provision. The main challenges mentioned related to resources, that is, staffing and funding, issues to which we return in Chapter 8. However, a number of coordinators mentioned the constraints of fitting activities into the school timetable. Issues around withdrawing students from class were also raised by one of the stakeholders.

Colleagues are very keen on mentioning the quality of some of the SCP-funded interventions potentially being detrimental to the children and their educational progress... in that they are leaving classrooms... leaving very high quality teaching interventions for some form of therapy that isn't necessarily proven in terms of its efficacy. (Stakeholder).

This perspective can be contrasted against that of SCP staff and principals who saw SCP as representing an enrichment of the curriculum.

So we have all our enrichment programmes, all that happens, so we have music, we have, in various schools, we have drama starting, we've had yoga, yoga emerged from working with the mental health services... We had a huge problem in one of the schools with behaviour on yard at the very start of this programme. And they encouraged us to do some meditation before and then to do some yoga with the children, it wasn't just oh let's just do yoga for the sake of it. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

Coordinators, chairpersons and principals discussed the rationale for having a number of different in-school activities. In the context of food poverty, breakfast clubs were seen as enhancing child nutrition as well as avoiding conflict over children arriving late to school.

The breakfast club in particular, I'd be very, very anxious to keep it, I think it's fantastic. A number of the kids do come without breakfast. It also gets them in early, they also get a chance to do their homework, if they haven't got it done already. And it gives them somewhere, without being too emotive about but somewhere safe and warm. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

if you didn't have the breakfast club I think our attendance would be way down... lots of times you'd find in school that the behaviour problem could be the likes of that, that they're not warm enough or they're hungry or something physical is wrong. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Programmes to facilitate the transition between primary and post-primary school were commonly provided across clusters, with structured programmes also evident in the case-study clusters.

We have a four-week programme for all of our students that enrol with us and that again is driven by SCP... For two hours every, say the four Thursdays in March for this year, for make it easy. We introduce them to science, technology; we introduce them to art and woodwork. So they get to know the school, they get to know each other and then when they come back in September this school is not new to them you know, and that's a huge, yeah, it's of huge benefit. And then we have big brother, it's run downstairs here so on a Monday and a Wednesday. First years are paired with a boy in fifth year, and he's the big brother, he minds them for the year, well I say to the boys he's kind of like your guardian angel. So he looks after you for the full year. (Inishmore, chairperson, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Many principals mentioned the importance of access to counselling and therapeutic interventions, with SCP enabling a quick response to crisis situations.

The counselling service that we've had access to through the programme has been an absolute lifesaver for us, and I mean that quite literally in some cases... we had a child a couple of years ago, for instance, where there were two suicides in the family and we were able to follow up immediately with services... The counsellors come and they're taking a child off to do a job and, you know, they do an individual counselling session with them within the school where the child is in their comfort zone, probably the second place they're most comfortable, apart from their home. (Durseley, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

We've a lot of behavioural problems in the school as well... so that's very beneficial having the play therapist 'cos an hour with her could get the teachers a five hours' productivity then for the rest of the week. (Basket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

Perceptions of different aspects of in-school and other provision and their impact on student outcomes are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

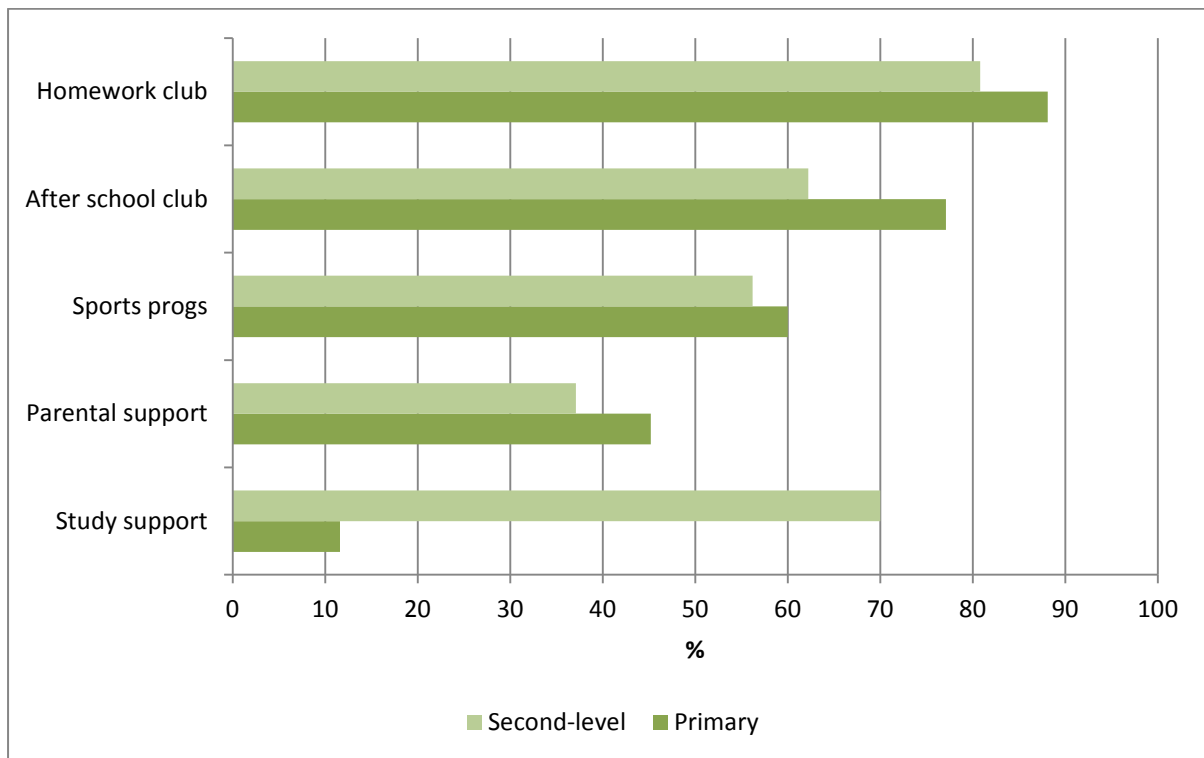
#### 4.6 AFTER-SCHOOL PROVISION

Over four-fifths of clusters have homework clubs in one or more of their primary or second-level schools (Figure 4.18). Over three-quarters of clusters have after-school clubs at primary level while 62 per cent have such clubs at second-level. Sixty per cent of clusters have sports programmes for primary schools while this is the case for second-level schools in over half of clusters. Parental support is a



feature of after-school provision in a significant minority of clusters, and is more frequently reported in relation to primary schools. The majority (70 per cent) of clusters have study support in place for second-level schools but this is, not surprisingly, very rare at primary level.

**FIGURE 4.18** Type of After-School Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster)



Source: Coordinator survey.

Homework clubs were seen as providing facilities for students who would not otherwise have a quiet space in which to do homework. This was viewed as contributing to engagement by removing homework non-completion as a source of friction between teacher and student.

They physically maybe find that the homework is tough. Or they're in a house where there's no heat, no electricity, I've had people who don't have electricity because their meter has run out... And kids would say I couldn't do my homework last night because there was no lights. And therefore no lights, no heat, no nice hot dinner. ... Anyway what we have found with homework club is that those children are quite confident coming in the next morning because the homework is done. And therefore teacher doesn't have to spend 15 minutes in the morning saying why is the homework not done and here's your punishment and whatever and whatever. It makes life an awful lot easier. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

That is an enormous benefit to the school and to the children, to those children. And homework isn't that negative connotation for them because it's sorted, it's organised, it's done. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

While homework club and study support were seen as crucial, the importance of providing a varied after-school programme was also emphasised by SCP staff.

We need to ensure that there is variety in our after-school clubs. We found that offering homework clubs only to groups did not work in ensuring consistent attendance. The children we target need this academic/homework support but they also need to achieve in other ways whether it be through art, sports, cookery etc. (Coordinator survey response, medium urban cluster).

As with in-school provision, the main challenges faced by coordinators in providing after-school activities related to funding and staffing. However, many mentioned an additional challenge, that of ensuring that the target children availed of after-school provision.

We found here, we cannot give the target children after-school hours. ...We weren't getting hardly anybody and the ones we were getting were definitely not our target children. (Gorumna, principal, large, urban, diverse).

There is some variation in the nature of after-school provision across clusters. Small clusters are less likely to provide after-school clubs (60 per cent compared with 78-82 per cent in medium/large clusters for primary schools) and somewhat less likely to provide second-level study support (63 per cent compared with 80 per cent in large clusters). However, small clusters are somewhat more likely to mention parental support as a dimension of after-school provision (42 per cent compared with 32 per cent in large clusters for second-level schools). Sports programmes are more frequently provided in large clusters (71 per cent compared with 53 per cent in small/medium clusters for primary schools). Urban clusters are significantly more likely to provide after-school clubs than rural clusters, most likely reflecting logistical constraints in providing after-school activities for a dispersed rural population; this is the case for both primary schools (89 per cent compared with 63 per cent) and for second-level schools (71 per cent compared with 52 per cent). They are also somewhat more likely to provide after-school sports (65 per cent compared with 55 per cent at primary level; 64 per cent compared with 49 per cent per cent for second-level schools). Clusters where the coordinator has a youth/community work background are much more likely to run after-school sports programmes for second-level students (64 per cent compared with 38 per cent) and are more likely to mention

parental support as a dimension of after-school provision in second-level schools (46 per cent compared with 29 per cent).

The nature of after-school provision varies somewhat depending on the relative size of the target group. Clusters that target a small number of the cohort are less likely to provide after-school sports programmes. Clusters that target a larger proportion of the cohort are more likely to make parental support a feature of after-school provision in primary schools.

#### 4.7 HOLIDAY PROVISION

At primary level, the most frequently provided holiday programme is a fun camp (dance, crafts, sport etc.), followed closely by sports programmes and trips (Figure 4.19). At second-level, the most frequently provided activities are trips, fun camps and sports programmes. A transition camp aimed at sixth class students is provided in around four in ten clusters. Holiday provision places much less emphasis on formal learning activities, with specific literacy and numeracy programmes provided in a minority of clusters. In contrast to the patterns for in-school and after-school provision, the nature of holiday provision does not vary markedly by cluster type. However, small clusters are more likely to report parental support as a feature of holiday provision. Activities are provided for an average of 4.7 weeks over the holidays with considerable variation in the length of such provision across clusters. Larger clusters tend to run holiday provision for somewhat longer than smaller clusters.

Clusters that target a larger proportion of students are more likely to provide arts programmes and primary literacy programmes. Clusters that target a small number of students are more likely to mention parental support and transitions programmes as features of holiday provision for primary school students.

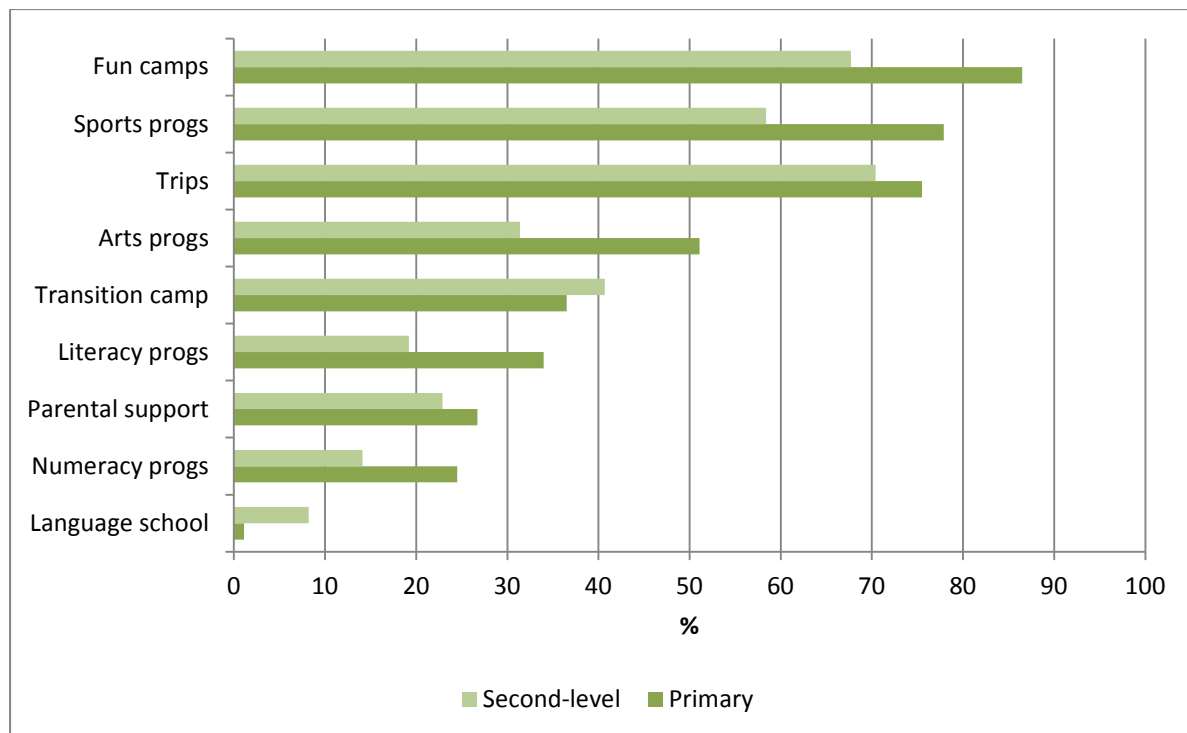
Holiday provision is seen by staff and stakeholders as way of enhancing relationships between young people and school, thus contributing to school engagement.

Over the holiday periods it is very easy for the students, particularly in DEIS environments, to lose any sort of loyalty or connection or relationship with the school, and those activities help to minimise that. (Stakeholder).

Provision over the holiday period was also seen as a vital support for children 'in crisis'.

Eight weeks is a very long time in a child's life, that's in a dysfunctional home. And you have those kiddies and they have some link to the outside world [through holiday provision] and if there's a major issue, you know, you're going to be told. (Bere, medium, rural, diverse).

**FIGURE 4.19** Type of Holiday Provision (% Provided in Any School in the Cluster)

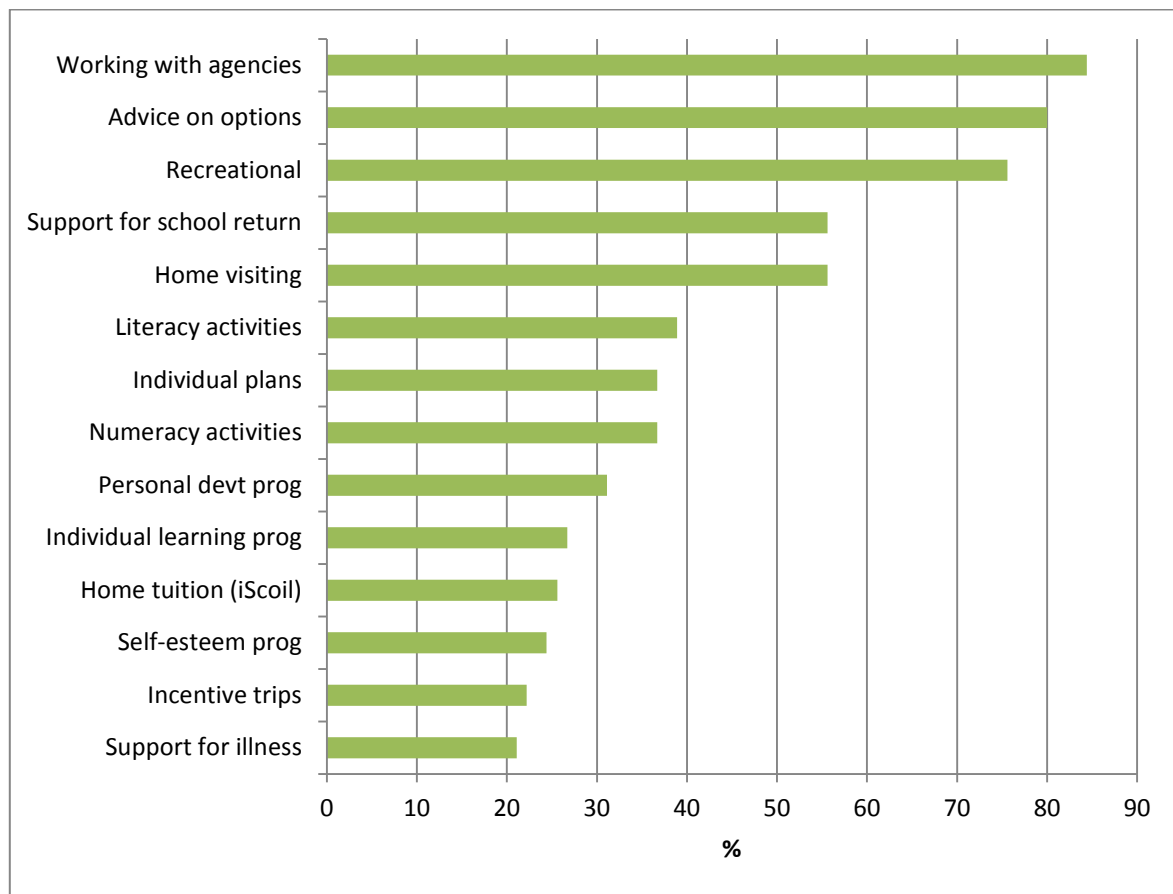


Source: Coordinator survey.

#### 4.8 OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROVISION

Four out of five clusters indicated that they provide out-of-school provision for those who have left mainstream education and had one or more children or young people being catered for at the time of the survey. Out-of-school provision is slightly less common in urban clusters (76 per cent compared with 83 per cent) but does not vary by cluster size or employer arrangements. Just under half (48 per cent) of the clusters with any out-of-school provision cater for three or fewer young people; only a tenth of clusters cater for ten or more young people who are out of school. The main focus of out-of-school provision is on identifying and linking with key agencies as well as providing information and support to the young person and their family regarding educational options (Figure 4.20). Recreational activities also form an important component of out-of-school provision. Support for a return to school and home visits take place in around half of the clusters concerned. More specific activities focused on formal learning are apparent in a minority of clusters.

**FIGURE 4.20** Type of Out-Of-School Provision (Only for Those Clusters with At Least One Young Person in Receipt of Out-Of-School Provision)



Source: Coordinator survey.

In the survey, coordinators reported a number of challenges in relation to out-of-school provision, chiefly, having dedicated staff and an appropriate space as well as funding, given that this kind of provision is resource-intensive and typically focused on a very small number of young people.

As out of school rarely features among our targeted children/young people, we do not have a concrete programme that we would follow. The HSCL usually works with these cases. (Coordinator survey response, medium urban cluster).

[Out-of-school provision] requires massive input, [it is] difficult to support students who often need intensive specialist support. (Coordinator survey response, large urban cluster).

Demand for out-of-school provision is not significant within the cluster. ... Budget and personnel cuts would make it difficult to offer a full programme. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

With one exception, there was a low level of involvement in out-of-school activities in the case-study clusters.

The out of school one is probably the one we really don't do much of. We don't have the funding to follow through, you know and that's the reality, the reality of it. So we're very heavy in school and our after-school activities. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

The exception was Arranmore, where a dedicated out-of-school programme had been established.

We looked at how we should deal with those kids, what should we do with them? If they go do we say to the court that they're gone or do we try and track them and help them to get an alternative education? So we did the latter and we have the out [of] school programme here now and what we do is we track everybody that leaves school that's targeted. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

#### 4.9 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at how students are identified for participation in SCP and the range of activities provided to them. The criteria used to identify at-risk students largely centre on attendance, family circumstances and children's socio-emotional well-being, though in practice students are generally identified on the basis of multiple risk factors. Principals, HSCLs and school pastoral care teams are all closely involved in this identification process. Clusters differ in the proportion of students targeted, reflecting the different ways in which they attempt to match need and resources. Clusters that target a larger proportion of the student cohort tend to have greater provision for early years and senior cycle students.

There is very significant diversity across and within clusters in the kinds of supports provided through SCP. In general, interventions are more frequently provided within the school day, though coordinators would like to see a greater emphasis on holiday and after-school provision. In addition, a significant group of clusters have diverse provision, combining activities across the four SCP pillars. Some differences in provision are evident across different kinds of cluster. In particular, rural clusters are less likely to provide after-school activities, reflecting logistical constraints. Rural clusters are also more likely to focus in-school provision on formal learning difficulties at both primary and post-primary level, perhaps reflecting less complex needs in rural schools (see Smyth et al., 2015).

# Chapter 5

---

## Clustering and DEIS provision

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the balance of schools, DEIS and non-DEIS within clusters and at the relationship between the School Completion Programme and other components of DEIS provision. Section 5.2 examines the size and composition of SCP clusters, focusing in particular on the relative balance between primary and post-primary, and DEIS and non-DEIS, schools. This section also explores coordinator perceptions of the adequacy of current clustering arrangements. Section 5.3 looks at the way in which SCP is linked with other aspects of DEIS provision at cluster and school level.

### 5.2 CLUSTER SIZE AND COMPOSITION

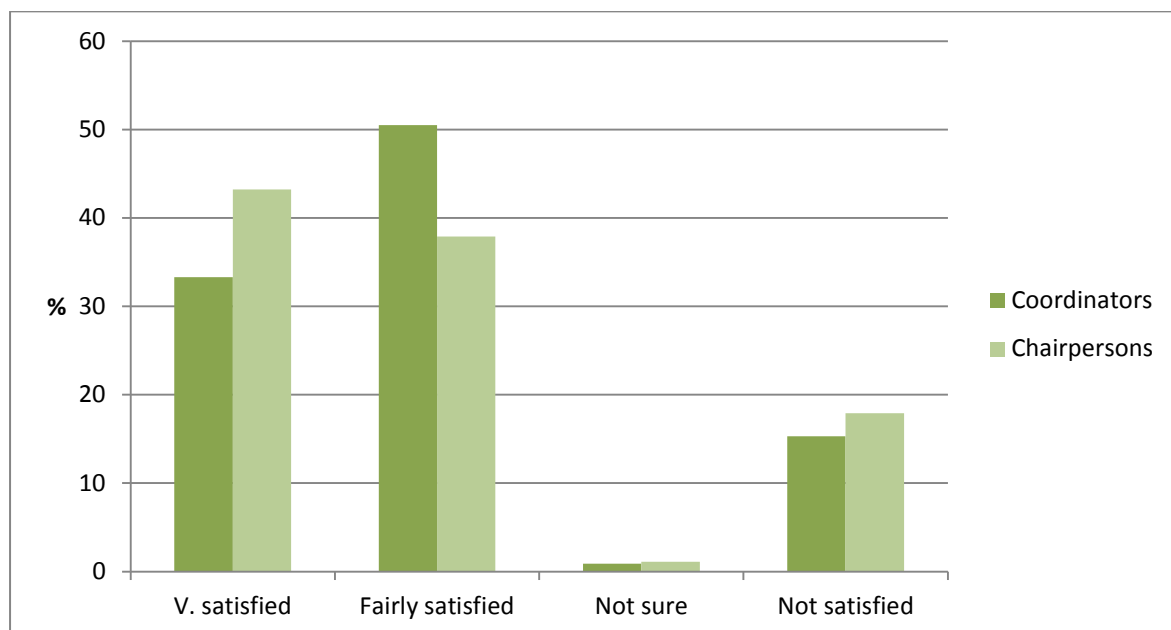
SCP clusters vary in size and composition, that is, in the relative proportion of primary and post-primary schools and in the balance between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The smallest clusters have two schools while the largest have 12 schools. Just over a fifth (21 per cent) of clusters could be characterised as small (with three or fewer schools), almost half (47 per cent) as medium (4-6 schools) and a third as large (with seven or more schools). With one exception, post-primary schools are represented in all clusters while a small number of clusters are made up of second-level schools only. Generally post-primary schools make up a third or fewer of schools in a cluster (Table 5.1). Thus, a quarter of post-primary schools are in clusters where they make up a fifth or less of schools in the cluster while 15 per cent of post-primary schools are in clusters where they make up the majority of schools. Not surprisingly, post-primary schools make up a larger proportion of small clusters and of rural clusters, given their smaller average size. Second-level schools make up a slightly higher proportion of schools in clusters managed by ETBs compared with those managed by LMCs or school BOMs. Given the larger size of second-level schools, the picture is quite different when we consider the proportion of students in the cluster schools who are at post-primary level. Post-primary students are more likely to make up over half of all students in the cluster, with almost a third of clusters having second-level students in the majority (Table 5.1).

**TABLE 5.1** PROPORTION OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS IN THE CLUSTER ACROSS CLUSTERS

Proportion Made Up by Post-Primary:	Schools	Students
<20 %	25.4	8.9
21-35%	33.9	26.6
36-50%	22.6	25.0
>50%	14.5	30.6

Source: Coordinators survey.

Clusters also differ in the relative balance between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Non-DEIS schools were allocated to some clusters to reflect patterns of student transfer into or out of DEIS schools. Furthermore, some cluster formation predated the roll-out of the DEIS programme, so some schools previously funded through prior schemes for disadvantaged schools may not have been granted DEIS status when the criteria were reassessed. Over half (59 per cent) of clusters are made up exclusively of DEIS schools while in a tenth of clusters non-DEIS schools make up over half of the schools in the cluster. Large clusters are more likely to have at least one non-DEIS school, with half doing so compared with 41 per cent of medium clusters and 31 per cent of small clusters. Rural clusters are much more likely than urban clusters to have a non-DEIS school (52 per cent compared with 32 per cent).

**FIGURE 5.1** Satisfaction with Present School Clustering Arrangements

Source: Coordinator survey.

A third of coordinators describe themselves as 'very satisfied' with current clustering arrangements while half report that they are 'fairly' satisfied (Figure



5.1). The views of chairpersons are broadly similar, though they are slightly more likely than coordinators to report being 'very' satisfied. Dissatisfaction levels among coordinators do not vary markedly by cluster size but those in large clusters are more likely to describe themselves as 'fairly' rather than 'very' satisfied. Chairpersons in larger clusters are more dissatisfied with present arrangements than those in smaller clusters. Size of cluster was not as frequently commented on in open-ended responses or case-study interviews as other aspects of clustering arrangements. However, some coordinators pointed to the difficulties in catering to the needs of a large number of schools:

The project is too large for one coordinator, [it is] impossible to have a presence in each school. (Coordinator survey response, large urban cluster).

Another coordinator in a large urban cluster pointed to the need to 'reduce the number of schools in [the] cluster to improve contact with schools and also to enhance inter-agency co-operation'.

Satisfaction with the clustering arrangements does not vary by the proportion of non-DEIS schools in the cluster. However, satisfaction levels tend to be higher where the cluster is mainly comprised of primary schools. Those in rural clusters are more likely to express dissatisfaction with clustering arrangements, with 23 per cent doing so compared with 9 per cent in urban clusters. Information from the open-ended survey questions pointed to dissatisfaction in rural clusters reflecting the challenges of providing activities and interventions in the context of a geographically dispersed population.

Distance between the schools is a difficulty. This cluster is spread over a large geographical area, it takes over an hour from office to one of the schools. (Coordinator survey response, medium size, rural cluster).

Information from the open-ended survey questions and from the interviews in the case-study clusters highlighted the two main challenges regarding present clustering arrangements. Firstly, the mix of schools in a given cluster did not necessarily reflect local neighbourhood boundaries, with some instances of schools in close proximity to each other, and serving the same families, being in different clusters.

It is hugely anomalous that we have the two schools... are in two separate SCPs... brothers and sisters could be dealing with two separate personnel. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, clusters differed in the extent to which students from the primary schools transferred to second-level schools within the same cluster.

[The] transfer rate from our SCP primary schools to SCP post-primary is low and in one of our post-primary schools we don't work with any primary schools in the area. (Coordinator survey response, small urban cluster).

The clusters do seriously need overhaul... where you'd have feeder schools and the post-primary school all operating within one cluster. (Stakeholder)

This was seen as presenting significant challenges in terms of continuity of tracking and provision.

We're sending them up to a secondary school and they're great secondary schools. But there's no supports, they're not DEIS secondary schools .... so... it's like holding the child's hand and walking them out the boardwalk and then letting them drop. Because they will need those supports right up until their Leaving Cert. ... I just feel that we do a fantastic service in School Completion. And then we leave them to swim and they're not ready to swim at all. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

There's no tracking and there's no follow through. And School Completion Programme clusters are organised on a local basis and here the children scatter to lots of different secondary schools. So we lose touch. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

Some targeted primary school students transfer to secondary schools that are not within our cluster and they lose continuity of support. (Coordinator survey response, large urban cluster).

None of the local second-level girls' schools are part of DEIS and therefore we cannot support our large cohort of female targets from [the] primary schools once they leave sixth class. This really doesn't make sense as continued support through to second-level is very important. (Coordinator survey response, large urban cluster).

In these instances, follow-up often relied on informal contact between the coordinators and HSCLs in the relevant second-level school. However, in the case of students transferring to non-DEIS schools, such follow-up was made more difficult by the lack of a designated person to liaise with.

You can't be ringing up and just giving this information to the school secretary. You need a tutor, or somebody who's in a pastoral role. You know, so some schools are better at that. But some schools are huge and some schools aren't and some schools have DEIS status... and some of them don't... And other schools that don't have DEIS status don't have the

resources to have that type of pupil support in place. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

This principal emphasised the implications of this lack of follow through, coupled with a lack of feedback to the primary school, for early school leaving.

Thinking, oh I can't believe this child is gone and this is the first I've heard of it. And it's anecdotally, usually you hear from some of the other kids, from relatives, or parents, or if you have siblings still there. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

A parallel issue was evident where feeder primary schools were outside the cluster, making early identification and intervention difficult.

Increasingly over the years we find students who do not come from our cluster end up on the target list. This work is much more difficult as the relationship is not present with SCP staff. There are several schools in this area that are in disadvantaged pockets that are not in our cluster. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

[There are] no primary schools in [the] current cluster arrangement which means early intervention is not possible to help break the cycle of educational disadvantage. (Coordinator survey response, small rural cluster).

In summary, coordinators pointed to challenges in cluster composition, particularly in ensuring tracking of students as they move between the primary and post-primary sectors. In the following section, the link between SCP and other parts of the DEIS programme is explored.

### **5.3 THE INTEGRATION OF SCP WITH OTHER DIMENSIONS OF THE DEIS PROGRAMME**

*DEIS: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005) indicated that the School Completion Programme was an integral part of DEIS provision for schools serving disadvantaged communities. This integration, and the close relationship between SCP and HSCL provision, was emphasised by a number of the key stakeholders interviewed:

SCP is an important dimension of support services under DEIS. There are children in the system that need that individual or small group support at school level to support their engagement at school. (Stakeholder).

It's been a very important part of DEIS from the get go... At the moment it's been very closely aligned with the HSCL. (Stakeholder).

[HSCL and SCP] is the total support package as such for individuals and family. (Stakeholder).

The need for any review of SCP to be allied to the review of DEIS provision was therefore emphasised:

We definitely want and need a version of SCP to support what the next version of DEIS will be. (Stakeholder).

In this context, it is interesting to note that evaluations of DEIS by the Educational Research Centre and the DES Inspectorate have not assessed the role of SCP in any detail, an issue raised in one of the stakeholder interviews.

Very little of our reportage contains evaluative commentary in relation to SCP. (Stakeholder).

In the survey, coordinators were asked about the extent to which SCP was integrated into other aspects of the DEIS programme and planning at the cluster and school level. The vast majority (92 per cent) of coordinators indicated that they discussed at-risk students with the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator 'to a great extent'. Information from the case-study clusters similarly highlighted the close working relationship between HSCLCs and SCP Coordinators.

Home School is very much part of the School Completion because again they're at the face of it. ... We're all working within the DEIS framework... which ties in very much with your School Completion and Home School is part of that as well. (Bere, chairperson, medium, rural, diverse).

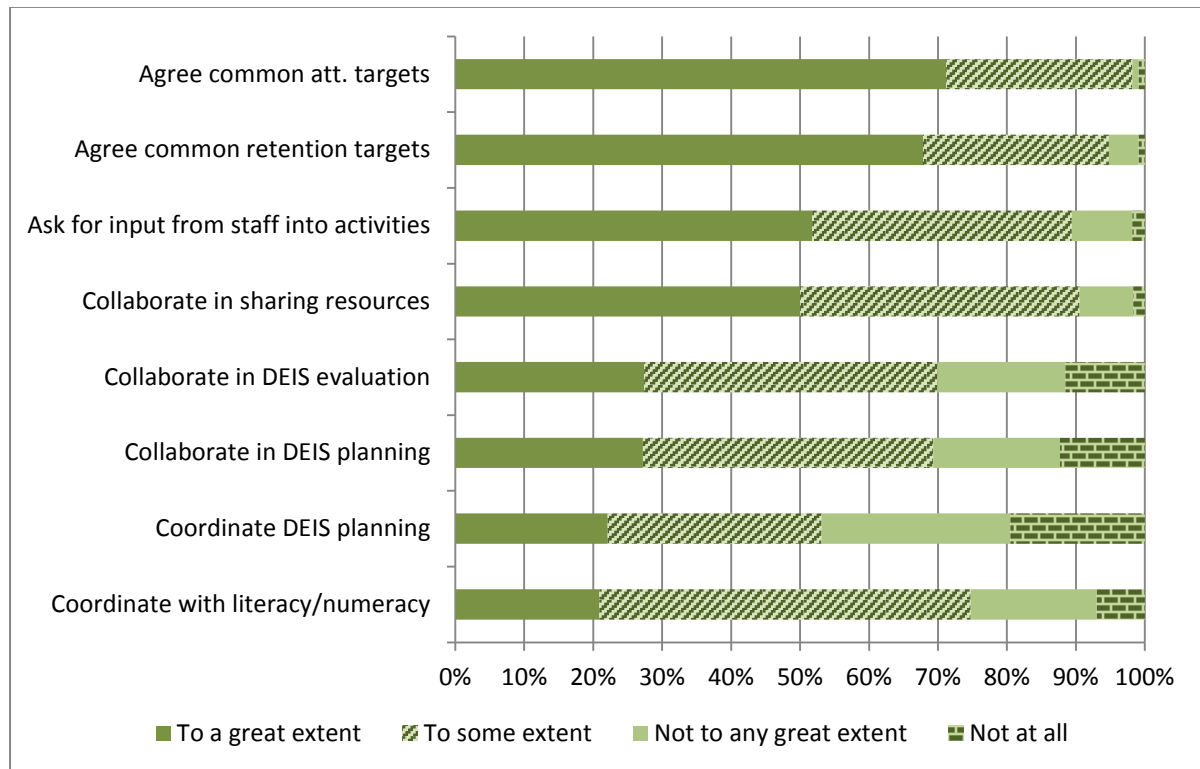
The biggest aspect of DEIS really is attendance. Because if children are present, then the rest will actually happen ... It would complement and work alongside home school liaison; we've an excellent Home School Liaison kind of Coordinator here. And so her goals then with parents would work alongside that, because she's trying to improve attendance and participation and uptake on all educational aspects. So when something's provided then for the children, by SCP and then by Home School Liaison... it can work better there. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

Coordinator involvement in other aspects of the DEIS process varied. There was a strong involvement in agreeing common attendance and retention targets, with over two-thirds of coordinators involved in this aspect 'to a great extent' (Figure 5.2).

When we're putting together the retention plan and we're doing the evaluations, we do tie in... You know we meet up and we discuss the different DEIS targets and plans. Because each school has a separate one...

And we use that when we're going into the SCP so we're not duplicating... I would go and discuss the targeting and the attendance with the schools and ask them, you know what they think they're aiming for in their DEIS. And then when we go to the SCP meetings then we'd be sort of on the same wavelength then. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse)

**FIGURE 5.2** Coordination and Collaboration with Other Aspects of the DEIS Programme



Source: Coordinator survey

There was also a significant involvement in seeking school staff input into deciding on SCP activities and in sharing resources. However, formal involvement in DEIS planning and evaluation as well as in the literacy and numeracy components of DEIS was less marked and varied across clusters.

The principals... do not necessarily involve me as the SCP coordinator in the planning and evaluation of DEIS in their schools. I am more involved in some of the link schools in this area than others and feel communication regarding DEIS could be standardised across all [cluster] schools to improve effectiveness of all programmes. (Coordinator survey response, medium urban cluster).

Coordination of resources is very dependent on individuals. I think this should be more formalised. (Coordinator survey response, medium urban cluster).

One coordinator emphasised that there was good coordination but the relationship was one of 'consultation' rather than formal input.

I suppose with the DEIS planning in schools... we are very closely linked with it. Now do I sit down and write out the DEIS plan with the schools, no I don't. Am I consulted about what goes into it? Yes, we are, you know, we are consulted. And normally at a management meeting or a review day in particular, you know I ask the principals bring your DEIS plans with you, just in case something comes up that we can refer back. So we are very much part of their process. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

They haven't really been involved in our DEIS planning, no, because... that would all be done at staff meetings after school... I mean they would be aware of our DEIS targets for sure, yeah, they would but they wouldn't be involved in the planning now. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

This is consistent with recent research on DEIS which indicates that two-thirds of principals indicate that they rely on the SCP team for support in DEIS planning. However, this support usually involves consultation rather than attendance at staff meetings (Weir et al., 2014).

In contrast, in another cluster SCP was seen as a foundation stone for DEIS provision and planning.

I'm hugely involved in DEIS here. I've been the main driver of the DEIS approach here...so you know how people think, how they come to the table, coming to the table regularly to share... like within their DEIS planning stuff. I think SCP has massively contributed to that and I can say without SCP here it might not have happened. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

A number of coordinators, chairpersons and principals emphasised the complementarity of the different strands of DEIS provision.

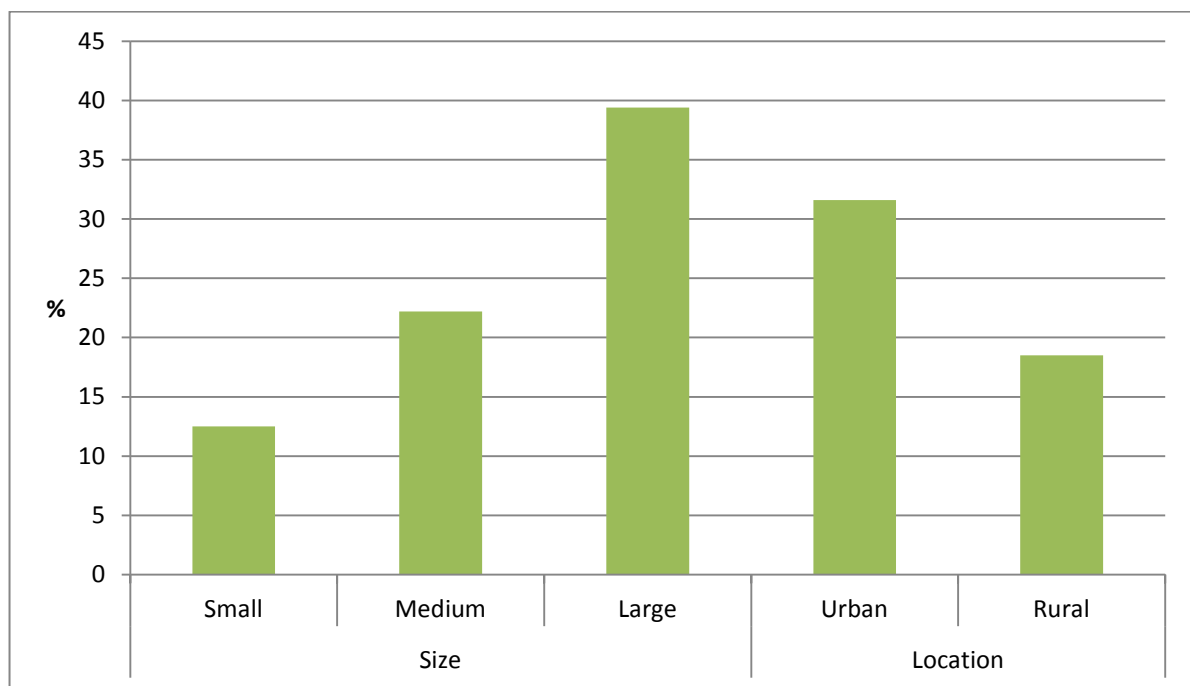
With the whole DEIS thing, ... School Completion is very much intertwined in that... they all feed into each other, do you know what I mean. And I think if one of any of those services were to be removed you definitely would notice a gaping hole ... You couldn't say one does the same job as another, but yet they very much work hand in hand. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

[It is] absolutely interwoven and integral and, like I would say, mutually dependent on each other as well, that's a huge thing. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

Information on the different aspects of coordination with other aspects of DEIS collected through the survey was formed into an overall scale of SCP coordinator involvement in DEIS (with a reliability of 0.784). Coordinators were found to be more involved in DEIS planning in smaller clusters, with the lowest levels of involvement evident in larger clusters. There was no difference between urban and rural clusters in overall coordinator involvement in DEIS. There was some variation by employment arrangement, with those in clusters run by ETBs somewhat less formally involved in school-run DEIS processes than in other clusters.

Overall, just over a fifth (22 per cent) of coordinators described themselves as ‘very satisfied’ with the coordination of the full range of DEIS supports, including SCP, in their cluster. Over half (53 per cent) described themselves as ‘satisfied’ while a quarter were ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’. Not surprisingly, coordinators who report lower levels of involvement and coordination are less satisfied with the coordination of DEIS supports. Variation in satisfaction levels is apparent by cluster size and location, with coordinators in larger clusters and those in urban areas being more dissatisfied (Figure 5.3).

**FIGURE 5.3** Dissatisfaction with the Coordination of the Full Range of DEIS Supports



Source: Coordinator survey.

In keeping with these patterns, several coordinators considered that there should be greater integration and communication between SCP and DEIS.

A bit more communication was needed there. SCP is so open and transparent, it's unbelievable. ... I mean we go to meetings and... you see all of our accounting and spending, what it's spent on. We agree everything together. Everything is out there. But you know it's not the case when it comes to the full DEIS system, you know like I think it would be far better if we were more involved. I'm not involved in the planning for DEIS. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

#### 5.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the nature of clustering arrangements, particularly cluster composition, and the extent of integration between SCP and other dimensions of DEIS provision and planning. Clusters vary in their size and composition. The extent to which cluster size influences governance and other arrangements will be explored in the following chapters. Clusters also vary in composition in terms of the relative balance between primary and post-primary, and DEIS and non-DEIS, schools. A sizeable proportion of clusters, four in ten, have at least one non-DEIS school, a pattern that is more common in rural areas and in larger clusters. While a third of coordinators are very satisfied with current clustering arrangements, many coordinators and principals raised issues about the appropriateness of current cluster boundaries. In some cases, different clusters were serving the same families in a local area; in other cases, students transferred into (or out of) schools outside the cluster. This posed challenges in ensuring continuity of support for students, particularly where they transferred into a non-DEIS school.

The School Completion Programme was seen as an integral part of DEIS provision by stakeholders, coordinators, chairpersons and principals. Coordinators had good working relationships with the Home School Community Liaison Coordinators and collaborated in working with students and their families. Close co-operation was also evident in agreeing and setting targets for attendance and retention. However, more formal involvement of SCP staff in DEIS planning was less marked and varied within and across clusters, with levels of involvement being somewhat lower in larger clusters.



# Chapter 6

---

## Governance: The role of the SCP Coordinator

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

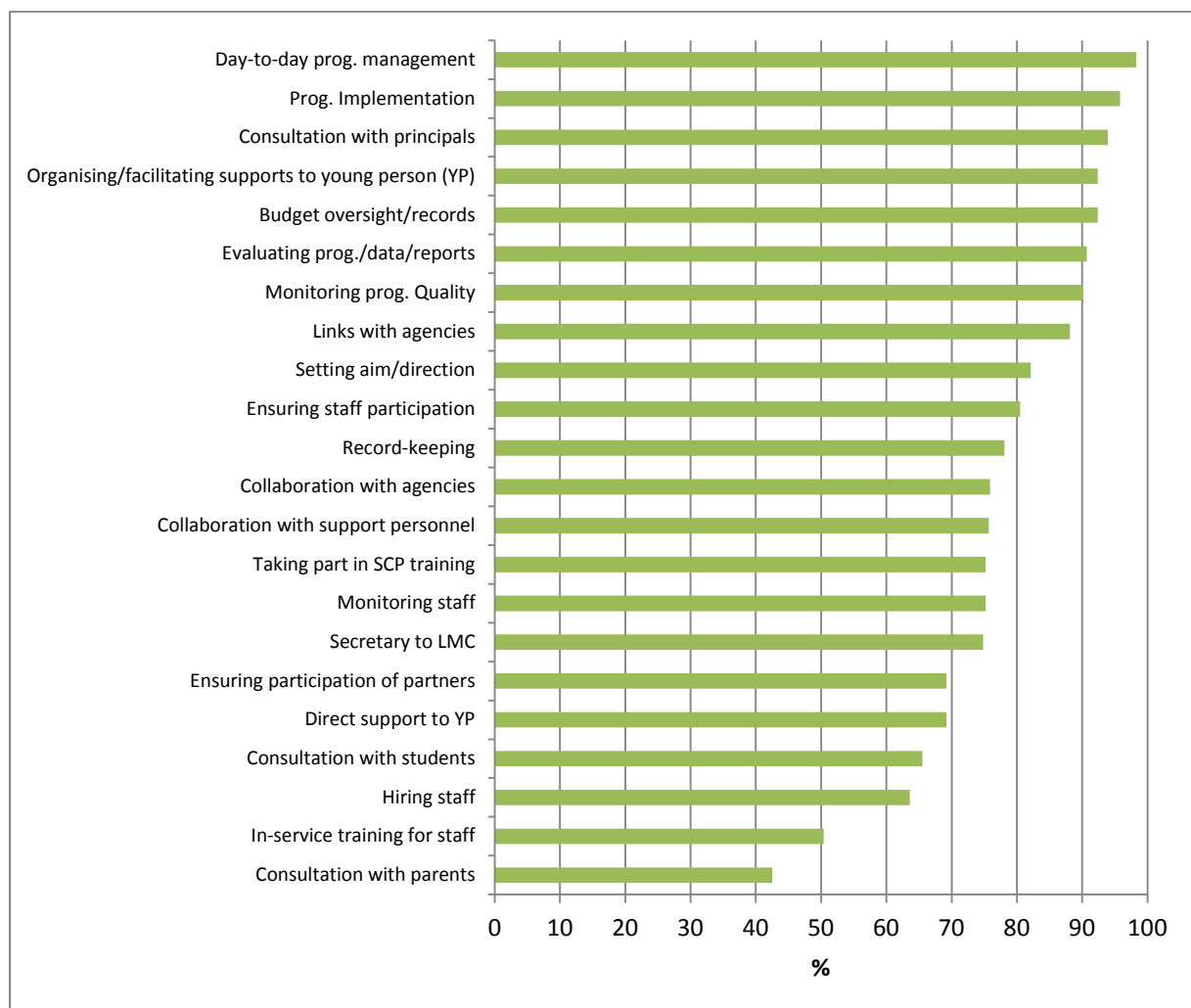
This chapter examines the role of the SCP coordinator. We use both quantitative data from surveys completed by coordinators and chairpersons and qualitative material gathered as part of the case-study cluster interviews to examine the role of coordinator. The first part of the chapter examines the role of coordinator regarding their responsibilities and the time they allocate to various activities, such as face-to-face communication with target children, administrative work related to the running of programmes, and liaising with parents, principals or agencies outside the school. The final section of the chapter examines the way in which SCP coordinators work alongside HSCLCs and EWOs with the common objective of reducing early school leaving.

### 6.2 ROLE OF COORDINATOR

The survey collected some background information on coordinators. Over three-quarters (77 per cent) are female. The majority, four-fifths, have been a coordinator for five or more years, with little variation in tenure by type of cluster. Coordinators are found to differ in their professional background, with 30 per cent having a teaching background while the remainder had previously been employed in youth, community or social work. Coordinators of urban clusters are somewhat more likely to have a teaching background than those in rural clusters (34 per cent compared with 25 per cent).

The professional background of coordinators was also discussed in the case-study cluster interviews. One coordinator emphasised the value of having a teaching background in addition to a social work qualification:

I have huge amount of experience in education, I trained as a primary school teacher, I also trained as a youth and community worker. I've all that to bring to the table, to share with all the schools and we're learning from each other so SCP has allowed them to access that personnel and resources.... I have all that sort of experience, professional experience behind me, educational qualifications behind me. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

**FIGURE 6.1** Role of the Coordinator (% 'To a Great Extent')

Source: Coordinator Survey.

In the survey, coordinators were asked whether they were clear about their role as coordinator and also to specify the extent to which certain activities were involved in their role. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of coordinators strongly agreed with the statement that 'I'm clear about my role as a local coordinator of the SCP' while a further 31 per cent agreed with this statement. Coordinators in smaller clusters were slightly less likely to feel very clear about their role (58 per cent compared with 66-69 per cent) but there was little other variation by cluster characteristics. Coordinators saw their role as encompassing day-to-day management of the programme, programme implementation, and consultation with school principals (Figure 6.1). Organising and facilitating supports for young people, budget oversight and record-keeping, evaluating and reporting on projects and setting up links with relevant agencies were also seen as features of their role 'to a great extent'. Setting the aim and direction of the programme as well as ensuring the participation of SCP staff were seen as key features of their role by four-fifths of coordinators. For three-quarters of coordinators, record-

keeping as well as collaboration with agencies and support personnel were seen as very important dimensions of their roles.

### 6.2.1 Varied Duties and Responsibilities

The qualitative interviews with coordinators also highlighted how the work of coordinators involved day-to-day management of the SCP by ensuring programmes are implemented and, in some cases, carrying out various activities themselves. Frequent communication with the various school principals in their cluster was considered by many coordinators to be an integral part of their job. Principals interviewed appeared to distinguish the role of SCP coordinator from other school staff according to their communications skills and positive relationships built up with the children over time:

She's here every day and what do you call it she knows the children like very well as well so that's huge, I think, you know. (Lettermore, LMC member, small, urban, diverse).

They just have the right ability, the right personality, they're extremely calm, some of our kids can be manic, they just have this ability to get the best out of our children...they're just good at what they do, they're good at what they do. They have the ability, they'll do it very, very well. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Another principal in the same cluster echoed these points, highlighting the rapport built up between the coordinator and both children and staff at the school:

The [coordinator] is just everything, she's really, really a great organiser. She's a lovely way with the children, lovely way with the staff. She's amenable, approachable...so the strength would be the personnel and what they do. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

In particular, the ability of the coordinator to develop and nurture links with the wider community and external agencies was seen as extremely beneficial:

She's out in the community. She keeps you know a lot of our work is kind of on the ground. She keeps in touch with everything that's happening outside in terms of even in-service, in terms of programmes that are running out in the community. And she matches them to what would work within each of our schools. (Durse, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

When coordinators themselves were questioned about their role, many defined themselves as being different to teaching staff in that they were not there to

educate or discipline but instead represented a 'friendly face' for children in school:

We're in the school nearly all the time. And we are a friendly face for them in the school. And we're always watching their back, that is our job and we let them know that, we're watching your back. We try not to use the bad cop element, you know what I mean. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

Some were a little frustrated at the amount of different responsibilities associated with the role. One coordinator described how their role was often difficult to define to others due mainly to the varied nature of the job:

It's [the SCP] just such a mouthful, but then there's so many different, like I'm the coordinator of this programme but I've so many different roles, you know I do loads of admin, I do loads of one-on-one, I do loads of key working, I do homework clubs, breakfast clubs, you know there's parts of me everywhere. It's hard to define your role to people. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

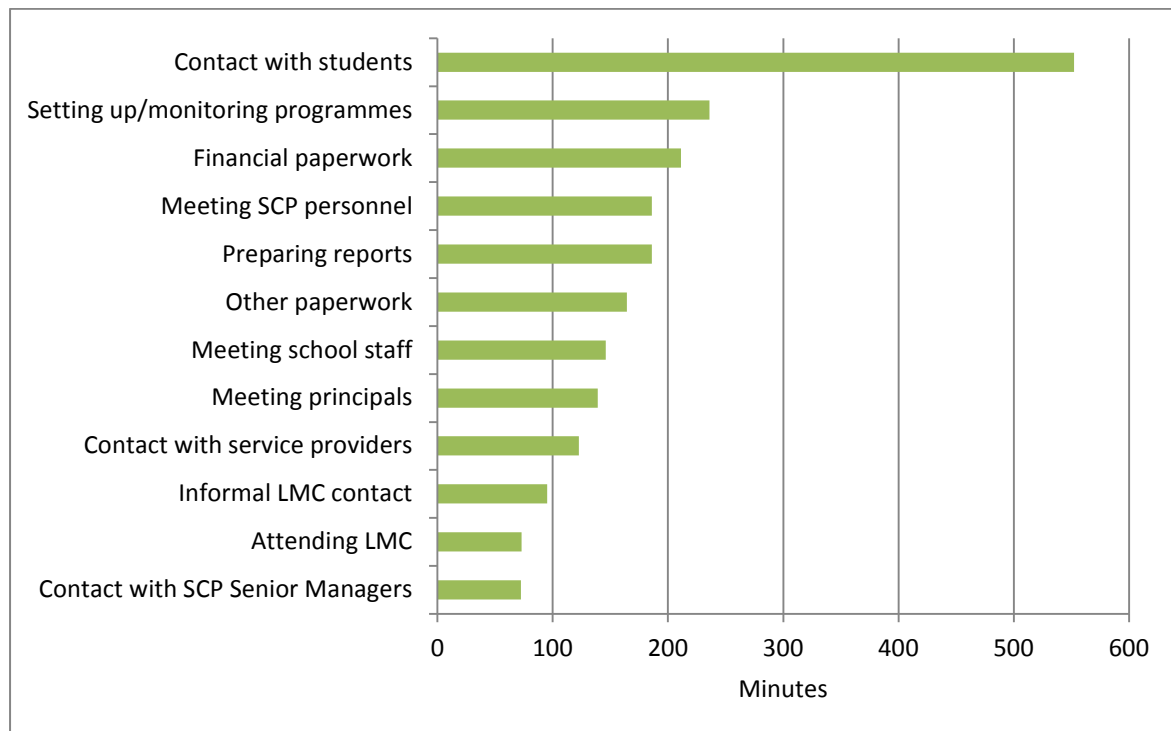
One day I could be in [name of store] getting an emergency Cornflakes delivery for the breakfast club and the next day I could be sitting at a, you know, an agency meeting about a particular family. So you know it's broad and we cover everything (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

Some variation between coordinators was evident in the survey data in relation to certain aspects of their role. However, there was little variation by the legal/employer structure of the cluster, that is, whether the employer was the LMC, school BOM or ETB. The extent to which coordinators were directly involved in providing support to children and young people varied by cluster size; in small clusters, 85 per cent of coordinators were directly involved in such support compared with 72 per cent in medium-sized clusters and only 55 per cent in larger clusters. On the other hand, larger clusters appear to entail greater administrative responsibilities, with coordinators somewhat more likely to be highly involved in evaluation, data collection in auditing (95 per cent compared with 85 per cent in small clusters) and in monitoring and evaluating programme quality (97 per cent compared with 84 per cent). A minority of coordinators saw consultation with parents as being a major part of their role. However, there is some evidence that rural coordinators are more involved in such consultation (48 per cent compared with 37 per cent). This pattern partly reflects cluster size since smaller clusters are more likely to consult with parents 'to a great extent' than larger clusters (50 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Furthermore, smaller clusters are more likely to consult with at-risk students regarding programmes; 81

per cent of small clusters do so 'to a great extent' compared with 64 per cent of medium-sized clusters and 58 per cent of large clusters.

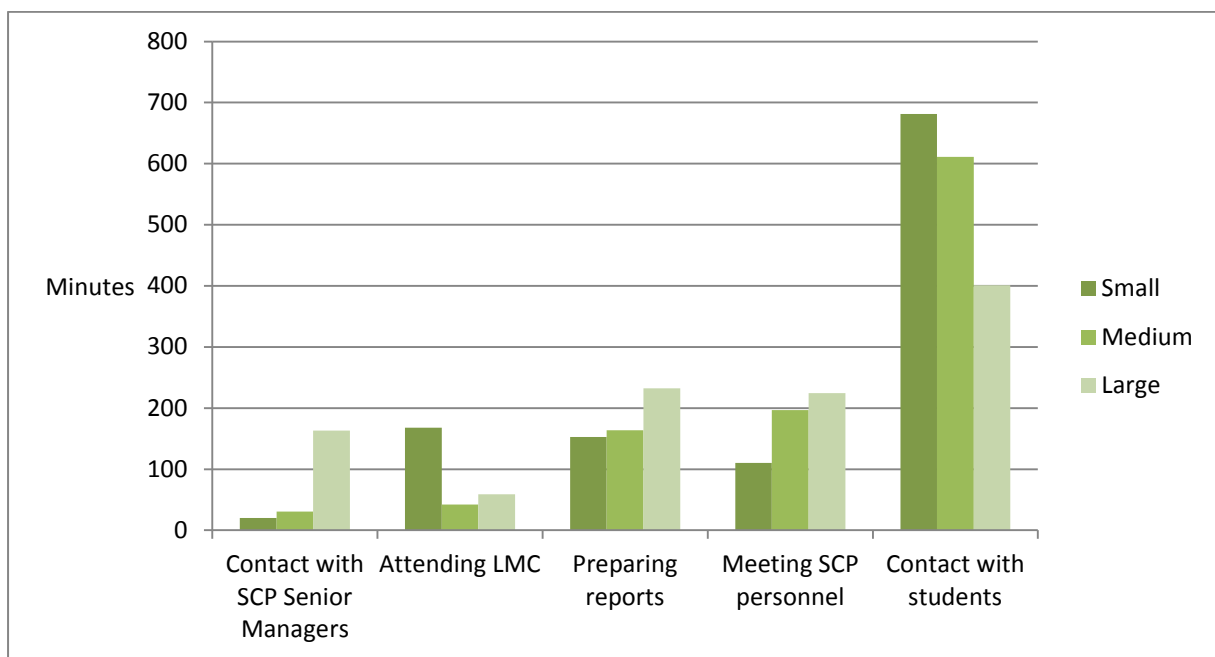
Some differences are evident in how the role is interpreted depending on the professional background of the coordinator. Those with a background in community/youth/social work are more likely to emphasise ensuring the active participation of other relevant partners than those with a teaching background (76 per cent compared with 54 per cent). There are also differences in collaboration with support personnel (89 per cent compared with 74 per cent), participation in SCP/Tusla training (85 per cent compared with 61 per cent), and in the emphasis on monitoring programme quality (94 per cent compared with 81 per cent). These patterns hold, even when the fact that teachers tend to work in smaller clusters is taken into account. On the other hand, teachers are somewhat more likely to consult with students (75 per cent compared with 59 per cent), though coordinators in larger clusters have less involvement in consulting with young people whatever their background.

In the survey, coordinators were asked to estimate the time they usually spent per week on a range of specified tasks and activities. These data yield further insights into their role. By far the greatest amount of time was spent on face-to-face contact with students, on which coordinators spent an average of 9.2 hours per week (Figure 6.2). Coordinators spend just under four hours per week on setting up and monitoring programmes. A considerable amount of time is spent on administrative tasks; 3.5 hours per week on financial paperwork, three hours on preparing reports and 2.7 hours on other paperwork. Meetings with principals, SCP personnel, school staff and service providers occupy a considerable proportion of time. Contact with the LMC and with SCP Senior Managers occupies somewhat less time than other activities.

**FIGURE 6.2** Average Time Per Week Spent on Different Activities by Coordinators

Source: Coordinator Survey.

In keeping with the information on the extent to which coordinators are involved in various activities, the time allocated to various tasks differs by cluster size. Figure 6.3 shows the tasks for which variation by cluster size is greatest. Coordinators in small- and medium-sized clusters spend much more time on face-to-face contact compared with those in larger clusters. Those in smaller clusters also seem to have more direct contact with the chairperson and other LMC members. In contrast, coordinators of larger clusters spend more on preparing reports, meeting with other SCP personnel and with SCP senior management. There is some variation by type of programme, with coordinators of diverse programmes spending significantly more time setting up and monitoring programmes as well as preparing reports.

**FIGURE 6.3** Average Time Per Week Spent on Selected Activities by Cluster Size

Source: Coordinator Survey.

### 6.2.2 Reporting and Administration

The case-study cluster interviews also highlighted the extent to which coordinators were spending significant amounts of time gathering relevant documentation from principals as well as preparing retention plans and reports:

I'm the one that collates it and puts it together and sends it in, you know. The same thing happens with the retention plan. I send out the necessary documentation to the principals, ask them for the relevant information. I take it, I collate it, I put it all together and send it in. So it's a huge bulk of work and very time consuming and you do feel lonely at times, it's very hard running around [the no. of] schools trying to get everybody to give me the information on time. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

One chairperson also described the heavy workload of the coordinator and the many responsibilities associated with the position:

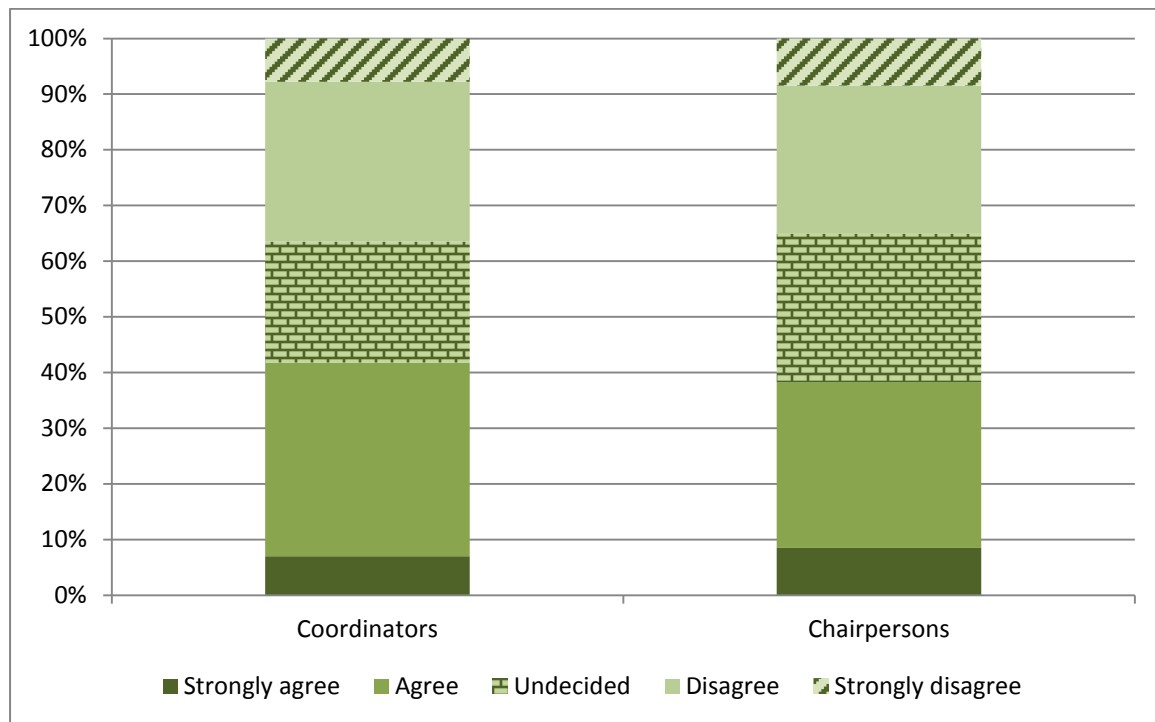
It's a burden to look after the whole funding, the accounting, the purchasing, the payments. And to see that all that is done correctly, returns made on time. All of that is a huge burden, it's full time. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

Some coordinators felt they were spending increasing amounts of time doing administration instead of working directly with target children and young people:

There's so many changes happening in the last year and year and a half that I've been office bound. I mean my contact time is down to nothing in some cases...you know so I'm really unhappy with that. And you know because I feel that's not good, I don't think that's a positive thing. I think I should have more, I should have more contact time with students and schools. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

A minority of coordinators and chairpersons, four in ten, considered that sufficient training was provided to coordinators (Figure 6.4). There was some variation in perceptions depending on the legal arrangements of the cluster. Coordinators in clusters where ETBs were the employer were somewhat more critical of the adequacy of training than those in other clusters (51 per cent disagreed that there was sufficient training compared with 24-25 per cent in clusters run by LMCs or BOMs). Somewhat surprisingly, however, chairpersons in clusters run by ETBs were slightly more satisfied with the training for coordinators with greater criticism where clusters were run by a school BOM. Three-quarters of coordinators reported that they had availed of continuing professional development over the academic year 2013/14. Levels of engagement in CPD did not vary by cluster size, coordinator background or urban/rural location. Coordinators in clusters run by LMCs were slightly more likely to have taken CPD while rates were somewhat lower in clusters run by school BOMs. Interestingly, coordinators who had done CPD in the previous year were just as critical of the adequacy of training provision as those who had not. In two-thirds of cases, the CPD was provided through SCP with the remainder through another organisation. Thirty-nine per cent of coordinators described themselves as 'very satisfied' with the training they received, 38 per cent were 'satisfied' while 21 per cent were 'not satisfied'. When asked about their training needs, coordinators focused on financial and administrative management, software to support financial reporting and therapeutic interventions.



**FIGURE 6.4** Agreement with the Statement that ‘Sufficient Training is Provided to Local Coordinators’

Source: Coordinator Survey.

### 6.2.3 SCP, HSCL and EWO

Both the case-study cluster interviews and stakeholder interviews highlighted the important relationship between the SCP coordinator, the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator and the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO). One coordinator described how the SCP provided a clear link between ‘educational welfare services and the schools’ (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, ETB, high intensity, diverse). Other interviewees described the relationship as being ‘in tandem’ (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, LMC high intensity, in-school) or ‘very much hand in glove’ (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, school BOM, low intensity, diverse).

In a number of case-study clusters, the SCP coordinator, the HSCL Coordinator and the EWO would meet regularly to discuss certain children and ensure that none of their work was overlapping or being duplicated:

So a lot of the interaction that we have actually is to make sure that we’re not overlapping. We also sit on the youth forum together. But again that would be to give feedback on the services that both of us have to offer and to access services then that are on offer at the forum because it’s a great place for networking. (Valentia, LMC member, medium, urban, in-school).

You know we work alongside home school, education and welfare services and ourselves. Trying not to, I suppose, duplicate our work. But with School Completion we're very much on the ground. We're on the ground every day. We're in the schools every day. Where the other services may not be, bar the home schools if they're based in an individual school. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

In one cluster, the three parties had monthly meetings to review the work being done regarding student attendance, a practice which appeared to be motivated by the coordinator:

Every month we would sit and review what individual work was going on, who I was targeting on attendance, who the home school was targeting, maybe what parents. Behavioural issues, we'd be encompassing all aspects of school life...With the ultimate aim, I suppose, of if they're not in they can't possibly learn or they, their behaviour won't improve, they won't have positive outcome so at the very, I suppose the basic level is attendance. (Inishmore, LMC member, rural, medium size, in-school).

Some of those interviewed felt that the level of communication and co-operation between the SCP coordinator, the HSCL Coordinator and the EWO meant that the services offered were seamless:

I would work very closely with the Home School, with School Completion and with the principal...you know...we're seamless I suppose in what we're offering...It's very much a three party approach. (Inishmore, LMC member, rural, medium size, in-school).

In other instances, however, coordinators and principals reported that it was sometimes difficult to secure back-up from EWOs unless children had been absent for very considerable periods of time.

We don't have really the back-up of the Educational Welfare Officer. We do but it's not effective in that they're not seeing it through in terms of school attendance notice being issued. ... There's a child here, I think he's missed on average maybe eighty days a year and we call out to the house and it's the same excuse, oh he's sick, and we know it's not the case... and nothing is happening to the family, there's no kind of intervention. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium, in-school).

One stakeholder noted, however, that despite having a similar objective, the roles of these organisations differed somewhat:

SCP [is] aimed at the child, then HSL may engage an EWO, who takes a more legalistic approach regarding dealing with families with attendance

problems, the initial approach of HS [Home-School Liaison] is to work with the families. (Stakeholder)

One principal felt that the EWO had a different role regarding attendance but that SCP was more geared towards encouragement and engagement:

I suppose the EWB have a very different, a definite role of attendance and you know, compliance with legislation and that. The SCP comes from the point of view of, okay, of encouragement. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school).

In some cases the interviewees felt that the roles of the SCP coordinator, the HSCL coordinator and EWO were not clear enough, however:

I think the role of the coordinator, she would say this herself, is not clear. There's a bit of confusion and overlap with the Home School Liaison and the educational welfare and it's just, it's not that clear to me. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

### 6.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter examines the role of the SCP coordinator. Using quantitative data from coordinator surveys and qualitative material gathered in stakeholder interviews and as part of visits to case-study clusters, we provide an in-depth insight into the role of the SCP coordinator. Findings show that their key responsibility is the overall management of the programme. This involves frequent communication with principals of schools within the cluster in order to organise supports, keeping budgets and records more generally, and building relations with families, the community and outside agencies. The SCP coordinator appears to be viewed quite differently to other teaching roles in the school, based on their personal relationships with the target children. There is some evidence, however, that the varied nature of the role of SCP coordinators can lead to uncertainty about a role that is so difficult to define. The survey results highlight variations in the way in which SCP coordinators allocate their time to different tasks based on the size of the cluster, with those in smaller clusters spending more time providing direct support compared to larger clusters where time was more likely to be spent working on the administration associated with the project. Other responsibilities included setting up and monitoring programmes, financial paperwork, writing reports and meeting with principals and SCP personnel. Finally, the qualitative interviews highlighted the relationship between the SCP coordinator, the HSCL Coordinator and the EWO. Findings suggest that this is generally a positive working relationship that provides a

greater service to children at-risk. However, there was some evidence of a lack of clarity or division of roles in some clusters.

# Chapter 7

---

## Governance: The Chairperson and Local Management Committee

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter utilises survey data, case-study cluster interviews and stakeholder interviews to examine governance of SCP. It firstly examines perceived weaknesses in national governance and the complexities around the legal and employment arrangements of clusters. We then focus on the role of the chairperson by examining their relationship with the SCP coordinator and other aspects of their role such as monitoring finance and communication with principals in the cluster. The next section focuses on the division of labour within clusters, while Section 7.5 examines aspects of the operation of the LMC such as its composition, the process of recruiting members, expertise among committee members, the content of meetings and the level of clarity around functions. The final section of this chapter uses coordinator survey data to examine reporting structures in SCP, focussing on the frequency of reporting, the extent to which they feel reporting is useful and their overall satisfaction with reporting structures.

### 7.2 NATIONAL GOVERNANCE

The stakeholder and case-study cluster interviews highlighted a number of issues around the governance of SCP at national level. This was suggested by some to be the one of the biggest weakness of the programme (this is further discussed in Chapter 10, Section 10.3.1). In particular the transfer of SCP to different government departments over time appears to have caused much confusion and uncertainty:

We have been moved from one agency to another. We go from one group to another. We're passed around. And as soon as we move to a different organisation we have to take on new ways of operating and working. (Blasket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

Another coordinator also questioned the wisdom of moving SCP between departments and the message this was sending to SCP staff. They also were concerned that Tusla were not fully aware of the value of SCP on the ground:

Over the last few years we've been in such a state of flux and it's, it would be nice to know kind of where we're going and where we're at really...we've moved three departments in under three years you know so we were Department of Education and then we were Department of Children and Youth Affairs and now we're in Tusla and you know kind of, I suppose, if we're moving so much on a national you know, kind of on the top level, feed, it might feed down to us kind of say, I suppose on the ground. What is our direction you know, where do, I suppose the government really, who are giving us the money see us going, you know. Do they see the value of us? Because on the ground and with the daily work we do, you can see the value in it every single day. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

At a practical level, some felt that simple guidance from head office around how clusters should operate would be helpful where it allowed for local autonomy around provision to be maintained:

Guidance is needed at local level in terms of how it should operate; but not so that it becomes prescriptive, it should allow local freedom'... [The guidelines should indicate] what the programme is about, what is possible and how it should work with other support service' (Stakeholder).

Another stakeholder noted the need for cross-departmental supports for student retention. They felt the move from SCP into Tusla to be a negative given that it is an education programme that should be housed in the DES:

We don't have a formal, cross-departmental view and support structure in place for student retention. And we moved it to Children and Youth Affairs. And really, really, where it has become completely derailed was the establishment of Tusla. Because it is now in an Agency, moved further from the centre. And from what I can see, standing outside, my interactions show, I feel, it is not a priority within Tusla. So I feel there is an urgent need for us to look and see where it should be housed, and in my view, where I stand, its natural home is Education. (Stakeholder).

### 7.2.1 Employment Structures and Human Resources

Data from the governance survey which related to the 2012/13 school year indicate that clusters vary significantly in their legal and employment arrangements. In 41 per cent of clusters, the employment relationship operates through the local Education and Training Board (ETB), in 29 per cent of cases the employer is the Local Management Committee while in 24 per cent it is a school board of management (BOM); a small number of clusters have other arrangements, including being under the auspices of an Education Centre. At the time of that survey, the majority (72 per cent) of clusters indicated that they had terms of reference in place for the operation and management of the LMC, a

pattern that did not vary markedly by cluster type. However, less than a quarter (23 per cent) had written documentation setting out the roles of LMC members and only a fifth had induction material for new members.

Information gathered in the case-study cluster interviews, from the surveys and from the stakeholder interviews highlighted issues around a lack of governance or 'collective responsibility' in relation to human resources in SCP:

There is no sense of who is in charge; for all the intents and purposes it would be the coordinator, who is actually an employee, is actually running the show and not the board itself and I think that the board itself is less than the sum of its parts; so what happens when there is no collective responsibility? (Stakeholder).

One principal noted the lack of management or accountability for the role of coordinator, for example:

I think accountability as well for the coordinator, you know, where are they all day long, who's managing them, you know. Now we trust the coordinator completely but there's a lack of accountability, I think. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

The varied employers for SCP staff such as ETBs, School Boards of Management and LMCs were also seen as a cause of much difficulty by those interviewed. One stakeholder highlighted the difficulties when people are being paid by the ETBs but working for the LMC:

Where they are working with the ETBs, there aren't memorandums of understanding; there isn't a clear sense of what people's roles are. There seem to be a bit of batting back and forth between LMCs and ETBs in terms of who is the employer. (Stakeholder).

For those employed by ETBs, however, some appeared to benefit from having access to specialised support services:

I have the benefit of the ETB/VEC to support the LMC although it clouds clarity as to who has the main governance. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

ETB provide excellent support in relation to employment and finance. ... We are administered by the ETB and as a result are lucky not to have to deal with jobs adverts, employment law, contracts or payments. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

Given the lack of clarity around employment contracts for SCP staff (with varying terms and conditions depending on cluster governance arrangements), some noted the need to have skilled personnel on the LMC to handle various issues as they arise. One stakeholder felt, however, that many LMC members had little expertise in human resources but yet were responsible for addressing difficult issues as they arose:

In essence, individual people are negotiating quite difficult human resource issues and industrial relations issues with the sense that they absolutely have to get it right because if they don't, there may well be personal liabilities. (Stakeholder).

Some coordinators reported a lack of job security, with one pointing out that they were 'not considered a public servant worker, I have no contract since August 2013' (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster). Others longed for a human resource department within SCP who they could contact about employment issues:

Like you have an HR department and you know you can really just, you know, email any question or concern you have to that person, we don't have that. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

The guidelines for human resources were considered to be weak and as a result clusters were depending on local knowledge or paid expertise:

There are no HR guidelines and a serious lack of expert resources for HR issues. All HR issues we have encountered have been addressed locally using local knowledge and payment for consultative advice. (Coordinator survey response, medium urban cluster).

Legal issues around human resources were of particular concern to those who feared for the future of SCP:

I think at the moment now their only worry is if School Completion is wound up, what happens and that's a big worry, you know, the responsibility of it, you know, the financial end, the redundancies, how we work all that out, you know that's one of their concerns at the moment. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

Other coordinators felt unsure about their role in relation to recruiting and managing other SCP staff such as project workers:



I have three breakfast or four breakfast staff so you know they'd see me as their employer, you know. So I deal with their issues or different things coming up there. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

Some argued that the role of the LMC should not be about governance or financial reporting but instead about planning and budgeting for provision within the cluster.

It is a lot to expect a voluntary group like LMC to be responsible for governance of this type of project, bearing in mind that almost all of its members are already working full-time and responsible for managing their schools... there is now so much emphasis on 'paper tracking', data and statistics collection and reporting that it is greatly affecting the time that Coordinators can have for 'pupil tracking'. (Coordinator survey response, large urban cluster).

One survey respondent suggested that human resources should be centralised:

Current structures allow the programme to run with the needs of the local area. I strongly feel that payroll, contracts and redundancies should be governed by a central office. SCP coordinators do not have the time for this aspect of the work. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

This thought was echoed by another coordinator:

If the LMC was about the retention plan and making sure that the activities and the services were delivered as they should. And then move the governance out of it and let the governance be managed by the department or by a governance agency or something like that. I think that would help. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

A survey respondent also noted a possible conflict of interest in having school principals and beneficiaries of the SCP also chairing the LMC:

End users of our services (schools) should not be part of the governance structure, conflict of interests and causes lots of difficulties for SCP staff on the ground. It is personality dependent. (Coordinator survey response, small rural cluster).

### 7.3 ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of the chairpersons are school principals, with a very small number having a professional background outside teaching. Their gender profile is quite different to that of coordinators, with 53 per cent being male (compared with 27 per cent of coordinators). There is quite a span in

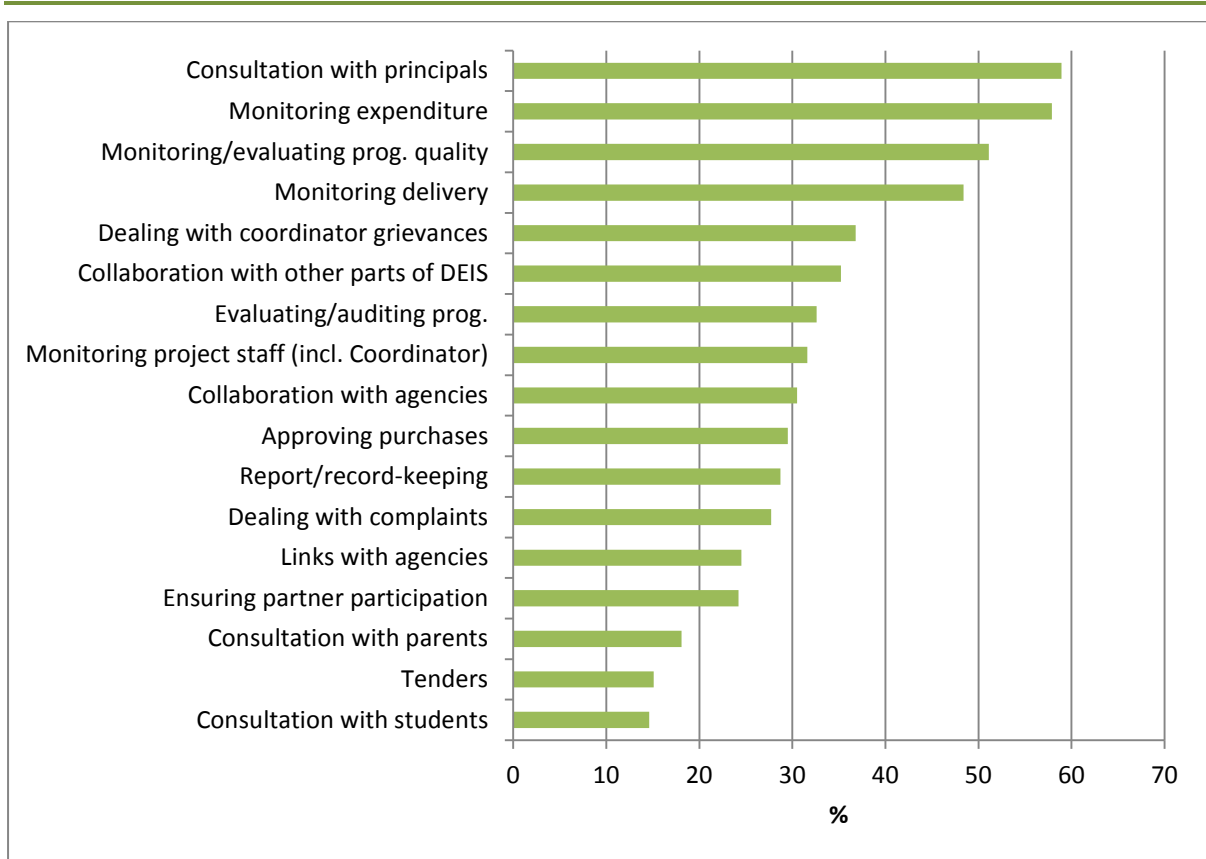
length of tenure, with 15 per cent in post within the last year while 29 per cent have been chairperson for five years or more. There are more recently appointed chairpersons where the employer is the ETB (61 per cent within the last two years compared with 38 per cent for LMCs and 12 per cent for BOMs).

Over a third (37 per cent) of chairpersons strongly agreed with the statement that 'I'm clear about my role as a Chairperson of the SCP' while a further 50 per cent agreed with this statement. Chairpersons in small clusters were somewhat less clear about their roles, with over a quarter disagreeing that they were clear or reporting that they were undecided compared with a tenth of those in medium or large clusters. As with the coordinators, chairpersons were asked to indicate their extent of involvement in a list of activities. The majority of chairpersons saw themselves as involved 'to a great extent' in consulting with principals and monitoring expenditure (Figure 7.1). Around half saw themselves as heavily involved in monitoring programme quality and delivery. Otherwise chairpersons were involved in a range of activities, including liaison with other aspects of the DEIS programme and with other agencies as well as purchase approval, record-keeping and dealing with grievances or complaints. Only a very small number of chairpersons described themselves as heavily involved in consulting with students or parents.

There was some variation in the chairperson's role by cluster characteristics. Chairpersons in small clusters were more likely to report that they were heavily involved in supervising and monitoring the work of project staff, including the coordinator (42 per cent compared with 24-29 per cent of those in medium/large clusters). They were less likely to indicate that they were involved in establishing and maintaining strong links with relevant agencies (42 per cent compared with 24 per cent in medium and 13 per cent in large clusters) or with ensuring the active participation of other partners (48 per cent compared with 23-24 per cent in medium/large clusters). As with coordinators, chairpersons of larger clusters were less involved in consulting with parents (9 per cent compared with 21-24 per cent in small/medium clusters). Those in clusters where the coordinator was a teacher were less involved in ensuring the participation of other partners than those where the coordinator had a community work background (45 per cent compared with 19 per cent). Chairpersons of rural clusters were somewhat more likely to describe themselves as not very involved in evaluating and auditing the programme (15 per cent compared with 33 per cent), in reporting and record-keeping (41 per cent compared with 28 per cent) or in monitoring the delivery of activities, though the numbers involved in the latter instance were small (17 per cent compared with 4 per cent). Chairpersons in clusters where the LMC was the employer had a greater involvement in dealing with tenders (33 per cent

compared with 9-12 per cent in ETBs and BOMs) and less involvement in consulting with parents (56 per cent 'not to any great extent' or 'not at all' compared with 42 per cent in BOMs and 34 per cent in ETBs). Collaboration with other agencies was somewhat less prevalent among chairpersons where the employer was the school BOM (48 per cent 'not to any great extent' or 'not at all' compared with 16 per cent in BOMs and 14 per cent in ETBs).

**FIGURE 7.1** Role of the Chairperson (% 'To a Great Extent')

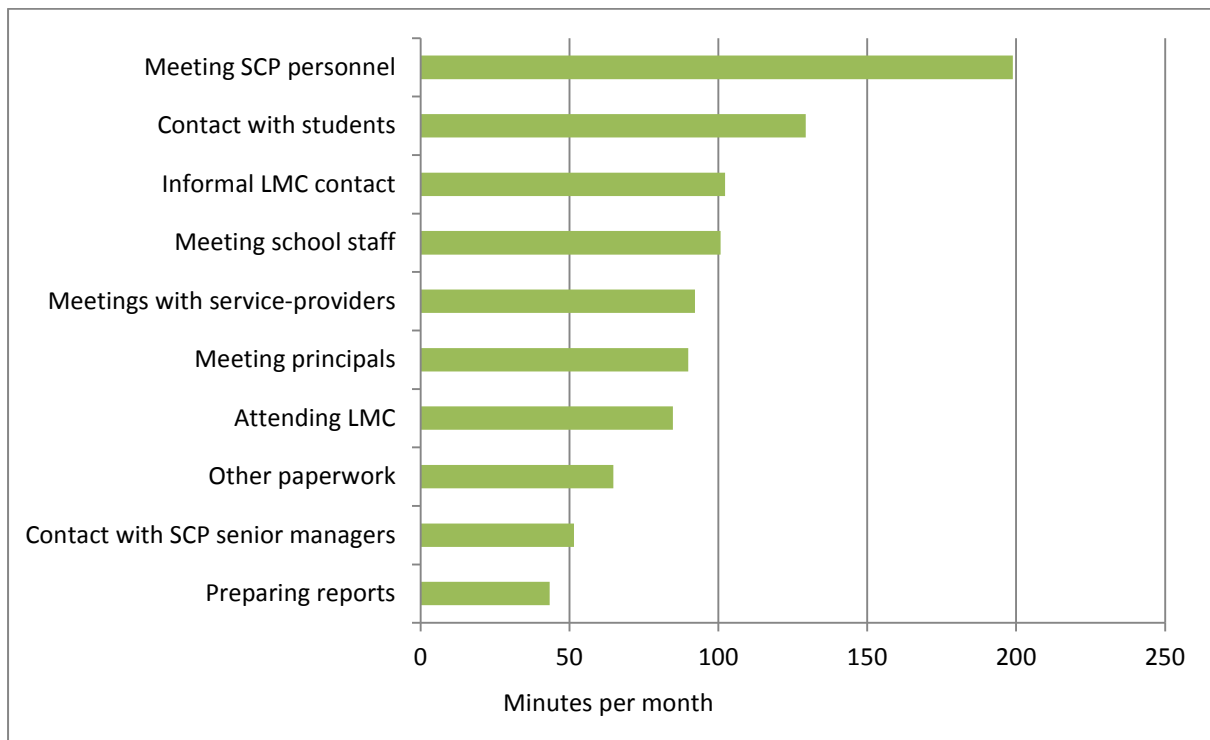


Source: Chairperson survey.

From the list, chairpersons were to indicate the five main responsibilities in their role. The most frequently mentioned responsibilities were monitoring expenditure (73 per cent), monitoring the delivery of activities (69 per cent), monitoring and evaluating programme quality (59 per cent) and consulting with school principals (54 per cent). Monitoring expenditure is less likely to be indicated as a main responsibility where the employer is an ETB, presumably because some of the financial responsibilities are dealt with centrally. Monitoring activity was mentioned more frequently where the employer was a school BOM and was less frequent in large clusters. While monitoring the delivery of activities was less prevalent in larger clusters, monitoring and evaluating the quality of programme was assigned greater importance; 73 per cent of chairpersons in large clusters named this as one of their five main responsibilities compared with

around half in small or medium clusters. Coordination with principals was assigned greater importance in clusters where the coordinator had a teaching background with relatively little variation by other cluster characteristics.

**FIGURE 7.2** Time Allocated to Various Activities by the Chairperson (Minutes Per Month)



Source: Chairperson survey.

In terms of the amount of time spent per month on various activities, the greatest amount of time (3.3 hours) was devoted to meeting SCP personnel, including the coordinator (Figure 7.2). Chairpersons also spent time on contact with students (1.7 hours), informal contact with members of the LMC and meeting school staff (1.7 hours each) as well as meeting principals and other service-providers (1.5 hours each). Around an hour a month is spent on paperwork, with a further three-quarters of an hour spent on preparing reports. There is some variation in the amount of time spent on different activities depending on the legal arrangement of the cluster. Where the employer is the LMC, chairpersons tend to spend more time in informal contact with the LMC, meeting service-providers and in contact with SCP senior management. On the other hand, they spend less time in face-to-face contact with students.

Chairpersons were less likely to have received CPD in the previous year than coordinators, with 55 per cent having received such training. Chairpersons of rural clusters were somewhat more likely to receive training (61 per cent

compared with 50 per cent) as were those in larger clusters (64 per cent compared with 53 per cent in small clusters and 49 per cent in medium clusters). In contrast to the situation for coordinators, only a minority (29 per cent) received such CPD through SCP with the majority receiving it from another organisation. The majority of chairpersons described themselves as very satisfied (44 per cent) or satisfied (37 per cent) with this training.

The qualitative interviews with coordinators, chairpersons, principals and LMC members in SCP clusters also highlighted the range of responsibilities and activities of chairpersons. In line with the quantitative findings, many interviewed felt that the chairperson's role was one of monitoring or overseeing finance within the cluster:

They'd have the responsibility of signing off on the financial reports and the retention plan, the evaluations, a lot of other areas. So they'd be involved in those areas. So I if you like in consultation with them would do a lot of the work. But we eventually sign off. But they would sign off on a lot of different areas with SCP. So there's quite a lot to oversee. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse)

The chair was also important in facilitating the LMC meetings and informing the LMC members about the governance of the programme. In another cluster, the coordinator described the dual role of coordinator and chairperson in informing the management committee of various issues:

I [coordinator] provide the information to the local management committee and I might have a concern about how I think the governance is going on, or you know they're asking different questions now on our annual report and I'd like the management committee to be aware of that. My chairperson would make sure the management committee are aware of all of these things, you know because it's not my place. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

Other coordinators regarded the chair as their line manager who they could bounce ideas off or discuss issues on a day-to-day basis:

I would meet the coordinator very regularly and particularly at the beginning with a new person starting, when anybody starts off, I suppose I can direct them a lot and just say look be careful here or this was tried before or you know, this is a thing to try or just, we try that and this is what happens. So just here's the pitfalls ... So I suppose it's, it's somebody actually that, they can bounce things. (Lambay, chairperson, urban, medium size, diverse).

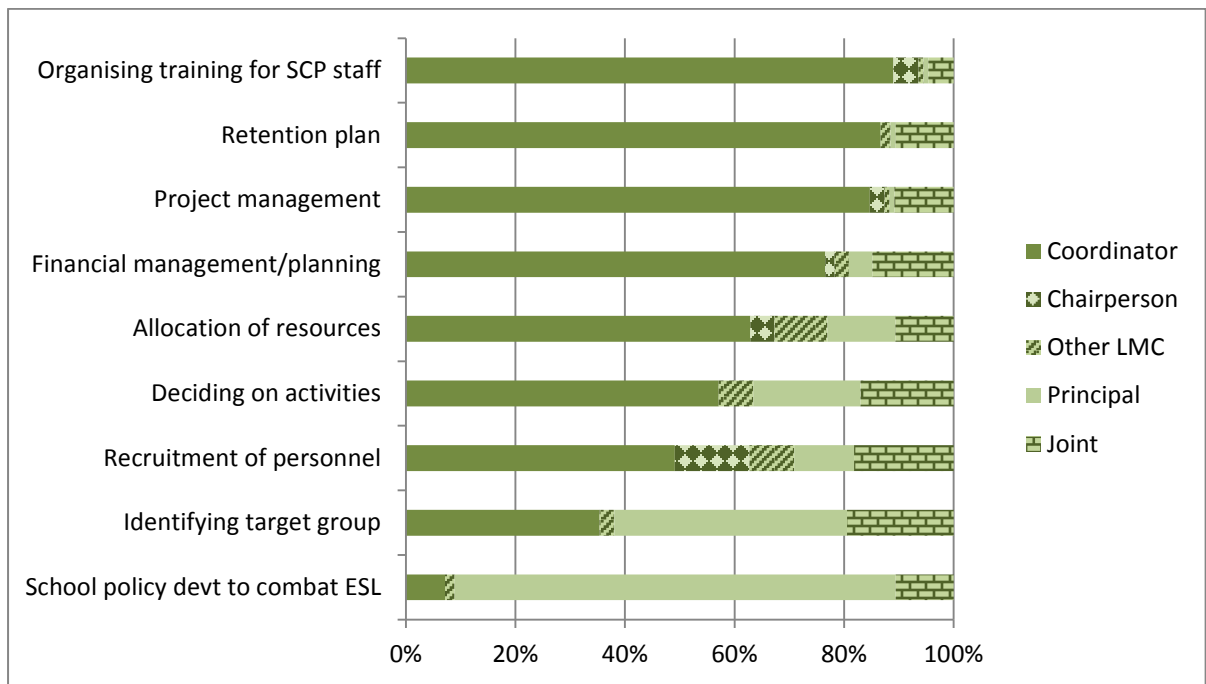
Well the chairperson is my support and my line manager in, I don't know about day-to-day terms but definitely at LMC level. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

Only in one cluster were tensions expressed in relation to the relative roles of the coordinator and the chairperson.

#### **7.4 DIVISION OF LABOUR WITHIN CLUSTERS**

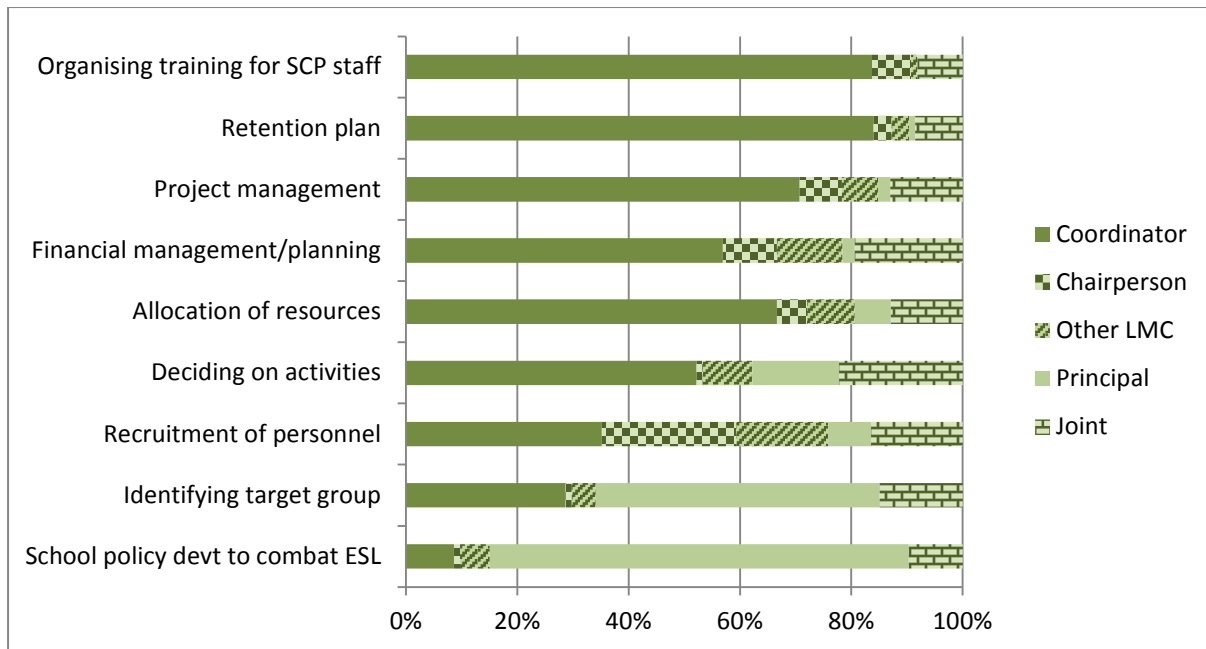
This section uses data from the 2014/15 survey to explore the division of labour across the main partners in the cluster. Coordinators and chairpersons were asked who had the main responsibility for a specified list of functions and tasks. As outlined in Chapter 6, the coordinator was seen as playing the main role in relation to project management, deciding on the activities offered, allocation of resources and financial planning, drawing up the retention plan and organising training for SCP staff (Figures 7.3 and 7.4). Responsibilities for recruiting staff were configured differently across clusters. School principals were seen as playing the main role in identifying the target group (see Chapter 4) and especially in school policy development regarding early school leaving. Chairpersons are generally not seen as playing a main role in these functions but in a quarter of clusters they play a main role in staff recruitment. Coordinators and chairpersons are broadly in agreement about the division of labour. The only discrepancy relates to financial management and planning where coordinators are more likely than chairpersons to say that they play the main role. The details of the respective roles of coordinators, chairpersons and LMC members are discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

**FIGURE 7.3** Main Responsibility for Specific Functions: Coordinator Perspective



Source: Coordinator survey.

**FIGURE 7.4** Main Responsibility for Specific Functions: Chairperson Perspective



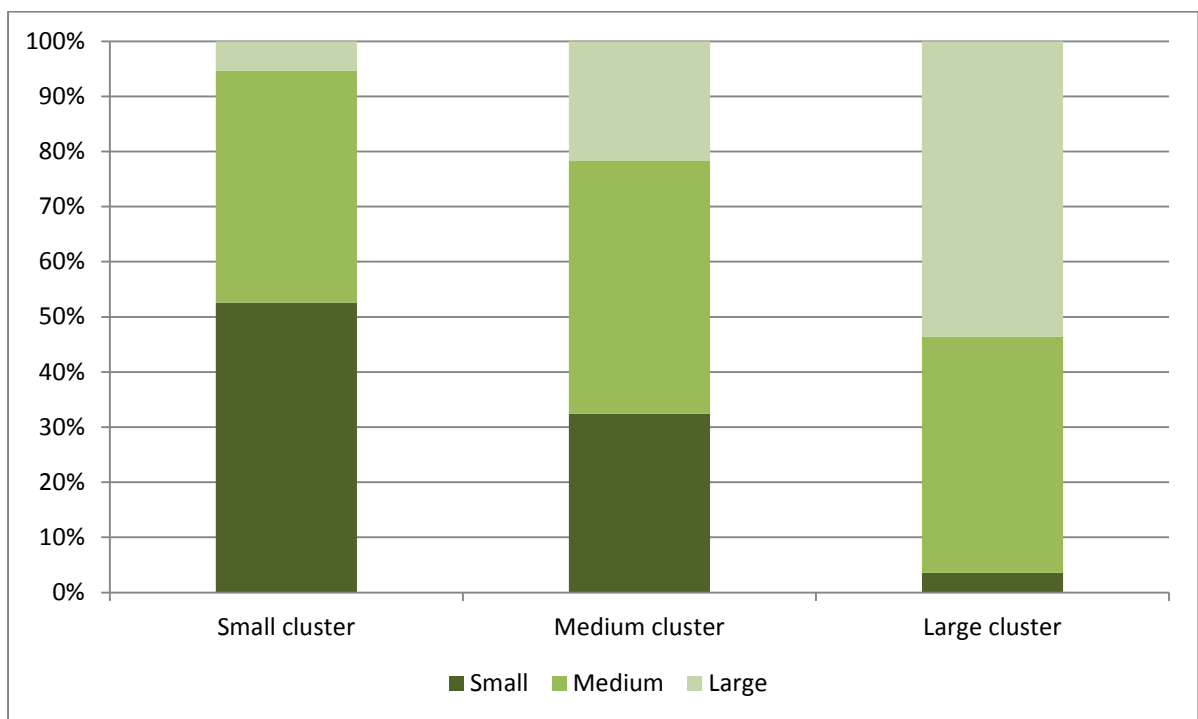
Source: Chairperson survey.

### 7.5 ROLE OF THE LOCAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (LMC)

There is considerable variation across clusters in the size of the local management committee. Based on information from the survey of chairpersons,

the mean size of the LMC is 13, though membership ranges from six to 25. The average size is somewhat smaller than the 15 reported in the governance survey and the Annual Progress Report figures for 2011/12. Over a quarter (28 per cent) of LMCs can be characterised as small (with 6-10 members), 44 per cent as medium (11-14 members) and 28 per cent as large (15 or more members). There is a marked relationship between the size of the cluster, as measured by the number of schools, and the size of the LMC. Figure 7.5 shows that over half (53 per cent) of small clusters have small LMCs while over half (54 per cent) of large clusters have large LMCs. This is not surprising given that school principals in a cluster become members of the LMC. Information on the composition of the cluster indicates that larger clusters have more LMC members largely because they have more members who are school principals or other school staff. However, they are also more likely to have slightly more representatives from statutory agencies.

**FIGURE 7.5** Size of LMC (Number of Members) by Size of Cluster (Number of Schools)



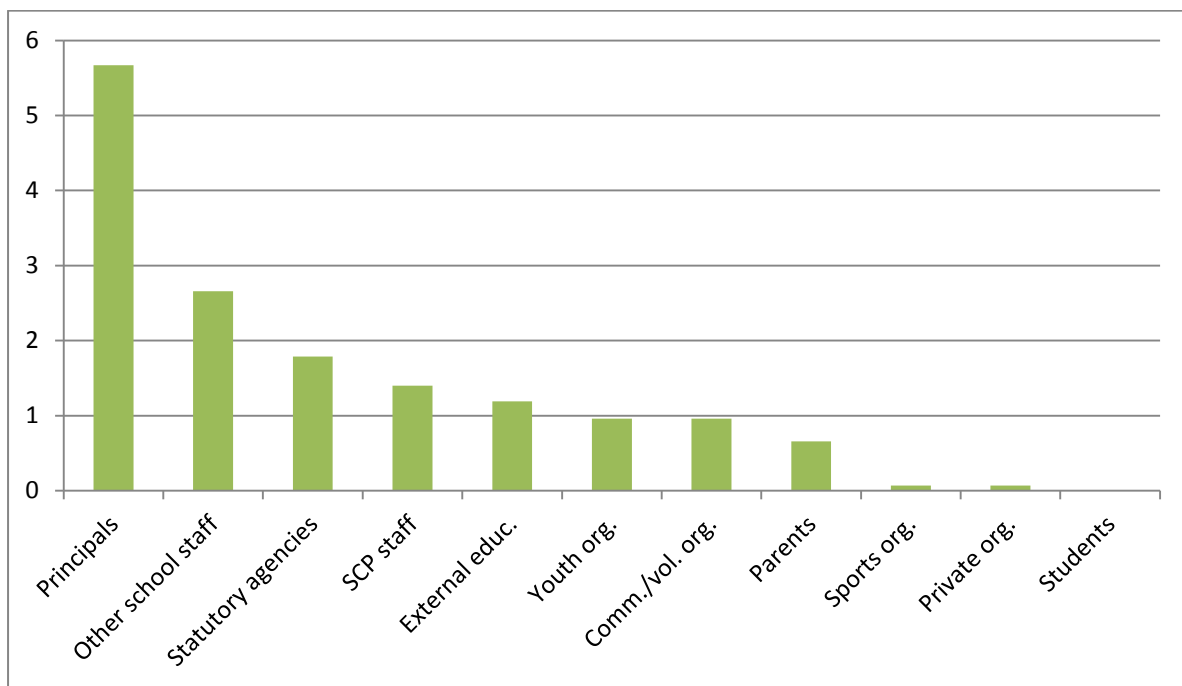
Source: Chairperson survey.

Information on the composition of LMCs can be derived from the Annual Progress Report of 2011/12. Figure 7.6 shows the average number of members from different organisations across clusters. It is evident that LMC membership is strongly dominated by school staff, either principals or other members of staff. In terms of other organisations, statutory bodies/agencies are more highly represented; even so, around a fifth of LMCs have no statutory representatives.



Clusters have an average of one representative each from external educational agencies, youth organisations and community/voluntary bodies. However, just under half (47 per cent) of clusters have no community/voluntary representatives while over a third (35 per cent) have no representatives from youth organisations. The majority of clusters (62 per cent) have no parental representatives on the LMC and none of the clusters have student representatives. There is some variation in LMC composition by cluster composition. Parents are more likely to be LMC members in smaller clusters (54 per cent compared with 31 per cent in medium clusters and 40 per cent in larger clusters). Where the coordinator has a community/youth work background, parents and community/voluntary bodies are somewhat more likely to be represented on the LMC.

**FIGURE 7.6** Composition of LMC (Mean Number Involved)



Source: Annual Progress Report data, 2011/12.

The survey findings indicate that around half of coordinators and over half (57 per cent) of chairpersons indicated that it was easy to recruit members of the LMC. Coordinators of smaller clusters or where the employer was the school BOM were somewhat more likely to report challenges in recruiting LMC members but the differences were not marked. Just under half of coordinators and chairpersons felt that ‘all members of LMC are very involved in the work of SCP’. Coordinators in smaller clusters were more likely to report challenges in involving all LMC members (50 per cent compared with 33 per cent in medium clusters and 26 per cent in large clusters). The relationship between LMC size and perceived

level of involvement was less clear-cut; coordinators in clusters with medium-sized LMCs reported the greatest level of challenge while challenges were seen as less prevalent in larger clusters. In contrast, there was little variation by cluster type in the perceptions of chairpersons regarding levels of involvement.

The case-study cluster interviews also highlighted a number of issues around the process of recruiting the LMC and its composition. One stakeholder felt that an induction or period of training should be necessary given the high level of responsibility of its members:

Another thing about the LMCs is that there is no process regarding going on to it or a process of going off. There is no term, no training, no induction, etc., when you have such a high level of responsibility. (Stakeholder).

This lack of process resulted in variation in how the committee oversee the project and depends on the 'personality of the coordinator' whether it was effective or not:

It does vary because of simple things like who is on the board, can they actually attend regularly; what other demands are being made to various people...the strength of the coordinator can make a huge difference. How well they work with the committee, how well they can actually lead work in an area or how well they can take direction from a committee, which is fine if the committee is functioning but might be problematic for an individual if the committee isn't working as effectively as it could. (Stakeholder).

A number of those interviewed highlighted the difficulty in getting non-school personnel to be members of the LMC. It seemed to be particularly difficult to recruit parents who might feel intimidated by the make-up and format of these meetings:

Where we have to work on that a little bit more is through the parental involvement. It's to encourage people to believe that they have a value in their contribution. They kind of see us kind of talking the shop talk maybe a little bit. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

Others also pointed to the lack of external agencies on the LMC which they felt might provide a fresh or different point of view in which to guide SCP decisions:

I'd like to see different agencies on it. I'd like to see somebody from the HSE on it for example...because we do have a lot of, not cross over as such but we have a lot of things that we, if we knew how the HSE viewed them

we might do something different. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

I think the local management committee, I would love to see it wider, with a, with a real input from other agencies, statutory and community. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

One LMC member felt that parental and outside agency involvement in the LMC meetings had reduced over time due mainly to the school emphasis of these meetings:

I remember a few years back and we were kind of saying, we were, you know, it just ended up, just being the principals of the schools. (Gorumna, LMC, urban, large, diverse).

The survey data also collected open-ended responses regarding the composition of the LMC. The issue of an emphasis on school-level issues and power differentials among members was raised:

LMC members need to be able to make decisions on the work of SCP and not just principals making the decisions. ... There is no equality between members, the principals decide what projects are run between themselves and how the budget is divided between schools with other members' input ignored. (Coordinator survey response, medium rural cluster).

Stakeholder interviews, interviews in the case-study clusters and coordinator survey interviews also discussed the extent to which LMC meetings were meaningful in relation to guiding the project and making decisions. One coordinator felt that her daily communication with principals meant that many decisions had already been made prior to meetings of the LMC. As a result the meetings were considered futile:

You know we've lost a lot of community people off our management committee as well. We've lost our Garda representative, our youth service representative because they don't have time to attend meetings and it's just...it was one of the reasons, I suppose the main reason was they felt that decisions had been made already by the time our local committee had come together. And you know, to a certain extent, I suppose they were right because, because we're meeting, I'm meeting with principals every week and I'm meeting teachers and meeting home schools, a lot of our agenda for our local management committee, it's there on paper but a lot of decisions have been made. Because schools, you know, need decisions made, you know, we can't wait for our management meeting to make decisions if they need to be made. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

In another case-study cluster, an LMC member also noted the decline of the involvement of external agencies over time and described the meetings as a place where decisions made by coordinators and principals were rubberstamped:

We tried to include as many people as possible and they had Garda liaison people and social workers but it got so big and it was difficult to get everybody that I think we've kind of streamlined down now to basically the principals meet whenever they meet...I think it was becoming more and more that really we were rubberstamping the decisions made by the principals and the coordinator. (Gorumna, LMC, urban, large, diverse).

Stakeholders interviewed echoed these issues and felt that in reality decision-making in clusters was down to the local coordinator and principals:

On paper LMCs are the accountable body, but in practice it isn't the case. Local coordinators tend to run the SCP projects with not a huge amount of oversight about what they are doing and when they are doing it. And they tend to more than the LMC, this being a generalisation, drive the project and the vision and the leadership is really provided by the local coordinator in terms of the project. LMCs often tend to operate as a rubber stamping exercise (Stakeholder).

The number of LMC meetings also varied across clusters nationally. The survey found that in over half (54 per cent) of clusters, the LMC meets 3-4 times a year with only a handful of clusters having less frequent meetings than that. Almost a third meets 5-6 times a year with a small number meeting more frequently. The majority of coordinators and chairpersons, six in ten, are 'very satisfied' with the frequency of meetings. Dissatisfaction is greater where there are fewer meetings. Smaller clusters are somewhat more likely to meet less frequently than other clusters. LMC meetings are generally used for the coordinator to report on project progress (94 per cent), to discuss financial matters (89 per cent), to discuss human resources (79 per cent) and to provide feedback on the project from the LMC (76 per cent). Two-thirds of LMCs use subcommittees for specific functions. Subcommittees are more commonly used in larger clusters (76 per cent compared with 37 per cent for smaller clusters) and where there is a large LMC (100 per cent compared with 33 per cent for small LMCs). Subcommittees are used more frequently in urban clusters (77 per cent compared with 52 per cent in rural clusters), a pattern that is not explained by the larger size of urban clusters.

Some of those interviewed in the case-study clusters noted the need to reduce the number of meetings over time as a result of them being repetitive:

I think in the last few years the number of times we need to meet has definitely reduced. Because the meetings on a monthly basis were kind of repetitive in a sense. Yes this is going well, yes we've done this. (Valentia, LMC member, medium, urban, in-school).

Another principal felt that the principals in the cluster lack the time to attend these meetings:

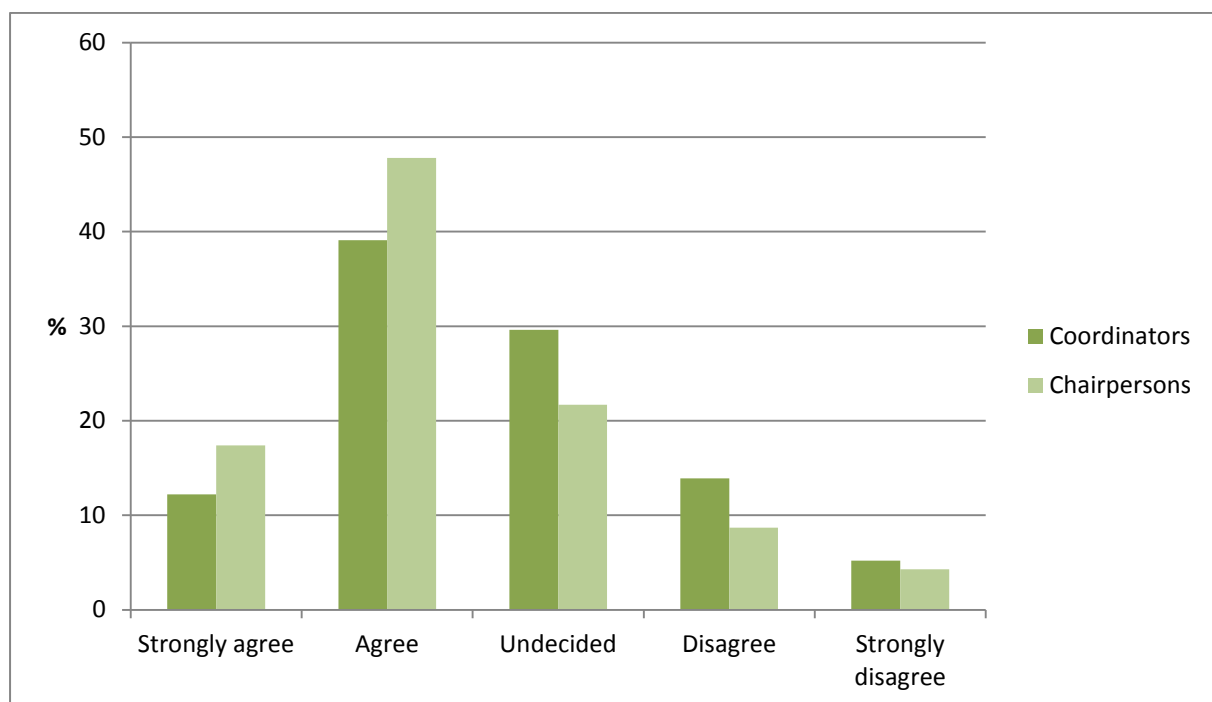
I don't think we've met this year...I'm the only one who has attended every meeting since it was set up...the other Principals... it's just down the list of priorities. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

In the same cluster, the coordinator noted difficulties in getting LMC members to regularly attend meetings. This was particularly problematic where relations between the chairperson and coordinator were weak:

[Decisions are] made between myself and the three principals, I'd go to them and I'd say to them individually is this what you want to do with this, but no, there just isn't an opportunity, they just never seem to be available at the same time so you just can't pin them down. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, in-school).

Figure 7.7 shows the extent to which coordinators and chairpersons feel that LMC members are clear about the functions of the LMC. Coordinators are somewhat more critical, with half feeling that LMC members are clear about their functions compared with two-thirds of chairpersons. There was little variation in these perspectives across types of clusters.

**FIGURE 7.7** Agreement with the Statement that 'Committee Members Are Clear About the Functions of LMC'



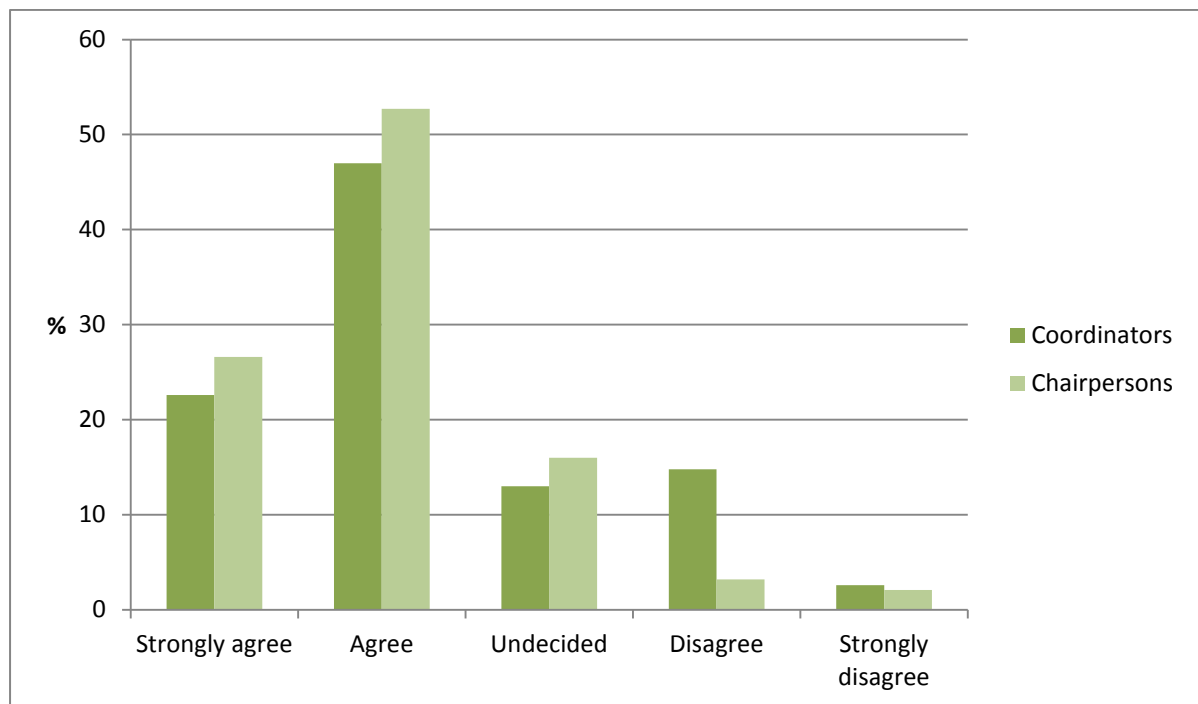
Source: Coordinator survey; Chairperson survey.

The issue around the clarity of the role of the LMC was also raised during the qualitative interviews in the case-study clusters. One stakeholder noted that 'the administrative and financial guidelines are chronically out of date, and actually give misleading information' (Stakeholder). One coordinator felt something stronger than guidelines were needed to define the purpose and role of the committee:

I suppose, at a national level and how I wish there was more directives there and more clarity on the role of, of the LMC. And the different members, and if, if there's to be an executive committee of the LMC. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

The majority of coordinators and chairpersons (70 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) felt that they received sufficient support from the local management committee (Figure 7.8). Coordinators of smaller clusters were more critical of the support they received (35 per cent disagreed that they received sufficient support compared with 16 per cent of medium and 8 per cent of large clusters). Coordinators in clusters where the ETB was the employer were also somewhat more critical of support from the LMC (30 per cent disagreed compared with 12 per cent for LMCs and 7 per cent for BOMs).

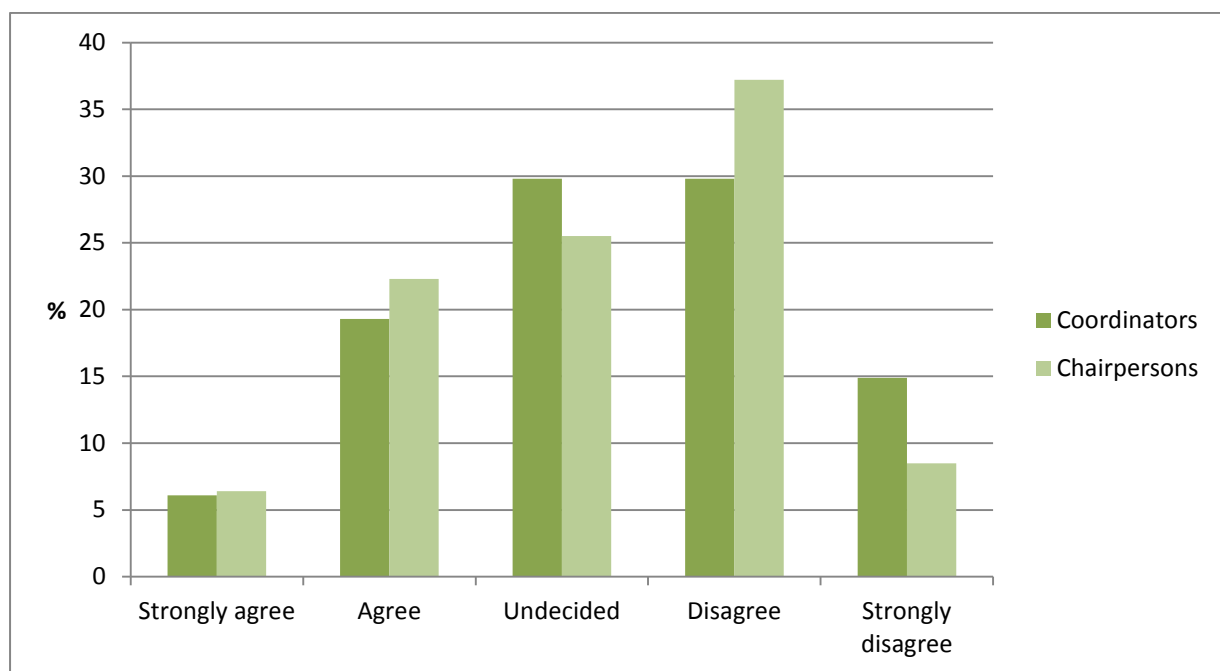
**FIGURE 7.8** Agreement with the Statement that 'I get Sufficient Support from the Local Management Committee'



Source: Coordinator survey; Chairperson survey.

The majority of coordinators and chairpersons were satisfied with the expertise of the LMC in relation to project governance (72 per cent and 80 per cent respectively). However, only a minority of coordinators and chairpersons, around a quarter, felt that the LMC members had the necessary skills to deal with complex legal, financial and HR issues (Figure 7.9). This perception varied little by cluster type so seemed to be an issue across all clusters. The perceived skills gap was, however, somewhat greater where coordinators reported difficulty in recruiting LMC members. Coordinators saw LMC training needs as centring on the definition of roles and responsibilities, human resources, and financial and legal issues.

**FIGURE 7.9** Agreement with the Statement that ‘The Committee Members have the Necessary Skills to Conduct all Matters – Legal, Financial, Employment etc. Appropriately’



Source: Coordinator survey; Chairperson survey.

Some of those interviewed as part of the case-study clusters and stakeholder interviews also noted the need for greater expertise among members to deal with legal or financial issues that arise:

And we’re really trying to find, you know even an accountant, you know, I brought an accountant in just to see everything, was I doing it ok, you know. And you’ve to pay money for that. Whereas it’s just lovely to have it in an organisation or a go to person with that expertise. So the expertise is really not there, local expertise is there but that governance expertise isn’t. And I’m on a wing and a prayer about it. I’d say you know you’re getting by, you know but I don’t know how well, you know I don’t know how well. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

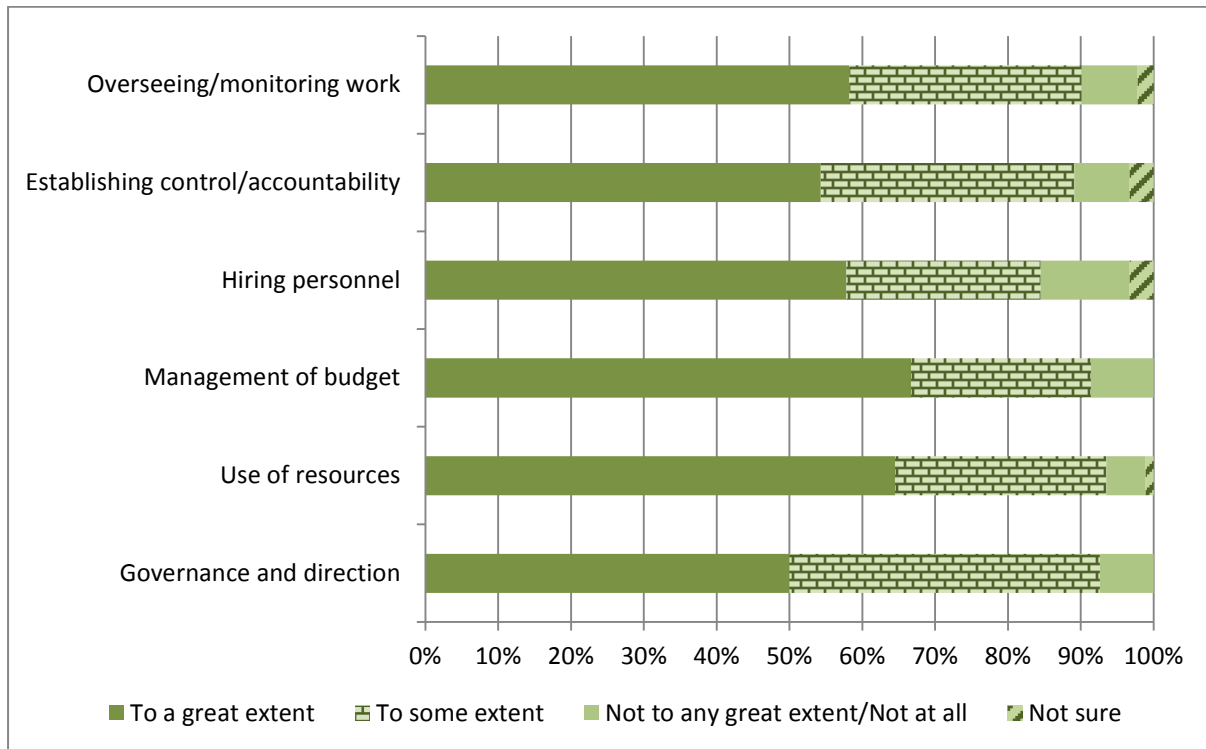
One of the key things is that we haven’t managed to the extent to which we probably should have to up-skill the Local Management Committee, and the School Principals in what their role is and how they should be using their SCP supports (Stakeholder).

In the survey, chairpersons were also asked about their satisfaction with different dimensions of the performance of the LMC. Half or more reported that they were satisfied ‘to a great extent’ with different dimensions of LMC performance (Figure 7.10). Views were somewhat less positive in relation to their role in governance and direction of the project compared with the other dimensions. The vast majority (84-85 per cent) of chairpersons also agreed that ‘the LMC constantly



monitors the cost of delivery of SCP interventions and supports’ and ‘has an important role in assessing and evaluating the quality of interventions within SCP’. Three-quarters of chairpersons agreed with the statement that ‘the LMC provides good operational guidance to the coordinators’.

**FIGURE 7.10** Chairperson’s Satisfaction with the Performance of the LMC



Source: Chairperson survey.

Chairpersons were asked to respond to the statement that ‘There is sufficient training provided to members of LMC’. Only a small proportion (13 per cent) agreed with this statement with 19 per cent undecided and 52 per cent disagreeing. This pattern applied across all cluster types. Chairpersons were much more critical of training where they felt there was a skills gap in relation to important functions.

### 7.5.1 The Content of LMC Meetings

Managing and discussing finance featured in many of the case-study cluster interviews as being the main focus of the LMC meetings. Some noted that discussions around budget often dominated these meetings in recent years as a result of cuts to funding and its implications for provision:

I suppose it’s all about governance, keeping an eye on how things, and to make sure that we get value for money for what we have, and what we’re

doing...like the role seems to be, you know, it gets more and more depressing, but maybe we're at, hopefully, hopefully things will start climbing again now. (Dursey, chairperson, rural, large size, diverse).

In one cluster where frequent meetings were held, the agenda focussed on recent spending:

You'd have income and expenditure side to it and it would have breakdown of what money was spent on. So they'd know, so everyone would know in the committee how much money we got, if we got a lodgement, what did we spend. (Blasket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

One coordinator used the retention plan as the structure of the LMC meetings to plan the way the next year's budget would be spent:

The retention plan... is the basis on which we start. We agree what we're going to, how we're going to spend the money. Once we get confirmation we've got the money then we start to do what we said we'd do. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

These meetings would also make decisions about 'how the budget for the cluster's divided out' (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, BOM, high, diverse) and:

Make sure... that the funding is spread out that the targets are met. That it's been used the right way, that everyone collaborates together to get the benefit for the kids. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

A second related feature of the meetings was on planning for programmes. In one cluster, an LMC member described how the meetings were used to inform members of activities being run and decide on the budgets required:

What the school programmes are going to be in relation to summer programme. Maybe it's deducing stuff that they need funding for, particular programmes in the school, maybe if, at the time now they've done some art. They've done music. They've done football, sports, things like that...and then educational stuff as well. (Lettermore, LMC member, small, urban, diverse).

In another cluster, the coordinator noted how discussions at the LMC meetings were lively and robust, particularly around decisions on important issues such as child protection policy. Members of the LMC appeared to have an equal voice but, as a result, decisions around various issues took time:

They all have their say, you know there's nobody, you know, has a higher rank and that we tend to, you know discuss out everything. ... I could just write the policy now in a day. I could write a retention plan in a day, you know. But... if people are to buy into it and to be part of it, it's not going to work that way. And it takes time and going from one person to another person and agreeing and compromising. (Blasket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

Meetings also involved reviewing programmes throughout the year and modifying them if they were not working to the benefit of the target group. Some noted how if a programme was not working it was obvious:

You're kind of going okay well that's not really working so then I'd hear about it, we'd talk maybe about ways we could change it and then we'd bring it to the principals of the schools and then I'd bring it to the chair and then I'd mention it to my management committee. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

### 7.5.2 Sharing Information/Collegiality

One aspect of the LMC not explored in the survey data collected relates to the benefits of the LMC in forming relations between school principals in the same cluster. The interviews with principals in the case-study clusters highlighted this as a by-product of the LMC meetings. Many noted the benefit of the management committee in discussing similar school-level problems:

There is a very good relationship within the cluster between all the principals and the various schools you know. And the management meetings then are very, very helpful when we get together to discuss different things as well is really, really helpful. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Some principals felt that these meetings removed a sense of isolation as they were able to share similar issues and get advice and support:

At the management committee here it's the issues that are specific to the programme and we do find that you get a considerable amount of, I suppose, relief in knowing that you're not on your own and that the problems aren't unusual to yourself. (Durse, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

Our team, the group of principals and our committee and, you know, support workers, we work exceptionally well together. There's a great relationship between everybody...even school situations, because there's so many schools in our cluster, you know we can, if I've an issue or something I can get advice from another school that maybe they have dealt with it this way or that...and we sort of have each other's back, because we

all have the same sort of children, they're all coming from the same background, they're all extremely disadvantaged, you know. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Some found that the success of the LMC meetings was down to the coordinator in setting the agenda. They appeared to offer a means in which to share experiences and discuss issues with other professionals:

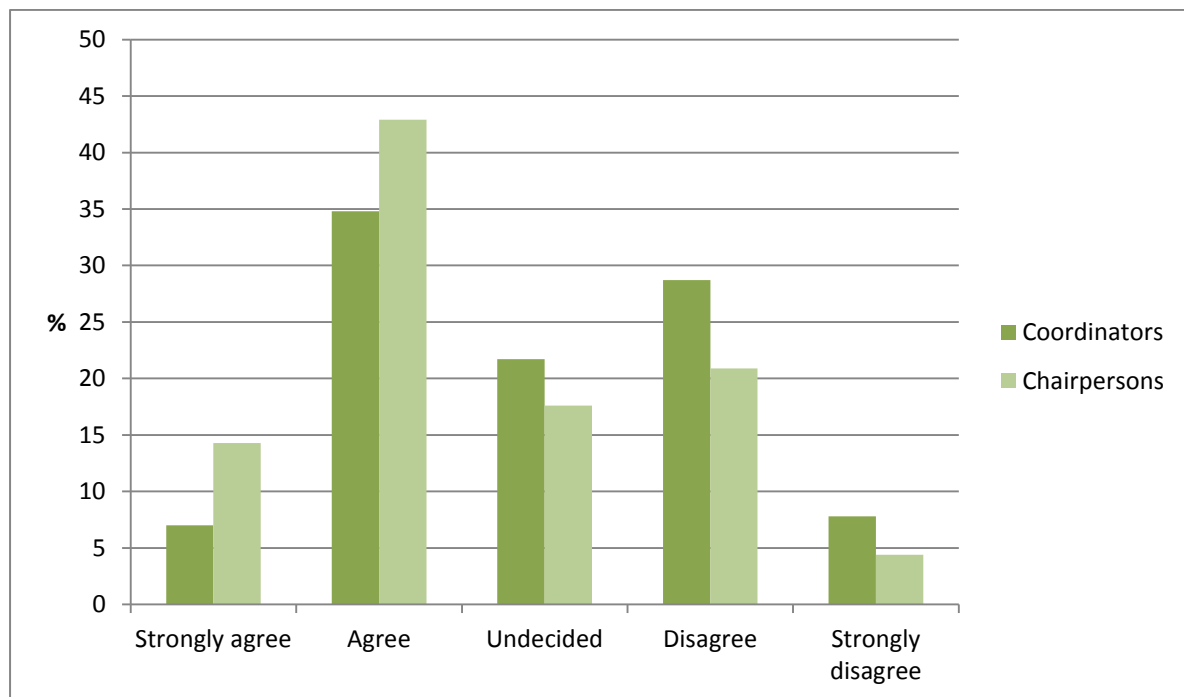
I find it very well, because we can hop things off each other and then we're learning from each other at the same time. And then we see what's best practice in all of the schools, which I think is very beneficial and... I have to say we work extremely well together, but it's driven by the coordinators, it's driven by [coordinator]. I mean she sets the agendas; she'll come to me with them. (Inishmore, chairperson and principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

This level of collegiality was not contained within the LMC meetings but provided principals with more immediate support on a daily basis by phone, for example:

It's quite a small cluster it's very easy to pick up the phone and say 'I'm having a lot of problems with this, or this isn't working, you know, can we pop over to the school?' You know so that we can have those informal meetings. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

## 7.6 REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

The work of SCP clusters involves a series of reporting arrangements from the coordinator to the chairperson and LMC as well as from the coordinator and chairperson to senior managers in SCP/Tusla. Chapter 6 and Section 7.3 have indicated the relative importance of reporting in the activities and time allocation of coordinators and chairpersons. Much less than half (42 per cent) of coordinators were satisfied with current reporting structures while chairpersons expressed higher levels of satisfaction (with 57 per cent being satisfied) (Figure 7.11). There was relatively little variation in satisfaction levels by cluster type, though coordinators in clusters with ETBs as the employer expressed greater dissatisfaction (53 per cent compared with 24-25 per cent for LMCs and BOMs).

**FIGURE 7.11** Agreement with the Statement that 'I'm Satisfied with the Current Reporting Structures Regarding SCP'

Source: Coordinator survey; Chairperson survey,

Coordinators were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding the frequency of reporting to different levels within SCP and the purpose of such reporting. In terms of the frequency of reporting, the vast majority (89 per cent) of coordinators agreed that they 'regularly' reported to the chairperson and two-thirds indicated that they received regular feedback from the chairperson. Those in larger clusters or with larger LMCs were more likely to 'strongly agree' that they regularly reported to, and received feedback from, the chairperson but regular reporting was a feature across all cluster types. Regular reporting to senior SCP management was less prevalent (with 38 per cent indicating such reporting was 'regular') while just under a third (32 per cent) indicated that they received regular feedback in return. Regular reporting to senior management appeared to be more common in clusters with larger LMCs (58 per cent compared with 30 per cent in small and medium LMCs). Regular feedback from SCP senior management appeared less prevalent in clusters run by ETBs (60 per cent disagreeing compared with 25 per cent of LMC-run clusters and 32 per cent of BOM-run clusters). Although many coordinators were critical of current reporting structures (see Figure 7.11), three-quarters agreed that 'reporting to the LMC is useful for target setting' and two-thirds indicated that 'reporting to Tusla facilitates the evaluation and development of the project'. While finding reporting useful in many respects, two-thirds of coordinators agreed that 'reporting processes take up too much of my time'. Coordinators were more

dissatisfied with current reporting structures where there was not regular reporting to, or feedback from, senior SCP management.

This issue of reporting and administration for the SCP coordinator also arose among stakeholder interviews. One stakeholder suggested that the extra burden on coordinators to report activities within the programme took them from more important work with target children:

While good governance is incredibly important, and financial accountability is incredibly important... it is also important that there wouldn't be too much administration involved. If you have your SCP coordinator covering all the schools and you have your individual coordinator in each school creating a lot of paperwork; one can question is it necessarily serving the needs of the students. (Stakeholder).

The vast majority (88 per cent) of chairpersons were 'satisfied with the reporting from local coordinators' and described this reporting as 'regular' (92 per cent). Chairpersons were more likely than coordinators to describe the feedback from chairpersons to coordinators as regular (85 per cent compared with 65 per cent). Less than a third (30 per cent) of chairpersons saw reporting as taking up too much of their time, a much lower figure than for coordinators. Like coordinators, chairpersons saw reporting as useful for target-setting (92 per cent) and project evaluation and development (76 per cent).

## 7.7 CONCLUSIONS

Using a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources, this chapter examines the governance of SCP at local level. Governance was suggested by some stakeholders to be one of the biggest weaknesses of the programme. In particular, clusters vary significantly in their legal and employment arrangements, with some operating through ETBs, while in others the employer is the Board of Management (BOM) of one of the schools in the cluster or the Local Management Committee (LMC). Almost three-quarters of chairpersons are school principals. The role of chairpersons consists primarily of monitoring expenditure in the cluster, monitoring the delivery of activities to students, monitoring and evaluating the quality of SCP programmes and liaising with school principals. Findings here show that the cluster size and whether the cluster is urban or rural based can influence the activities of the chairperson. Monitoring the delivery of activities was less prevalent in larger clusters, for example, and monitoring and evaluating the quality of programme was assigned greater importance in these clusters. Chairpersons appear to spend the greatest amount of time meeting personnel (including the SCP coordinator) and spend some of their time in contact with students or meeting school staff and other school principals.

There is considerable variation across clusters in the size of the local management committee, with larger clusters having larger LMCs. LMC membership is strongly dominated by school staff. Findings highlight a lack of process around recruiting and inducting new members to the LMC. LMC members typically meet 3-4 times a year, with the majority of coordinators and chairpersons very satisfied with the frequency of such meetings. While coordinators and chairpersons are generally satisfied with the expertise of LMC members in relation to project governance, only a minority feel that they have the necessary skills to deal with the complex legal, financial and HR issues with which clusters are commonly faced.

# Chapter 8

---

## Funding and Resources

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at resourcing of the School Completion Programme. Section 8.2 examines the staffing models used across clusters while Section 8.3 analyses satisfaction with existing premises. Section 8.4 explores the level of funding to clusters and the allocation of resources within them. The final sections deal with the impact of the recession on DEIS schools and the cuts in funding for SCP clusters.

### 8.2 STAFFING

Data from the Governance Survey 2013 indicated that over 2,000 people were employed through SCP.<sup>9</sup> In the 2014/15 survey, coordinators were asked about the current staffing models in their cluster. Less than half (44 per cent) of clusters had any full-time staff apart from coordinators; those who had full-time staff tended to have one or two (Table 8.1). The majority of clusters have some part-time staff, with an average of four such staff across all clusters. Around half of clusters employ sessional staff, with an average of 7.5 sessional staff across clusters. Just over a fifth (21 per cent) of clusters have full-time, part-time and sessional staff. Not surprisingly, larger clusters are more likely to have full-time, part-time and/or sessional staff than smaller clusters. This pattern is consistent with the pattern of less time spent on face-to-face contact with students and more time on staff management among coordinators of large clusters (see Chapter 6). However, larger clusters would be expected to have more staff because they include more schools and thus more students. A more accurate comparison is to examine the ratio of targeted students to number of staff. These patterns are shown in Figure 8.1 for clusters where they have one or more full-time, part-time or sessional staff respectively. It is clear that larger clusters actually have a larger ratio of students to staff than smaller clusters, reflecting economies of scale in larger clusters.

---

<sup>9</sup> The survey focused on the numbers of staff in paid employment and did not collect information on whether volunteers were involved in any activities.



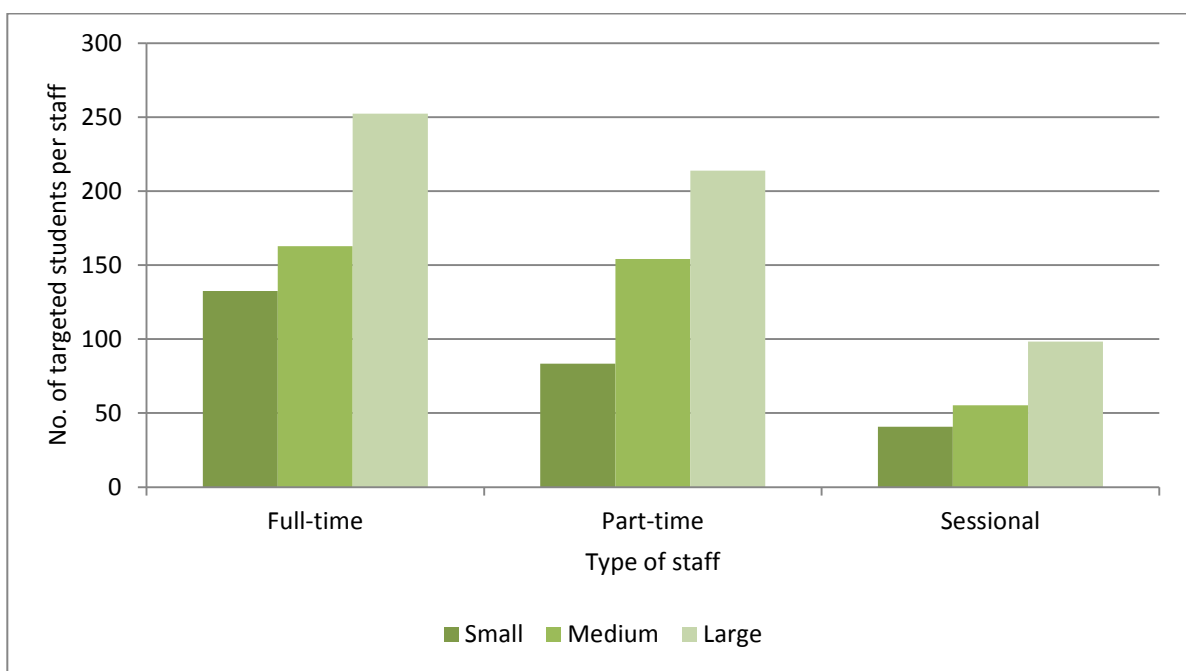
**TABLE 8.1** STAFFING MODELS IN SCP CLUSTERS

	Full-time (excluding Coordinator)	Part-time	Sessional
None (%)	56.1	37.7	49.1
One or more (%)	43.9	62.3	50.9
Mean	0.89	4.32	7.50

*Note:* The categories are not mutually exclusive.  
*Source:* Coordinators survey.

Urban clusters are more likely to employ full-time staff than rural clusters (54 per cent doing so compared with 35 per cent of rural clusters). This pattern is not only related to differences in size by cluster location; urban small and medium clusters are more likely to employ full-time staff than rural clusters but among large urban and rural clusters there are few differences in the proportion employing full-time staff. Clusters run by an ETB are somewhat less likely to employ full-time staff than other clusters (38 per cent compared with 48-52 per cent of those run by LMCs or BOMs). Clusters with a diverse range of provision across the four pillars are more likely to employ full-time staff (53 per cent compared with 35 per cent of clusters that focus on in-school provision); they are also more likely to employ sessional staff (60 per cent compared with 46 per cent).

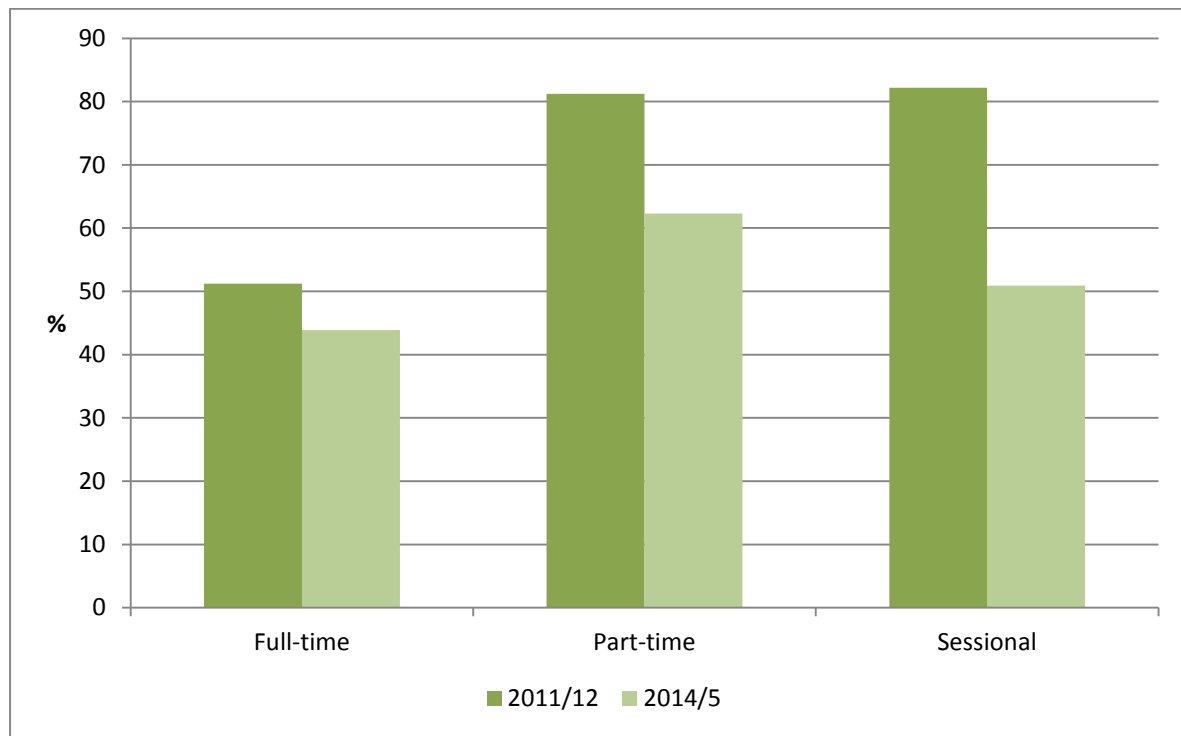
**FIGURE 8.1** Ratio of Targeted Students to Staff Numbers (where there is One or More Staff in a Cluster) by Cluster Size



*Source:* Coordinator survey.

Data from the Annual Progress Reports of 2011/12 allow us to compare changes in staffing models over time. Figure 8.2 indicates that the proportion of clusters employing staff other than the coordinator has declined over time, with the greatest decline evident for sessional staff.

**FIGURE 8.2** Having any Full-Time, Part-Time or Sessional Staff, 2011/12 and 2014/15



Source: Coordinator survey; Annual Progress Report 2011/12.

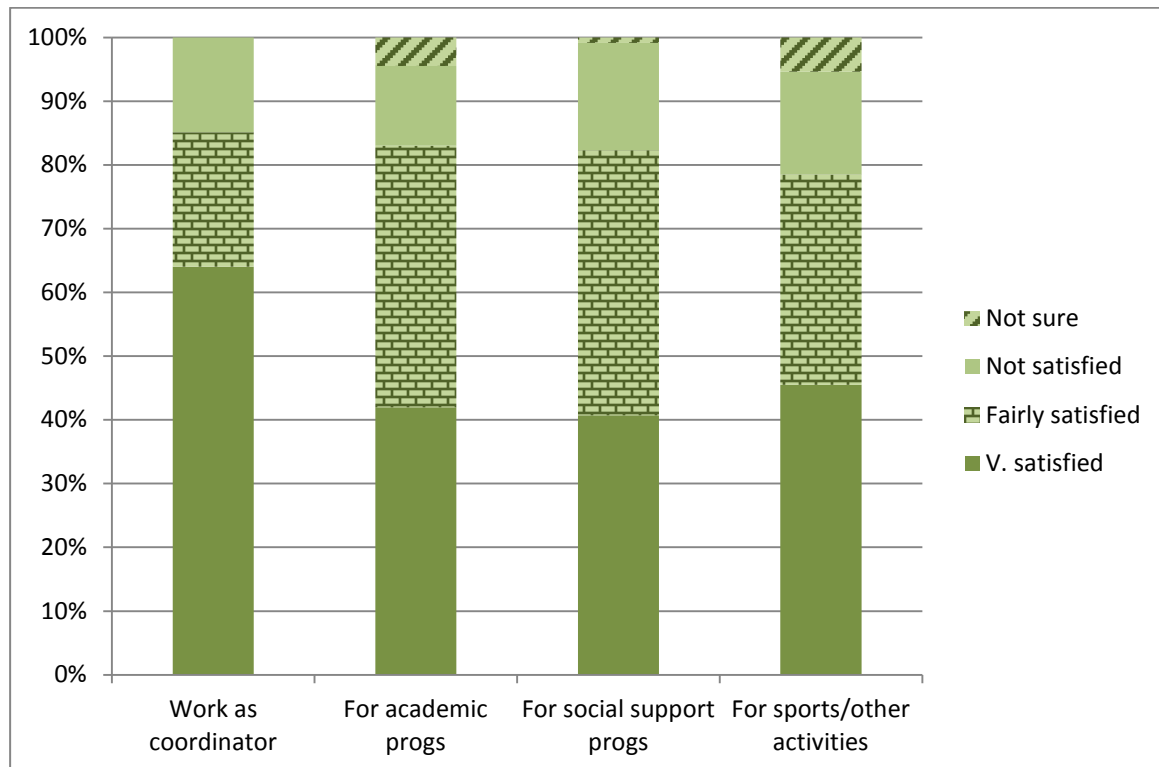
Coordinators were divided in their satisfaction with current staffing levels; 16 per cent were very satisfied, 33 per cent were 'satisfied' while just under half (48 per cent) were 'not satisfied'. Dissatisfaction levels were higher among those without any part-time staff (58 per cent compared with 44 per cent) and those without sessional staff (56 per cent compared with 43 per cent). When asked about challenges in offering different kinds of provision (see Chapter 3), staffing was mentioned by a significant proportion of coordinators.

### 8.3 PREMISES

Data from the Governance survey indicate that four-fifths of SCPs are housed in school premises. In the majority (61 per cent) of cases, SCP is housed in school premises with no rent charged; in a further 20 per cent they are located in school buildings but rent is charged; two were located in owned premises, with the remainder in rental/leasing arrangements. The survey of coordinators indicated that the majority (64 per cent) are very satisfied with the premises available to

them for their work as coordinator, with a further fifth 'fairly' satisfied and one-in-six expressing dissatisfaction (Figure 8.3). Coordinators report greater satisfaction with the premises available to them for their work as coordinator than with space for the provision of programmes and activities. In terms of satisfaction with the space for activities, coordinators are evenly divided between being 'very' and 'fairly' satisfied with the premises.

**FIGURE 8.3** Coordinator Satisfaction with Current Premises

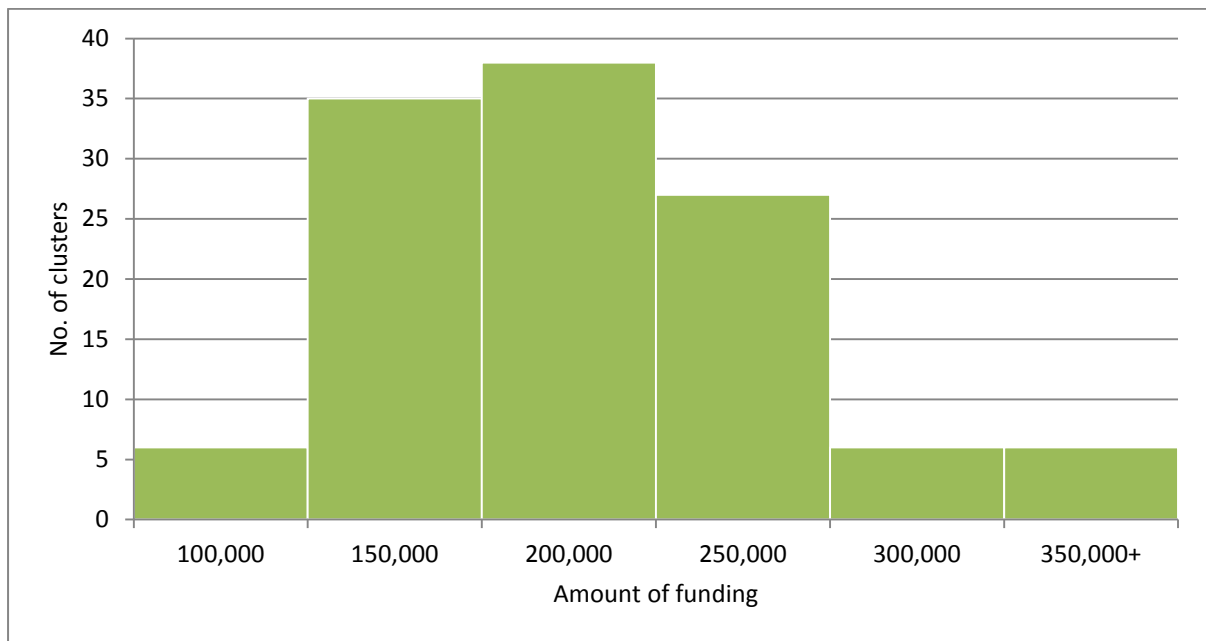


Source: Coordinator survey.

#### 8.4 EXPENDITURE

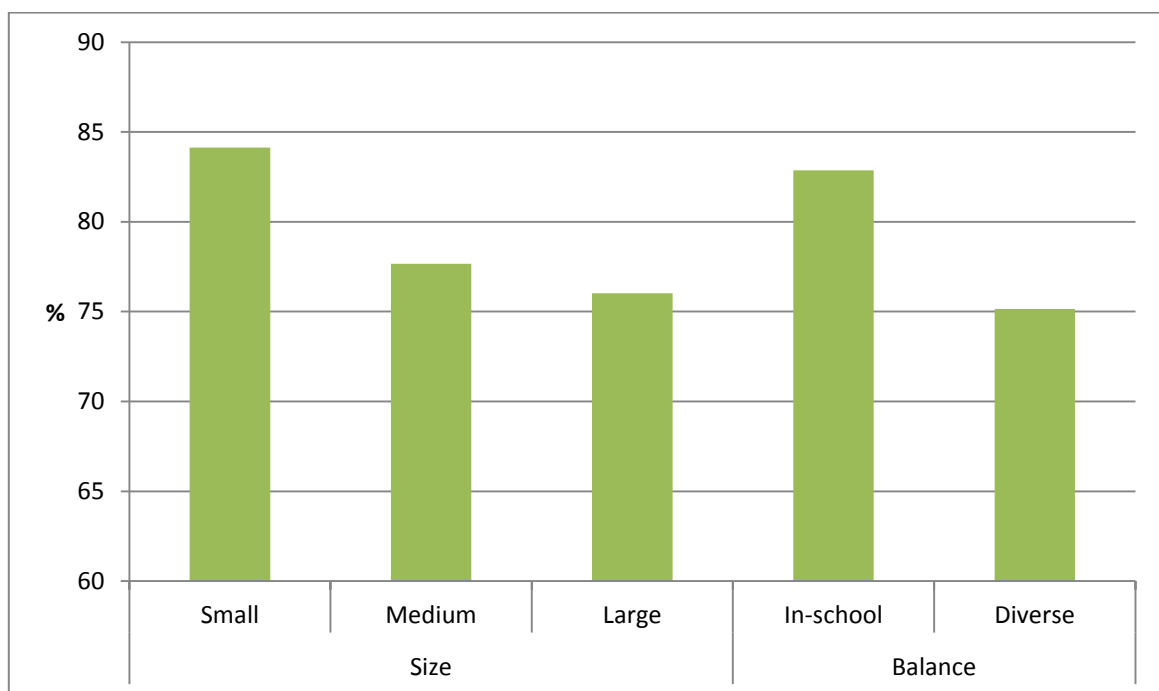
Coordinators were asked about the proportion of funding spent on staff costs, project activities and administrative costs. The mean proportion spent on staff costs was 79 per cent of total funding. However, the percentage spent on staff varied across clusters, representing less than two-thirds of costs in 16 per cent of clusters and more than 90 per cent of costs in almost a fifth of clusters. This pattern is consistent with the variation across clusters found in absolute levels of staff costs using Annual Progress Report data for 2011/12 (Figure 8.4). Smaller clusters spend more in relative terms on staff costs, suggesting some economies of scale in medium and large clusters (Figure 8.5). Clusters that emphasise in-school provision tend to spend more on staff costs than clusters with a diverse range of activities. Proportionately more is spent on staff costs where a smaller proportion of the student cohort is included in the target group.

**FIGURE 8.4** Total Spending on Staff Costs, 2011/12



Source: Annual Progress Report 2011/12.

**FIGURE 8.5** Proportion of Budget Spent on Staff Costs by Cluster Characteristics



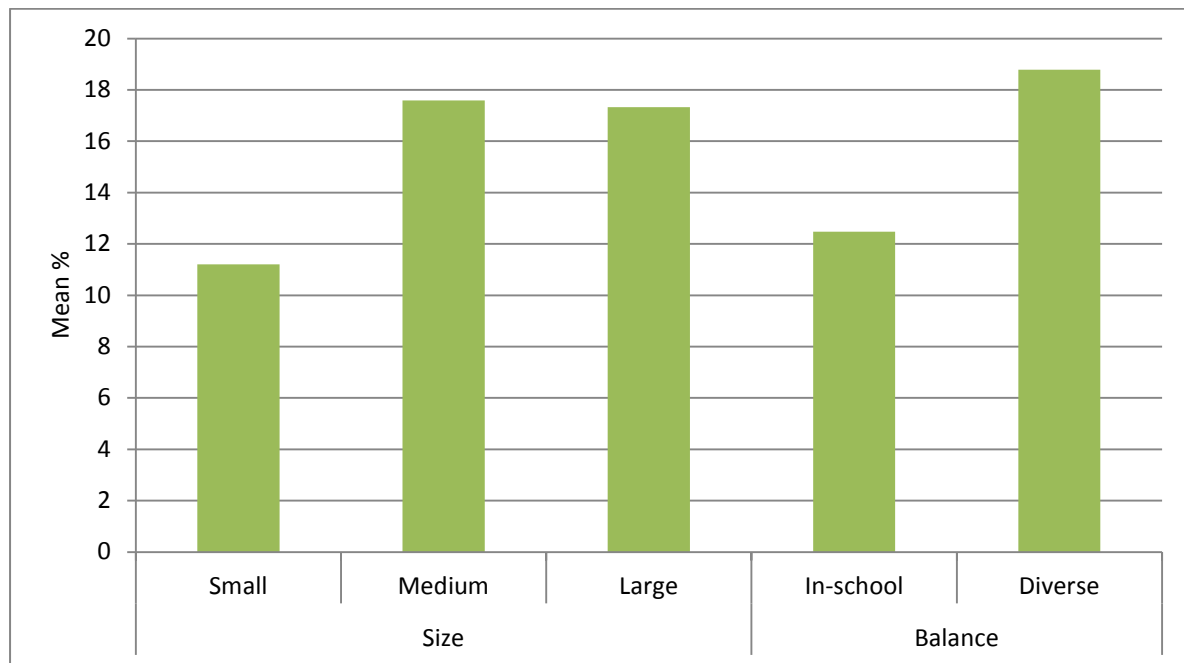
Source: Coordinator survey.

Note: Many clusters employ full-time, part-time and sessional staff.

Coordinators reported that an average of 16 per cent of spending went on project activities. Almost half of clusters (48 per cent) spent less than 10 per cent of project income on activities while 12 per cent of clusters spent more than 30 per

cent of funding on such interventions. Reflecting their greater relative staff costs, small clusters spend proportionately less on activities than medium and large clusters (Figure 8.5). Clusters with a diverse range of provision across the four pillars and those with a larger proportion of students in their target group tend to spend more on project activities than those focused on in-school provision.

**FIGURE 8.6** Proportion of Budget Spent on Project Activities by Cluster Characteristics



Source: Coordinator survey.

Clusters spend an average of 5.5 per cent of funding on administration, with relative spending on this category exceeding 6 per cent in a quarter of clusters. Spending on administration does not vary systematically by cluster characteristics but is slightly higher where sessional staff are employed and where the LMC is the employer. Clusters with diverse activities tend to spend somewhat more on administration than clusters that focus on in-school provision, reflecting their use of sessional staff to run after-school and holiday provision.

Coordinators were asked whether any of the cluster funding came from fund-raising or donations. Just 14 per cent indicated that they had such a source of funding; in the vast majority of cases, this made up less than 2 per cent of all funding. Reliance on fund-raising did not vary systematically by cluster characteristics. Clusters that relied on fund-raising tended to spend slightly more on staff costs and less on project activities. Only one of the case-study clusters indicated that they had managed to raise a significant amount of money from

fund-raising and they had used these resources for a marked enrichment of facilities.

That's an open area where we have the café itself and the kids hang out there. That's where the kids hang out. Upstairs we have a pool room and a games room. There's televisions, PCs, there's a library and then this side we have a gymnasium. Again we got grants to, to do those. On the far side here, the first project we did was the astro turf pitch. We felt we were doing a lot of stuff for the kids around sport and we thought if we had our own place because it's quite costly to, to hire places you know. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

One other cluster had managed to raise some money from local and community grants.

She [the coordinator] would have grown the programme hugely from let's say core funding... I know she gets funding from the Leader Programme, there is the school, and we get substantial School Meals funding... She got funding for the bus originally from the Dormant Accounts. (Durse, LMC, rural, large size, diverse).

In the survey, coordinators were asked about how the funding was divided within the cluster. The responses were broad, centring on 'needs' and being 'divided among schools' (once staffing costs had been taken out of the total budget). Information from the case-study clusters yielded greater insight into the process of budget allocation within clusters. In some cases, clusters adopted the policy of dividing the funding (more or less) evenly between schools.

The salaries would be provided for, we take out then money for holiday supports and then whatever is left it's divided... the secondary school get a double share... So once you have that money then through the School Completion management committee we would sit down then, each school can decide how it's going to spend that money....it would be at school level. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

The remainder of money [after staff costs] is divided between the schools equally. They've decided that. It used to be based on their target numbers but then everybody was so up and down, over and back that we decided... [to estimate] an average number from our target list and divided the money out like that. So then the schools spend their money on services like the breakfast club staff, homework club personnel, holiday interventions. So we still control the money. So they bring in their hours and we pay out accordingly like that. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

In other cases, priority activities were agreed among the group and the money allocated accordingly.

We look at how much money we've got...we take salaries out of it, we look at what's left but then we would prioritise after that. Do we want a summer programme? Yes, we do. What can we reasonably spend on it for a reasonable, we'll take that out...then we look at, we've, we've the home work clubs, the schools love the homework clubs. They all want to keep their homework clubs. That would be a priority. So we put an amount of funding into that...and that's the problem. It's in fact since the cut backs got to where they are now, it's nearly all personnel we have. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

The allocation of funding was seen as causing some difficulty where school profiles, size and student needs varied within the cluster.

Ours is the biggest school but the funds are distributed kind of evenly... I think it's the local management team decide it... but that was inherited. I think it was decided way back. So, so I think maybe a little bit of rejuvelling of that would be, would be beneficial.... That would be an issue. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

A certain degree of inertia was also evident in other clusters, where the budget allocation between schools was decided some years previously and persisted, even in the context of changing circumstances.

For historical reasons maybe, some schools have got a greater allocation of resources than others... that's just looking at it globally... I suppose our input would be staff in here... we get very, very little financial input. (Valentia, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

Coordinators were also asked about their satisfaction with how funding is apportioned within the cluster. One-in-six report themselves as 'very satisfied', 57 per cent are 'fairly' satisfied, 5 per cent are unsure and 22 express dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction levels are much greater in rural clusters (37 per cent compared with 10 per cent in urban clusters). Dissatisfaction is somewhat greater where clusters have at least one non-DEIS school (28 per cent compared with 20 per cent) but the differences are not very marked. Clusters where post-primary schools make up a larger proportion in the cluster tend to be more dissatisfied with the allocation of funding. Those in smaller clusters are somewhat more dissatisfied with funding allocation within the cluster (30 per cent compared with 25 per cent in medium clusters and 16 per cent in large clusters). Clusters run by LMCs are more satisfied than those with other arrangements, with 11 per cent expressing dissatisfaction compared with 24 per cent of those run by school BOMs and 33 per cent of those run by ETBs. Those who were dissatisfied with funding allocation within clusters were also much more likely to be dissatisfied with current clustering arrangements (see Chapter 5). Coordinators are also more

likely to express dissatisfaction where they are less involved in DEIS activities in the cluster schools.

### 8.5 THE RECESSION AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Ireland has experienced one of the most dramatic economic downturns among OECD countries since 2008. Whelan and Maître (2014) found that the proportion of the Irish population who were economically vulnerable, that is, at greater risk of poverty and deprivation, increased from an average of 16 per cent pre-recession (2004-2008) to an average of 26 per cent after the start of the recession (2009-2011). Rates of income poverty and material deprivation have been higher for children than for adults since 2004 (CSO, 2014). Furthermore, the bottom (and top) of the income distributions have experienced the greatest fall in income over the recession (Keane et al., 2014). Over the course of the recession there has been an increase in the number of medical card holders, a key indicator of socio-economic disadvantage, of about 10 per cent at school level for all DEIS and non-DEIS second-level schools (Weir et al., 2014). These trends have obvious consequences for the families of children attending DEIS schools. Material conditions have been found to significantly influence children's educational outcomes (McCoy et al., 2014) and their socio-emotional development (Watson et al., 2014). Therefore children and young people attending DEIS schools have experienced deteriorating socio-economic circumstances in the wake of the recession, circumstances that are likely to have impacted on their need for support.

The impact of the recession on the living conditions of children and their families emerged as a strong theme in the cluster case-studies, especially in interviews with principals of DEIS schools. Principals referred to an increased concentration of disadvantage and the complexity of issues faced by children and young people.

Very deprived backgrounds, huge amount of unemployment, you might have, you know, alcoholism, maybe drug abuse, violence in the home, you know children would have been exposed to an awful lot coming to school. (Bere, primary principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

On the socio-economic scale... the families were being more and more affected and they were beginning to really feel the bite of it. And I think more and more were vulnerable in terms of what they could pay, in terms of fees, just different bits and pieces, you could see it, you could even see it sometimes... in what they were wearing, their books. (Durseley, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

I see the decline now and... I see the negativity of it here. People not working, mother and fathers, and I see the drug issue starting to come back a bit...through boredom and kids then on the street then are open to being



asked to transfer drugs. (Basket, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

New issues were also seen as emerging. Homelessness was seen as becoming a feature in some school populations.

We would have some kids, like particularly last year you know, who were moving literally from family to family, with their own family, due to homelessness, and sleeping in a car, coming from a van... and they own nothing. (Lambay, primary principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

We have 12 per cent of our families are homeless. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

In addition, growing unemployment was seen as having impacted on families that would not previously have required support.

Poverty again is a big one. Unemployment and even for families who wouldn't have been on our, say, typical target list a few years ago. Because of the way things have changed with the recession, even some of what we would call, you know, your well off families. People who have lost jobs, suddenly you've got kids on the target list who you would never have put on your target list five years ago, now they're on a target list... you know it boils down to poverty and the economy having a huge impact. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

In addition to impacting on the living conditions of families, expenditure cuts had influenced the level and nature of public and community services. DEIS funding was largely ring-fenced during the reductions in public expenditure that took place from 2008, although levels of funding fell for the School Completion Programme, an issue which is discussed in greater detail in the following section. However, other changes in educational policy have impacted on disadvantaged schools. Such changes include the removal of the ex quota allowance for guidance counsellors, a reduction in the allocation for language support, and the withdrawal of the Visiting Teacher Service and Resource Teachers for Travellers. Given the greater reliance of working-class young people on formal guidance within the school (see Smyth et al., 2011), the withdrawal of the allocation for guidance will have had particularly serious implications for young people in DEIS schools. Furthermore, many DEIS schools had previously been in receipt of additional guidance resources through the Guidance Enhancement Initiative; its abolition is likely to lead to even greater difficulties in combining the educational guidance and personal counselling elements of the guidance counsellor role in the context of reduced resources. The greater concentration of immigrant and Traveller students in disadvantaged schools (see Smyth et al., 2015) means a

greater impact from the withdrawal of dedicated supports for these groups of children and young people.

These reductions in services were seen as directly impacting on the target group children and young people and thus shifting needs for support back on to the school.

Many other agencies with which we would have been involved over the years have either folded, had their own funding cut or simply find that they're spread so thin that... they're finding it difficult to keep themselves going. (Lettermore, chairperson, urban, small, diverse).

Schools have been cut, local community groups have been cut, everybody has been cut, voluntary groups have been cut... it's everywhere. (Dursey, chairperson, rural, large size, diverse).

The increased demands on our services due to the economic recession and subsequent cuts in all state agencies budgets as well has not been recognised. ... SCP is being seen as the go-to agency to address all problems, whether educational or social. We are not qualified to be social workers and our roles are becoming all encompassing; this cannot be sustained. (Coordinator survey response, rural, large).

The community area, the youth groups have all been cut very seriously. And their resources are depleted. ... They're not able to open every day of the week. (Basket, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

One principal described the negative impact of changes in the nature of services for Traveller children:

We would've seen that the Traveller pupils were starting to achieve, transfer well and be retained within the secondary school system. Now we see that since the Visiting Teacher... for Traveller Service is gone, those children are going. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

## 8.6 PERCEPTIONS OF FUNDING ADEQUACY

Concerns were expressed by a number of stakeholders and SCP staff about the criteria for allocating funding to clusters and their relationship with need. When SCP was initially established, it was stated that the criteria which determined funding 'include the cost of the local coordinator, the number of schools, the number of targeted pupils, the level of disadvantage and the supports to be implemented' (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2006). In 2003/04, significant variations were evident in the total amounts by cluster, ranging from €74,800 to €362,100 (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2006). Since then, funding has reflected the retention plans submitted by clusters. However, since the reduction

in overall funding for SCP (from €32.9 million in 2008 to €24.7 million for 2015), respondents indicate that each cluster experienced a substantial decline in funding levels.

It is essentially funding that is based on historical expenditure. Funding does not vary based on need between clusters. (Stakeholder).

However, some respondents emphasised that needs varied significantly across clusters, with more complex needs in some local areas.

I sometimes don't understand how all projects countrywide are treated the same when it's very clear that some areas of Ireland need more resources. I have taken a 33 per cent cut since 2008. That's a staggering cut for an area that is so affected by drugs, gangs and crime. (Coordinator survey response, urban medium-sized cluster).

Over three-quarters of chairpersons and 85 per cent of coordinators were dissatisfied with the level of available funding for SCP. Such dissatisfaction was evident across all types of clusters. However, coordinators of rural clusters were somewhat more likely to be dissatisfied than those in urban clusters (88 per cent compared with 80 per cent). Clusters that were dissatisfied with funding spent relatively more on staff costs and less on project activities.

Almost all (95 per cent) of the clusters reported ceasing or altering provision in the last three years. In almost all of these cases, provision was ceased largely because of insufficient resources. Interviews in the case-study clusters yielded a good deal of information on how cuts had impacted on provision. Clusters adopted a number of different strategies in response to reduced resources. One approach was to reduce the number of children in the target group overall and/or who could participate in specific activities.

With all the cuts to that as well there's lots of children that aren't getting the supports that they need. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

Programme funding was reduced by 33 per cent over recent years. In the meantime needs and numbers of young people 'at risk' have increased. (Coordinator survey response, small rural cluster).

We're scratching the surface really, you know...we're trying to target well okay this child is needy but suddenly this person needs her more like...and that's, that's it, and we're juggling, we're juggling you know...they're, they're very vulnerable. (Durse, principal rural, large size, diverse).

Secondly, provision was offered for a shorter period over the school year or for fewer days per week. After-school and holiday provision was seen as absorbing the bulk of these reductions.

It means that you have to cut back on the services. You know you don't have as many after-school supports or holiday provisions as you would like. You can't do as much work yourself as you would like. You can't buy in services because the funding is not there. And trying to stretch yourself over [X] schools to get to all of your target students is near impossible. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

We've had to cut back on the homework club at sometimes, at key times...because we simply ran out of funding... it had a knock-on effect and all our third year students lost out on that. (Lettermore, chairperson, urban, small, diverse).

While our cluster prioritised after-school supports when looking at the implementation of funding cuts, they have been significantly reduced. ... The number of weeks for which each support is available has been reduced significantly. The impact of the loss of a full-time post in the core SCP team has been most significant in terms of after-school activities. ... Previously holiday provision would have covered Easter and Summer break period but this has been reduced to summer activities only now as a direct consequence of funding. (Coordinator survey response, urban, medium size).

Our summer programme is decimated, completely decimated, because it costs so much because of staffing. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

Especially the after-school stuff has been sacrificed hugely in all the schools because of our cuts. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

The cuts had also meant a rebalancing between funding for personnel and for activities.

Thirdly, some activities had been discontinued completely, in some cases leading to a loss in specialist therapeutic interventions.

The counselling, for example, the funding we received from SCP to fund art therapy, play therapy, like that's been reduced, reduced, reduced. So we've like [X no. of] children here, massive issues. You're actually playing god and saying okay which of you kids is most disturbed, you know...and like the thing is for the sake of the few thousand it costs to roll out our programme, the State would have no problem in fifteen years, sixteen years' time, spending a hundred grand a year keeping them in juvenile detention centres. (Valentia, principal, urban, medium, in-school).

When we had an art therapist, he was excellent, in terms of working with the very at-risk children. And that was very beneficial because again, the very at-risk children are the hardest children to get to access [outside] supports. ... So if they were here, he managed to get to them and... that made a big difference. So that was a big loss I felt. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

Some of those students from abroad would have come from Africa and they would have witnessed murders and stuff you know... As a result we have to provide counselling for them for obvious reasons...and of course you'll find probably talking to the Principals that the counselling issue is very contentious because over the years, since the recession, we've had a number of cuts to budget...we're down about [X] and now, and that has made a significant impact, negatively, on the provision of counselling, so that's a really big deal. (Durseley, coordinator, rural, large size, diverse).

The curtailment of provision was seen as having had very significant effects on children and young people in the participating schools.

Schools have nobody else who will pick up what we do. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

It's just that when you put supports in and then you take them away, I resent that, because we as a school make provisions for stuff, the kids come to depend on, the teachers come to depend on these extra supports and then suddenly through lack of funding we have to withdraw them or pay for them ourselves. (Bere, primary principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Reducing the level of provision was seen as losing continuity of support for the children and people targeted.

I know there's kids walking around that they would be in programmes, they would have been in programmes say three or four years ago. But they're not in programmes now. And if you lose the momentum, it's about momentum I think. They get used to going to the programmes, they're used to going in. Once they fall out of that... then they won't go to any clubs then. (Blasket, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

Cuts in funding, and uncertainty about the future allocation of resources, were viewed as impacting on the capacity to plan and deliver services.

There has been a fear at all levels that their jobs are not secure. This seems to be going on every year, you know, the funding is reduced, we're not sure about our jobs so it's very difficult for people to throw their hearts and soul into a job where even from, you know, at national level they seem to be unsure. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

The lack of permanency in relation to funding is a massive issue in terms of long-term planning, staff morale. (Coordinator survey response, urban, medium size).

Fixed costs reflecting the coordinator salary meant that funding reductions impacted on the money available for activities. Some respondents felt that this would lead to an imbalance in the nature of the programme.

If you're being cut kind of consistently you'd ask the question - well when is it going to stop? When does the programme become non-viable? Like at what stage is there enough money there for [Name] to be coordinator but there's no programme going, on do you know? ... That would be huge, that would be a huge concern... It was never a lot of money but, but you're coming to a point where you're beginning to say at what stage will it become meaningless in a way, you know. (Arranmore, LMC, rural, small size, diverse).

What we don't want to see is the situation where there is money for a coordinator, but no money for events, because these are the bread and butter of School Completion. (Stakeholder).

As the budget gets cut and cut and cut, they'll eventually get to the situation where they only have staff and no money to do anything else with. That's a concern. (Stakeholder).

Stakeholders, coordinators, chairpersons and principals expressed serious concerns about the impact on child outcomes if SCP provision was to be removed.

When you have a targeted resource and you take this away, you'll absolutely see this very quickly. SCP provide an escape valve to take some pressure off the schools. (Stakeholder).

We would be running a risk of a lot of kids falling through the net, particularly the kids who are currently availing of the general preventative work. ... [DEIS] would not necessarily cover all the basics... the level of need is so extraordinary that any extra support is always required. (Stakeholder).

[Without SCP] The cycle of disadvantage and exclusion would be cemented for a great many children, families and communities. (Stakeholder).

School Completion plays a huge part in [supporting children in crisis]... it's part of a mesh if you like, you know, it's like that game of Jenga, you know, where if you pull out one thing and you pull out the wrong one the whole thing collapses. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

You wouldn't be fit to be in the school because it's not manageable without all of the supports that School Completion bring in to us. I mean, we have kids who are traumatised through suicide, traumatised from

seeing their dads being shot on the street. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

## 8.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the level of staffing and funding across SCP clusters. Clusters are found to vary in their staffing models, using different configurations of full-time, part-time and sessional staff. Staffing levels have reduced in recent years, particularly in relation to the number of sessional staff employed. Funding constraints emerged as a dominant theme in the survey of coordinators and chairpersons and in interviews with stakeholders, SCP staff and school principals. Greater deprivation among the target population and a reduction in community-based services in the wake of the recession were seen as putting additional pressure on schools to respond to student need, at a time when funding for SCP was also being reduced. Almost all clusters reported having to curtail provision in response to reduced funding, with particular implications for after-school and holiday provision. These reductions were seen as having a significant impact on the children and young people in the cluster schools. Further reductions in, or withdrawal of, SCP services were viewed as having very serious implications for child outcomes.

# Chapter 9

---

## Student Outcomes

### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the potential impact of SCP provision on outcomes among children and young people. It is worth noting that while aspects of the DEIS programme have been subject to ongoing evaluation, existing evaluation reports have not assessed the work of SCP or focused on measuring the kinds of outcomes, chiefly, school engagement and socio-emotional development, on which SCP focuses (see Smyth et al., 2015). Similarly, DES inspectorate research on DEIS planning have not commented on SCP in an evaluative way (Stakeholder interview). Evaluating the potential impact of a programme such as SCP, which consists of in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision for different age-groups in varying local contexts, is immensely challenging. Indeed, an overview of DEIS evaluations indicates that the nature of the programme means that it is not possible to disentangle which elements of the programme work best; rather any changes in student outcomes in DEIS schools reflect the comprehensive package of supports put in place (Smyth et al., 2015). The second section of the chapter uses survey data from coordinators and chairpersons to examine their perceptions of the impact of SCP on a range of outcomes, supplementing these perspectives with interviews with principals and other LMC members. Section 9.3 looks at the current reporting structures regarding programme outcomes and considers some of the issues in measuring potential impact.

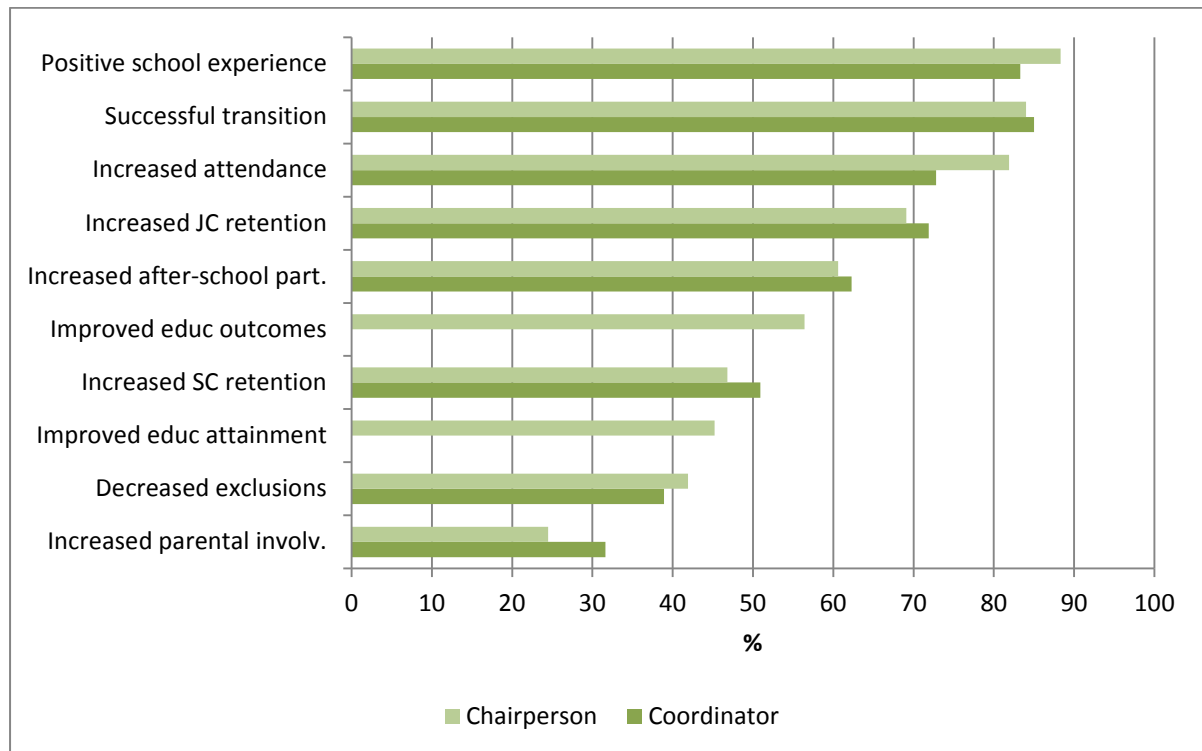
### 9.2 PERCEIVED STUDENT OUTCOMES

In the survey, coordinators and chairpersons were asked about the extent to which they considered that SCP activities in their cluster had impacted on a range of outcomes. Both groups were most positive about the extent to which SCP had influenced students having a positive school experience, making a successful transition from primary to post-primary and in increasing attendance (Figure 9.1). Over two-thirds of coordinators and chairpersons felt that SCP had increased junior cycle retention 'to a great extent' but fewer (around half) considered that it had the same impact on senior cycle retention. The majority felt that it had increased participation in after-school activities. A significant minority felt that it had resulted in decreased exclusions from school and it had enhanced parental involvement. Given that most chairpersons are school principals, they were asked about the potential impact of SCP on educational outcomes; over half felt that



SCP had resulted in improved educational outcomes and four in ten indicated improved educational attainment.

**FIGURE 9.1** Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent')



Source: Coordinator survey; Chairperson survey.

The patterns found in the survey were echoed in the interviews with SCP staff and principals in the case-study clusters. Thus, several respondents emphasised the impact that SCP had had on their attendance levels.

Like our attendance is very good ... and they put huge efforts, that's one of our strengths, the attendance thing for us, they put huge effort into our attendance. We have maybe 95 per cent attendance, whereas years ago we might have only had 75 per cent... and it was recognised in our DEIS evaluation as well, it was picked, and for an inspector to come in and say top class work. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Before [SCP], before we had targeted our work, like you were looking at kids with a hundred and twenty days out. I might have had eight or nine of them across the school. Like we're looking at targeting kids now on thirty or forty days because we've worked so intensively. (Inishmore, LMC, rural, medium size, in-school).

The range of activities run by SCP was seen as making school a more attractive option for children who were otherwise disengaged, thus fostering higher attendance levels.

The sports and the after-school stuff, it works, it's getting kids that would not be attending. But the rule is if you're not in school you can't go training, you can't go to the matches. And they are coming in. And there are some of them that I know for a fact wouldn't be here only for that. (Valentia, LMC, urban, medium size, in-school).

I think if we didn't have SCP, attendance would be... a big, big issue, with the supports that we have in place. And the appeal of school life would also be reduced. (Basket, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

In keeping with the survey responses, a positive impact on school retention was reported by a number of interviewees.

This year I have witnessed SCP students who received SCP support all through primary school complete their Leaving Certificate. ... I can say professionally that there is no doubt in my mind that without SCP interventions many of our students would not have completed their post-primary education. (Coordinator survey response, rural medium cluster).

In addition to the outcomes mentioned in the survey, many principals and stakeholders pointed to other aspects of student well-being and engagement that had been improved through SCP involvement.

It builds up their self-esteem, that they can go and they're there with their friends or their peers and nobody knows who is paying, that doesn't matter, they're there and they wouldn't be there otherwise. And it builds up their self-esteem, they're much more engaged, they'll come back to school and they'll talk about what's gone on. They're on an equal footing, on an equal footing with most of their peers which unfortunately the [group] wouldn't be otherwise. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

It's confidence building as well. I mean we'd done a concert here through SCP, a Christmas concert through SCP, where the children get up on stage and they sing or they dance or they do drama or whatever. I mean that's a huge morale boosting... Even for them to go up on stage and to feel a sense of worth, because I mean it's all about confidence building, it's a huge amount of it really. (Inishmore, chairperson, principal at PP, rural, medium size, in-school).

We have better afternoon attendances. We have a higher CAO output in terms of the average points gained. We have much less red and yellow card issues which is our system for difficult behaviour, so one seems to feed into the other ... that is when you put the confluence of all the ideas that we try

to put in place, there's a certain element of success now of which we'd be very proud. (Lettermore, chairperson, urban, small size, diverse).

In different populations the average, an awful lot of children will do different summer camps throughout the summer. They've something to come back ... to talk about in September, you know. In primary school you'll often do an essay you know, on your summer holidays ... what you did, if you did nothing, you know, that's, that's one of the, the easy things to, when you come back. It also takes them off the street, it stops them hanging around, hanging around can lead to trouble. Gives a sense of worth, builds their confidence, self-esteem, gives them something to look forward to. (Arranmore, LMC, rural, small size, diverse).

This engagement was seen as having a long term effect on outcomes.

There are longer term benefits to engagement: finding employment, but also how they engage with life in terms of their own social life, family life, their health. I think that is the main benefit of SCP. (Stakeholder).

A number of coordinators and principals told stories of particular students who had experienced difficulties and who had been supported by SCP.

We had a student last week in the secondary school who had been gone 59 days, so that's nearly two months. And when I got to him, took himself and his mother in for a meeting, sat down, just spoke to him like you would to a regular teenager. And he says to me god this wasn't as intimidating as the meeting that we'd had with the principal previous or the deputy principal. So I had to explain my role, I said I'm not a teacher...but that kid has been in school every day since and he's going to continue and do his Junior Cert. And I check in with his mother every day. There's things like that, that it's very hard to put down on paper, you know. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

Such support was seen as particularly important in cases of poor socio-emotional well-being and mental health.

There was one particular student that we were working so hard with him, throughout sixth class. But things just were not improving and through School Completion, one of the counsellors became involved here, in the school. You know, for a couple of hours in the evening time after school. And it just proved enormous for him. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

Every Thursday here, we have a counsellor come in, totally funded by the School Completion and that is a huge, huge resource for this school ... especially in the light where guidance has been stripped back, due to economic circumstances, in the last few years. And it's a crucial resource to

have and... I can see the benefits. I can see so many boys, in my short time here, that have benefitted from it. And that are going around now with a pep in their step and on occasions they were, they were under the weather... So the counsellor is great at drawing these lads out and making them feel at home. And making them think about what's happening, I suppose, and expressing their feelings. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

One of the major strengths too is counselling... Counselling is fantastic. As you know, it's very difficult to access counselling, what would you say, immediately you know?... We've had various crises, down through the years and it's fantastic to be able to get that person counselling within a very short time. ... It really has been invaluable, that's the major strength of it in my opinion... It's been effective. And like we've had several self-harmings, tried suicide etc., and touch wood they've, pretty, they've pretty much all been resolved. (Durse, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

Overall, SCP was seen as enriching students' experience of school and allowing them to experience activities to which they would not generally have access.

It gives opportunities to kids that they wouldn't necessarily get to experience. Experiences in terms of summer programmes and stuff like that. It gives kids an opportunity, in terms of access to, to here in the school, like personal development. And access to study clubs and access even to, to food and stuff like that. So they're all very, very positive. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

So SCP pays for a girl to come in, to teach dance to our children. Our kids just love it. They look forward to Tuesdays, it's their day when they dance and... she knows how to teach them very well. ... And she has the lovely music, all the modern music. She has a great rapport with them. ... They look forward to coming, to coming and it's, just a huge thing for them.... SCP pays for that and SCP sourced the personnel for that which is great. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

The enrichment that has happened through School Completion, the dance element, music, swimming, all of those things, life skills. That enrichment that is a great help to us that we wouldn't be able to do on our own. So that is it. And actually as I said here, as I said it's intrinsic in the fabric of the school and the parents' expectations. And it's a reason to come to the school. (Lettermore, chairperson, urban, small size, diverse).

Respondents pointed not only to the value of interventions and activities but to the way in which they were underpinned by positive and supportive relationships between SCP staff and students.

I've met kids who have come up to me and said if you hadn't been there I wouldn't have stayed in school... think they see us, school sometimes for

these kids is the enemy and they see us as the friend, do you know? (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

There's nobody else really doing these kind of things. There's nobody else walking through the school and going well he seems like he's having a hard day or you know, she, she came in and she had red eyes. Maybe I'll go and see if she's okay. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

We're there as a support for those students. Sometimes we're an advocate for them, we're a voice for them. Somewhere for them to come to, you know. And for the teachers and staff and you know the parents. We're on the ground, there's somebody on the ground every day, you know. There's some type of School Completion intervention continuously going on in the schools and that I think is really, really important. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

SCP bring something different to the table, the small things, breakfast and lunch to the people who need it the most but more important we have time to say hello to our students and ask the simple question 'How are you today?'. (Coordinator survey response, small urban cluster).

SCP was also seen as helping to improve relationships between teachers and students where teachers were involved in study support after school.

It [homework club] just provides for the most vulnerable kids, just another secure warm atmosphere. Places where they open up to staff members, they might tell them of things going on that we wouldn't know about. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

SCP was seen as having contributed to the identification of at-risk students as well as a multi-agency approach to addressing their needs.

The strengths is that it's in school, so it's an add on programme. And it's catching the children where they are, in the context where, you know, they may run into difficulty. So it's a preventative programme...that's the strength of it really is that it's in school. And that the personnel and the programmes can be tailored to the individual children's needs. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

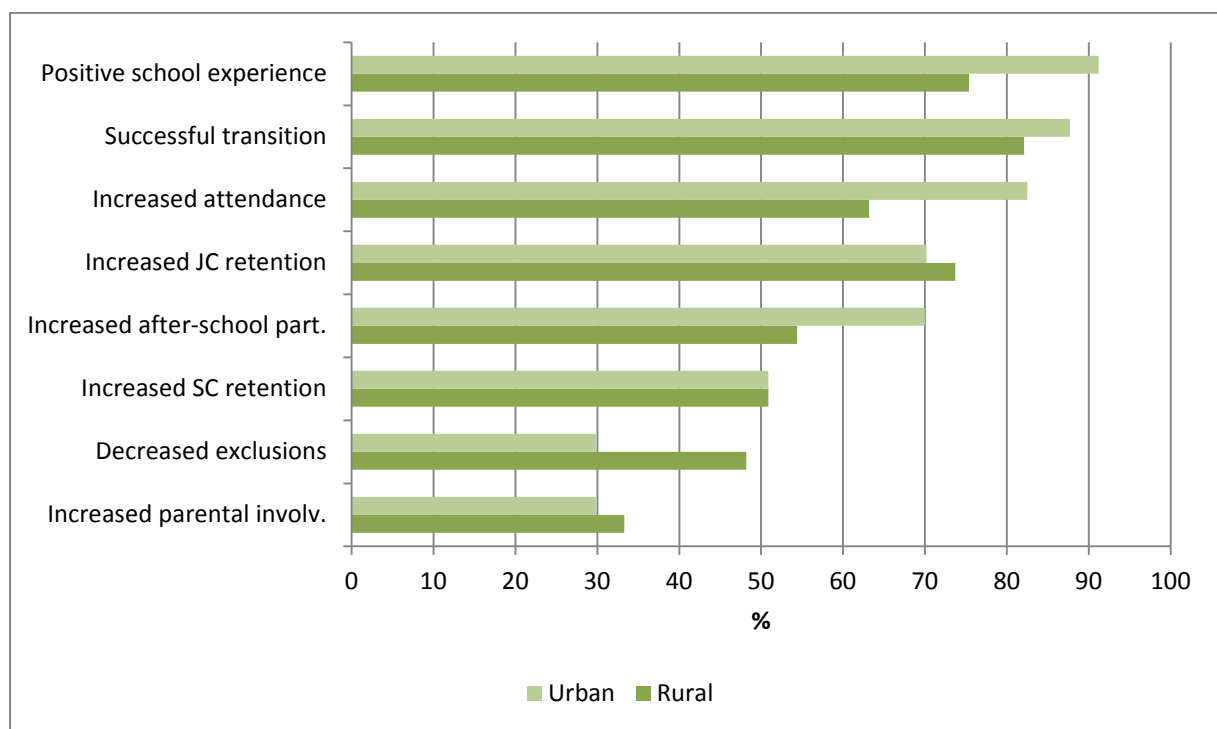
The programme has certainly made a positive difference for many of the families our project works with. ... In the community we operate in there are a lot of services working with vulnerable children/young people and their families. SCP are the only ones that work from inside the schools out. The links SCP has made with other agencies for the schools in our cluster have been invaluable. (Coordinator survey response, urban medium cluster).

While work with parents was generally seen as the role of the HSCL Coordinator and SCP was viewed as having impacted on parental involvement to a lesser degree than other outcomes (see above), some clusters did report marked improvements in parental involvement as a result of SCP.

A couple of years ago, the project decided to involve parents at the start of the school year. Just to explain to them that this is what School Completion is all about...this is the supports we'll be offering, you know, to the child and extra help with maths and English and a safe haven, I suppose, from three to four. That the kids can be in school for that time, it gives them, I suppose, the skills that are needed when they move on to secondary school. You know, to come home in the evening time, to get homework, to get into good routines and practices. And I have to say, the first year that we did that, I was blown away by the amount of parents who actually came in. Because they may be the very ones, at parent teacher meetings, they may not attend on those days. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

There were commonalities in perceptions of outcomes between urban and rural clusters. However, some differences were also evident (Figure 9.2). Coordinators of urban clusters were more likely to consider the SCP had had a positive impact on students' school experience, attendance levels and participation in after-school activities than those in rural clusters. On the other hand, coordinators in rural clusters were more likely to indicate a decreased number of exclusions from school. There were few systematic differences in perceived outcomes by cluster size, although those in small clusters were less likely to report a 'great' impact on senior cycle retention (39 per cent compared with 51 per cent in medium and 60 per cent in large clusters).

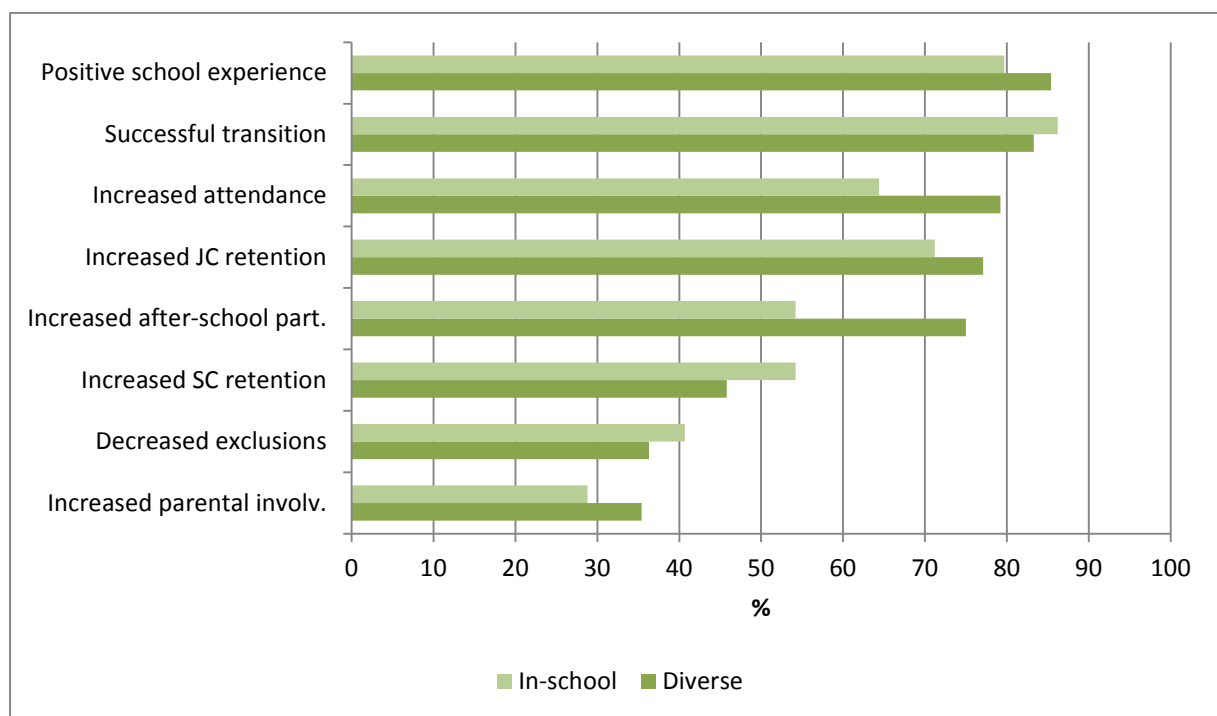
**FIGURE 9.2** Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent') by Urban and Rural Location



Source: Coordinator survey.

Some differences were evident too between clusters that emphasised in-school provision and those that had a broader range of activities. Diverse clusters were more likely to feel that attendance and participation in after-school activities had improved (Figure 9.3). They were also somewhat more positive about increased junior cycle retention. On the other hand, coordinators of clusters that focused on in-school provision were somewhat more likely to report an impact on senior cycle retention.

**FIGURE 9.3** Perceived Impact of SCP Activities on Student Outcomes (% 'To a Great Extent') by Cluster Typology



Source: Coordinator survey.

Chapter 8 indicated that the vast majority of coordinators were not satisfied with the level of funding to their cluster. Analyses indicate that the small number who report being 'fairly satisfied' tend to indicate more positive outcomes among children and young people.

Because of the diversity and number of activities offered within and across clusters, it is difficult to explore the relationship between the nature of interventions and perceived outcomes. However, some patterns are clear:

- The small number of clusters that do not use attendance tracking tend to report poorer outcomes in terms of attendance, retention and making school a positive experience.
- The clusters that have transition programmes are more positive about junior cycle retention and making school a positive experience.
- Breakfast and lunch clubs are seen as making school a more positive experience.
- Mathematics support is associated with more positive perceptions of junior and senior cycle retention. Learning support is also associated with a more positive evaluation of senior cycle retention.



- Participation in after-school activities is seen as higher where sports programmes form part of the provision.

While these patterns were evident, it is worth noting that interviews with staff and principals in the case-study clusters highlighted how the impact of SCP on outcomes reflected the range of activities offered.

### 9.3 INTERNAL EVALUATION PRACTICES

Chapter 6 documented the role of the SCP coordinator in reporting on cluster activities. In the survey, coordinators were asked about how they assessed whether programmes were working. The responses received were rather broad but the majority of coordinators mentioned the annual review of the programme, (unspecified) feedback from students, teachers and parents, the use of student attendance at activities as a measure of satisfaction, and/or surveys of students, teachers and parents. In the case-study clusters too, coordinators referred to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes:

We're constantly monitoring and evaluating the programmes and... Like every year there is an evaluation of the programme and every single programme is evaluated in detail. And you know the kids are asked what they think of the programme. (Blasket, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

We would do a review each year, just questionnaires to the kids... And at the end of each programme we'd, say on the last week of the programme, I'd say to kids, well what did you think of that? Again it's the attendance figures, we know whether the kids come back, if they're there week to week, because the kids that we have engaged in programmes they're difficult to kind of pin down to get a commitment from them. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, in-school).

However, concerns were expressed by some stakeholders relating to the lack of information on the impact of SCP on students.

The big issue at the moment is that it is impossible to measure the output, to measure what has gone into the programmes at local level; how much is spent on salaries and how much is spent on services and what outputs are being delivered, what children are benefiting from it. (Stakeholder).

Stakeholders and other respondents indicated the challenges in providing a systematic assessment of the impact of SCP, especially given the focus of the programme on the kinds of 'soft' outcomes, such as student engagement, which can be difficult to measure.

What families and children on the ground see as beneficial differs from any kind of formal measurement. But it is important to document that. (Stakeholder).

I mean they are kind of, you know, they are I suppose at school level, you know, that 'he behaves better in class' or, do you know what I mean...so they are hard to document, do you know what I mean, in terms of a bigger picture. (Durseley, LMC, rural, large size, diverse).

The situation is further complicated by the fact that at-risk students are often in receipt of services and supports from a variety of agencies other than SCP.

Typically a child who is in receipt of SCP support would be in receipt of external supports from other agencies and internal supports from the school. ... Impact is more to do with how all the different factors inter-relate. (Stakeholder).

Two stakeholders pointed to the need for rigorous evaluation of SCP using a longitudinal study.

There is an issue with trying to measure the impact of SCP over a very short period of time and within a very small area. Ideally it would be measured over a long period of time. (Stakeholder).

It is a challenge but it can be done... I think there would be a huge merit in a longitudinal study. (Stakeholder).

Current SCP reporting arrangements have resulted in a strong emphasis on reporting 'outcomes' as part of the Annual Progress Report. Although feedback from students, parents and teachers is invaluable in planning and adjusting provision, it cannot be taken as a rigorous measure of impact. International experience indicates the complexity of assessing impact for a multi-faceted programme such as SCP. 'Softer' measures of engagement are more difficult to measure than attendance and retention but are the key drivers of these behaviours. Different activities are offered across clusters and among different schools within clusters. Specific activities target different groups of children so that some interventions such as counselling involve very negatively selected groups of children and young people while other supports such as homework clubs have a more heterogeneous composition, making it difficult to compare 'like with like' and highlighting the need for detailed baseline information on students. Students may participate in multiple SCP activities in any given year and/or over time, even perhaps in different schools, so any impact will reflect the cumulative influence of these activities. Furthermore, students taking part in SCP are often provided with a variety of supports within school (through DEIS,

learning support etc.) and outside school (through other area-based interventions, community youth provision, social work services etc.), making it extremely difficult to attribute causality. Despite these challenges, it would be possible to assess the impact of SCP on outcomes with a longitudinal study which sought to capture these different factors. A study of this nature could take account of objective measures of attendance and retention, subjective measures of school engagement and measures of socio-emotional development (such as the internationally well-regarded Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and/or the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale).<sup>10</sup> There would be value too in using such a study to tap into the 'voice' of children and their families regarding SCP and other DEIS supports. However, a study of this scale would require significant resources and would yield findings only in the longer term. In the short and medium term, there are two potential pathways to deriving more detailed information on outcomes.

Firstly, evaluation of DEIS was built into the programme from the outset but this has not involved the systematic inclusion of SCP. There is thus potential for SCP to be systematically included in the evaluations of DEIS conducted by the Educational Research Centre and DES inspectorate. SCP provision could also usefully be considered in whole-school evaluation inspections, particularly given new work by the inspectorate on a template regarding school provision to support student well-being, an area in which SCP provision is central.

Secondly, there are implications for current reporting structures. The retention plans and Annual Progress Reports combine two functions: the provision of information on targets and 'outcomes', and reporting for accountability purposes. This may have the perverse incentive of leading coordinators to report on the 'success' of provision rather than critically reflecting on its potential impact. Data from the Annual Progress Reports do indeed show that coordinators almost universally report individual interventions as 'successful' or 'very successful'. Furthermore, information is currently collected in a form which makes it difficult to use for analytical purposes. At present, answers are reported in the form of fairly long passages of text. However, there is potential for some of the data to be reported in a more structured format, for example, by listing different types of provision and using a 'tick-box' format. This would allow for the greater use of data to examine variation in practice across clusters. While there is a considerable volume of information, some details on variation within clusters are not currently provided. In particular, it would be helpful to have more

---

<sup>10</sup> The availability of national data on school engagement and socio-emotional development through the *Growing Up in Ireland* study means that these data could be benchmarked against national patterns.

information on the extent to which challenges and experiences differ between primary and post-primary schools.

Coordinators are encouraged to report specific and measurable targets and link these clearly to reported outcomes, though they vary in the extent to which they do so (see also SCP, 2012c, *Data Bulletin no. 6* and the *National Overview of the School Completion Programme for reporting period 2012-2013*). There is merit in setting specific targets and reporting detailed outcomes in relation to objective indicators, chiefly attendance and retention. Such an exercise would be enhanced by being able to benchmark outcomes among cluster schools against national trends. At present, coordinators and principals do not have access to timely national data against which to benchmark themselves on objective outcomes such as attendance. Until very recently, the most recently published national attendance data related to 2010/11. National data on attendance and retention, particularly among DEIS schools, could usefully be utilised by coordinators and school principals to inform their own target-setting and planning. Although less amenable to objective comparison, there remains considerable value in reporting on 'soft' outcomes, such as school engagement and student behaviour, because of the way in which these factors shape longer term attendance and retention.

Very detailed information is currently collected from coordinators on early school leaving. However, the categories used for reporting are very detailed, with coordinators required to complete a large grid indicating the stage at which young people left school, their profile and their destinations, which has resulted in inconsistent quality of data. There would seem to be considerable potential to simplify the template as well as to try to link to DES data on early school leaving based on the Post-Primary Pupil Database.

#### 9.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored student outcomes. Since the inception of SCP, there has been an improvement in primary attendance levels and in rates of retention to Leaving Certificate, though these trends cannot be attributed to SCP alone (see Chapter 1). However, SCP, along with other strands of DEIS provision, is likely to have played an important role in this respect. The survey of coordinators and chairpersons indicates that SCP is seen as having had a positive impact on attendance, on making school a more positive experience for students and on junior cycle retention. Interviews with coordinators, chairpersons and DEIS principals echoed these views, with many also highlighting the influence of SCP on broader school engagement and socio-emotional well-being, with a particular impact on children and young people with mental health difficulties. The chapter

discusses the challenges in evaluating the outcomes of SCP, given its multi-faceted approach and close relationship with other parts of DEIS provision. The discussion points to the value of including SCP in ongoing evaluation of DEIS and of better using existing reporting to glean information on student outcomes.

# Chapter 10

---

## Strengths and Weaknesses of the SCP

### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

A central feature of the interviews carried out in the case-study clusters was what coordinators, chairpersons, principals and members of the local management committees felt were the key strengths and weaknesses of the SCP. The strengths and weaknesses of the programme were also discussed in the stakeholder interviews. This chapter provides a summary of many of the issues raised earlier in this report within a simple structure of strengths and weaknesses. The positive views represented in the first part of this chapter highlight the aspects of SCP that many believe they could not do without, such as the skilled personnel, the instant response to crisis situations in schools through counselling services, students' basic needs being met (such as food and clothing), the way in which SCP provided an essential link to parents and families of target children and young people, and the level of flexibility in what programmes were offered and when they were provided. The second part of the chapter examines what the interviewees felt to be the main weaknesses of the SCP as it currently operates. Funding cuts to services were strongly emphasised by those interviewed in addition to lack of understanding about how spending decisions are made at cluster level. The cluster boundaries were of particular concern to interviewees who highlighted the lack of tracking of students as they transferred from primary schools where SCP was provided to post-primary schools with no SCP available. Interviewees were also critical about the governance of SCP, the lack of support from head office and the lack of guidelines available.

### 10.2 STRENGTHS

#### 10.2.1 Flexibility in Supports for Children at Risk

The flexibility of SCP to respond to local needs as they arose was seen as a key strength of the programme. This flexibility allowed for differential responses across clusters but also for varying circumstances among schools in the same cluster:

I think the fact that you can tailor it to the needs of every individual school, I think that's fantastic. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

The School Completion Programme is about something different in every school, ... in our... schools it could be attendance focused in one school but it could be social skills focus in another school. Or it could be all about

homework clubs in another school. It's something different in every school. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

Its flexibility is probably its biggest, biggest strength, we can respond locally to what is happening here on the ground. We're not prescribed, we're not told what to do within, you know we have our guidelines and we work within them. We tailor our supports to the individual schools. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

The level of flexibility within SCP was also viewed as an asset in that programmes can be modified or changed according to need throughout the school year:

We're not restricted...I know we put a retention plan in and we say we're going to do this and going to do that...but if something turns up...which is different and we think there's another solution to it we can do it. That's one of the beauties of the programme...sort of what they call local responses to local issues. (Arranmore, coordinator, rural, small size, diverse).

### 10.2.2 Additional Support for Principals, Teachers and the School

SCP personnel appeared to positively impact on both principals and teachers in that they eased their own workload and provided a support during the school day:

It's to have those extra few bodies that in a situation where you know you have a severe behavioural issue with a child or something like that, well the teacher isn't on their own. The principal isn't on their own. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Well it's support for teachers, support for me, support, like we don't have anybody who is available to take children out on a one-to-one or you know a group and do that type of thing because all our teachers are either in class or they're in learning support. We don't have SNAs... we have nobody else to do that. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Principals were particularly appreciative of the support in light of recent cut-backs to resources and supports in the school more generally:

In terms of our staffing and the cut backs, it's a great support. I don't know what I'd do without it. (Durseley, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

Other principals were able to use the experience of the coordinator to get advice about particular issues:

It's the advice I suppose and it's the advice that it gives us too and it says look it, I can come to [coordinator] and say look it I've this student or that, she can say well this is available, that's available. I can do this you know and that's the whole idea of it or the strength of it. (Inishmore, chairperson and principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

### 10.2.3 SCP Has Changed the Way Schools Operate

During the interviews a number of people described the impact of SCP on the day-to-day workings of the school. In particular, it was seen as fostering a new relationship between principals, teachers and the SCP staff, with a greater integration of supports within the school.

I feel that SCP has massively resulted in systemic change in the schools I work in terms of how people think. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

A principal in the same cluster also noted this change to a care team model within the school:

With the help of different targets that are put in place and different help and supports we've put in place for them, like play therapy and different things like that, it has enabled us and even the whole, it has kind of built up a whole support care team. Like SCP in connection with the home school liaison has built up, it used to be the teacher, the teacher and principal. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

The SCP Easter and Summer projects allowed students and parents to see this 'new dynamic' and opening up of school to the community:

It brought a new dynamic into the school... the fact that... you've got the summer, the summer projects and that like every year, like there's a summer project run here. I think those sort of things are invaluable... and I don't think the schools could go back to what do you call it, running themselves before, before School Completion came on board. (Lettermore, LMC member, small, urban, diverse).

### 10.2.4 Valuable Information Gathering

Principals felt that the SCP personnel were able to access vital information about the family and home life of the children that they or the school would not otherwise be able to:

That they're on the ground, they're local, they hear what's going on and.. they have the experience of dealing with these people. I mean we'd have children coming from the far side of town... [you] wouldn't know their



seed, breed and generation kind of thing. Whereas they have that at their fingertips you know and that's very often a phone call to here, will maybe give us some vital information about a family and that, you know. (Durse, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

In many of the clusters, the coordinator had built up strong relations with students and their families. As a result, there was greater trust between parents and the school:

I know part of the reason why those parents would be coming in is because, you know, they know the completion coordinator here. And know that he is involved and may have been involved with older siblings. And there's a definite trust link there between [them] when they hear those names. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

Through experience working with different families spread across different schools in the cluster, the coordinator was often able to provide invaluable information to principals about certain target children:

[Coordinator] would have a lot of dealings with our families, or like that as I say cousins or what-not, do you know, between [name of school] ourselves, between [name of school], or whatever, so straight away that she's able to kind of help us, do you know the way, that we're kind of going, it's very easy that you would miss a child, or miss a situation, do you know the way going on. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

It has certainly enabled us to kind of get help for certain families, and supports for certain families, or even just to watch, keep an eye on certain families. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

SCP staff could often alert the principal or teachers to certain issues for particular children with the aim of improving their learning experience:

They would have a lot of information around family problems or issues that arise in class that affect learning and that, come up, so they would come up to me. (Lettermore, LMC member, small, urban, diverse).

### 10.2.5 A Non-Teaching Role

SCP personnel also offer schools a more informal form of communication with parents of children who are targeted. Their non-teaching role meant that their relationship with the children could be 'more informal' (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, ETB, low intensity, in-school):

They have different links with the children, so they're not seen as teachers, which is tremendous. (Valentia, LMC member, medium, urban, in-school).

It's different, the teacher relationship but the child is different than the parent. Because they still see you as a professional, or as a working for an institution...They don't see the School Completion workers as that. They see them as the same, personnel they see them on the same level. They open up to them, even though they'll open up to us because we really work well with the disadvantaged. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

One principal described how parents viewed SCP as a more positive, separate branch of the school who monitored attendance:

She would have sent letters maybe as well to some of the families explaining who she was, and what she was doing here, and kind of the gentle reminders that you know such and such a child has missed a lot of days... I suppose they get sick and tired of me nagging them and ringing...that you know that she has you know sent letters from the School Completion saying 'just a reminder that it is so important to be in school' and again the parents have come in and said 'oh got a letter from the School Completion Officer', you know. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

#### **10.2.6 Instant Support for Schools (Counselling)**

The immediate support from the counselling services in SCP was much valued by principals who felt that other agencies were not instantly responsive or had long waiting lists to access services. In crisis situations, the SCP personnel appeared to be the first contact point for principals, particularly where a crisis situation was ongoing:

We'd get a call from the school, in a panic, 'can you do this?' We'd have a counsellor in there within the hour...within the hour...and on a couple of occasions that counsellor went in to a situation where he was talking the person down, and it worked, it worked...and it's an instant response. Whereas if you were depending on the State responses, there is a process through which people go that is very time consuming, and you mightn't have that time. (Dursesey, coordinator, rural, large size, diverse).

I think the beauty of a School Completion Project is it is instant, you know, it's well almost instant...so if I have a child you know who is having a lot of difficulty in school...I could have a programme or something in place within days. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

One coordinator described how in crisis situations the SCP can divert funds from other planned activities and intensively target children in need:

I walked into a school the other day to do a mentoring programme, there was four adults in the corridor with four doors off it all closed, each

standing at a door and a little boy in the middle. Almost like a wild animal, you know, so what do we do, we have a meeting and we get some support for him immediately and we divert some funding from somewhere else. So that means that then the three weeks of dance programme is scrapped and we're going to do intervention one-to-one work with him you know. (Inishmore, Coordinator, rural, medium size, in-school).

When we identify, say you know, child protection issues and so on, very often the system itself is so all over the place...and so slow to react, that unless we had something like this where we can kind of intervene, to some degree, in the early stages of something and provide some sort of support or back-up, I don't think the system would actually operate quickly enough to deal with it...this gives us, if you like, a local immediate response. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

We don't have to go through a huge amount of bureaucratic processes to get that done. So it can be immediate... and we're on the ground a lot. (Valentia, coordinator, medium, urban, in-school).

At both primary and post-primary level, an increase in mental health difficulties was noted by principals. SCP appeared to be an immediate remedy to crisis situations:

Counselling is fantastic. As you know, it's very difficult to access counselling...we've had various crises, down through the years and it's fantastic to be able to get that person counselling within a very short time... we've had several self-harmings, tried suicide etc., and touch wood they've, pretty, they've pretty much all been resolved. (Durse, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

In non-crisis situations counselling was viewed as a 'crucial resource' or preventative measure in SCP. This was seen as particularly important '[in light of the fact that] guidance has been stripped back, due to economic circumstances, in the last few years':

So the counsellor is great at drawing these lads out and making them feel at home. And making them think about what happening, I suppose and expressing their feelings. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large size, diverse).

In a number of clusters the SCP coordinators were providing preventative therapeutic supports to children through one-on-one sessions with target children:

We call it an informal support because I'm not a trained therapist or a trained counsellor. So I can facilitate this programme with them, just to keep on track and keep them focused on school and to keep them out of trouble if possible...I would talk to the student and sort of go on what they

need and what they feel will work for them, you know. And quite often they just need somebody to sit down and talk to that's not a teacher, you know. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

### 10.2.7 Easy Access to Small Funds / Subsidies

Another key feature of SCP for schools was the availability of small amounts of funding which can be used to 'fill a plughole in the system' (Stakeholder) or subsidise activities for some of the target children. One coordinator felt that it enabled children to attend various activities such as swimming with their peers, many without the knowledge that they were being subsidised:

I give subsidies for targeted kids to attend swimming but say that's like, ends up being a good bit of the money that goes towards swimming. Like just for example, that's just one thing, in school that half them, half them probably don't know that we give the money towards it. (Lambay, coordinator, urban, medium size, diverse).

A coordinator in another cluster often involved the parents where target students were being subsidised to make a nominal contribution to the activity:

If there was a particular situation where that child might be missing out on a school activity because, or a school related activity, or if we have trips and the child can't go; it gives us an option to sort of go into the barrel and find a way around it. (Rathlin, principal, urban, medium size, in-school).

Principals working in the same cluster found that SCP was helpful in getting some students basic necessities such as clothes or glasses:

Day-to-day things like if a child has no uniform or no books or down to no shoes, one child here had no glasses, the Mum couldn't afford to buy him glasses... little things, you know, that really hinder the child kind of participating day-to-day. But they're massive really, you know. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, in-school).

At post-primary level, the chairperson, a principal in this cluster, was able to contact the coordinator to request SCP funding to support a student in making their online CAO application:

I would say to her is there any chance because I'm concerned that he's not going to apply, (a) they don't have a credit card and (b) they probably wouldn't get the money at home to bring in the cash and we'd pay for it on credit card. So she'd always, always be able to. (Rathlin, chairperson, urban, medium size, in-school).

Principals found huge benefit in having this fund to open up opportunities for targeted children and young people:

It means that kids can access certain things that they wouldn't, under normal circumstances right...so I suppose, from a resource point of view, it is an extra resource. There's money there to do things that you wouldn't normally do. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

### 10.2.8 Monitoring and Tracking Attendance

Many felt that the supports provided in SCP made school a more welcoming and happier environment for children:

I think if we didn't have SCP, attendance would be, it would be a big, big issue, with the supports that we have in place. And the appeal of school life would also be reduced. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

Principals were in agreement that the SCP played a useful role in monitoring and tracking attendance of students at risk of disengagement from school and early school leaving:

One of the strengths is we've seen an improvement in those children as regards attendance because they're being tracked and they're being maybe hassled a little bit more as regards absences. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

It's far more difficult for a student to fall between the cracks now which is fantastic. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

Some clusters employed attendance officers who followed up on absences; in some cases this approach was supplemented by home visits:

Those phone calls that are made in the morning times to the parents does make a difference. Because they realise, we're actually on the radar. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

### 10.2.9 Creates a Positive View of School and Community to Parents and Children

Many of those interviewed also felt that SCP had brought a new dimension of community into the schools in the cluster:

I think the fact that we collaborate locally and we're kind of a bit embedded in the community if you like. Ok we're school based. But I see us as being community based. And I think that's our biggest strength, I

believe, the collaboration part of it. And I think... that that's helped us to achieve things. (Blasket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

In some clusters the SCP coordinator was seen as a good way to access 'outside agencies' who they could liaise with and 'bring people in' for specific services or interventions (Lambay, chairperson, urban, medium size, ETB, high intensity, diverse). Another principal noted:

They have great links in the community, they have links with the HSE, they have links in with social care, with doctors, with Guards, community Guards. They know the people on the ground. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

They belong in the school, they belong here, they belong in the youth groups. And it gives a kind of sense of community. And we're constantly keeping the sense of community, how important it is for the community to look after each other. (Blasket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

SCP activities were seen as allowing parents to see the schools in a new light:

It certainly gives them a far more positive feeling towards their education and... that in turn I think has a knock-on effect for their parents because a lot of the parents haven't had a positive...education experience. So my, my whole feeling is, if it does nothing else except that this generation of children going through that they have a very positive experience of school. They can look back and say they, you know they got experiences. (Lambay, chairperson, urban, medium size, diverse).

Another principal in the Bere cluster expressed the same views but noted that the 'funding for the holiday supports, it's a vital part of portraying school in a positive light to the children as well' (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Other interviewees noted the way in which SCP had become an integral part of the school with the additional supports now seen as essential:

I think maybe at some level then it becomes part of school life, do you know what I mean, people don't see these as additional supports anymore, they see them as essential supports, do you know what I mean. (Durseay, LMC member, rural, large size, diverse).

One principal described the positive relationship between an SCP project worker and the teaching staff at the school:

Our project worker would come into the staff, a staff meeting annually, maybe biannually, depending and she would present to the staff what, what's happening in relation to SCP... there's also a very, very good level of communication between the staff and the SCP. She would have her own post box in the staffroom. (Valentia, principal, medium, urban, in-school).

### 10.3 WEAKNESSES

#### 10.3.1 Poor National Governance

A major criticism of SCP was the governance of the organisation at national level. One coordinator felt that the poor governance had led to a fragmented form of provision across different clusters:

Nationally, better governance, a better governance structure that it's, it's not so varied... and fragmented across the place. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

One coordinator felt that the changes of departments meant a lack of continuity in communication:

I have to say it's been a strange few years, because every time, our financial records keep changing, who we report to, who we send it to. Like I keep sending things to the wrong people. I don't know who I've to send anything to now these days. It's all very confusing. ... I don't even know if they know who we are, what we do. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

In particular, some felt that they 'don't get any support' from head office (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse). One coordinator felt that there used to be greater supports from the national coordination team but that this has been reduced with the move to Tusla and the reduction in funding:

There's very little support, from the national coordination team. Or even Tusla, that, yea, there's definitely a very, a lack of support there. When I first started there would've been more support, there was more, there was. They have a national coordinator and there would've been more members on the national coordination team. But since the cuts that's been reduced. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

It was an initially planned that we would have in say the SCP main office, the head office, that we would have somebody there who would look after that area. So I think it's a weak area to be honest. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

### 10.3.2 Funding Cuts

Reduction in SCP funding was raised as a significant weakness in all ten case-study clusters. In one cluster, a school principal described how the cuts to funding were causing stress in the cluster as support had to be reduced:

The biggest problem is funding...I suppose, it's difficult right now as well I can see the stress which exists within this cluster. And say for [the project worker] as well, with regard to the fact that... more cuts are imminent. So it causes a huge stress factor for people, who already engaged in activities that concern the people who are at risk. That's the biggest problem, now at the moment. (Blasket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

In particular, the lack of certainty about funding in the future was impacting the planning and provision for subsequent years.

You never know from year to year what's happening because there's cutbacks every year, okay... I suppose you'd just like to have a long term plan and see where it's going, you know... it's just been cut, cut, cut, cut....So there's uncertainty. So I mean at the moment, you know, you'd be saying the only thing you can rely on at the moment are the School Completion workers, you know. (Dursey, principal, rural, large size, diverse).

The fact that the SCP has moved departments over time is a cause of much concern and uncertainty (see above). As a result, staff concern about their positions and cuts for services for students was seen as detracting from the primary aim of SCP:

But I mean like every time they change an organisation... it's like kind of having been married now to several different organisations. ... So then instead of driving it with kind of enthusiasm and passion about making sure that people complete school, their energies are taken up with how are we fitting into the organisation, is my job going to be here, am I working hard enough to be seen to be doing things. (Gorumna, chairperson, urban, large, diverse).

Counselling featured as the one area that had been cut and that was an essential part of SCP and schools more generally:

I mean there's not enough counselling I don't think, in a lot of cases I know you can say we could put a counsellor in twenty four hours but there's definitely students or kids that need help. (Lettermore, LMC member, small, urban, diverse).



One coordinator felt that the cluster required a full-time counsellor to deal with the mental health issues among students in the schools:

I'd love to have a full-time counsellor, in my secondary schools. We've got huge mental health issues, particularly with boys and the girls. And I think every school should have. Now I know the guidance counsellors, some of them are trained but they're not therapists, they're not psychotherapists. We have a lot of kids in need, we have a lot. It's frightening how many we have, you know. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

Principals were also dissatisfied with the level of contact they had with the SCP coordinator, particularly in large clusters where they were working in multiple school settings:

The weakness at the moment is that I suppose we don't see them enough. You know you'd get to the point where you know [coordinator] and [project worker] are really only in maybe one day a week and it's mainly a morning slot with us. And you know it's not enough to deal with the problems that we're dealing with, with the children. And I suppose that's the down side...It would be lovely if we could have them two or three times a week, you know for our particular school. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

One principal felt that the coordinator was over-stretched and had little capacity to effectively monitor and track the targeted students as they move through the education system:

Obviously with budget cuts and everything there is time constraints on [coordinator], and everyone wants a piece of [coordinator], do you know that way...but I'd love to see maybe is there, you know these certain families, I suppose there is too many families now for her to track, but to be tracked more throughout the system. (Lambay, principal, urban, medium size, diverse).

### 10.3.3 A Lack of National Vision

The interviews highlighted concerns about the commitment to SCP at a national level. Many noted the absence of any real national vision for the programme. This was seen as compounded by changes in the government department responsible for SCP over the past number of years (see above):

I'm not sure about the national vision for School Completion. They seem to have changed their identity quite a bit as the years have gone on...the principles I don't think are as clear as they are in home school liaison for example. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

Some felt that Tusla had little real understanding of what SCP was doing in schools and communities:

I worry about the way that Tusla looks at SCP and... they actually don't see what's happening on the ground. (Inishmore, chairperson and principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

I don't think there is any major message there from the top of School Completion as to what exactly this is about, how it is making a difference, is it making a difference, in what way is it making a difference. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

I would have say to you that you know that Tusla really, really have to see the worth of SCP and the work that they do....they have to take it seriously, ... the work that they do is really valuable work. And it's only when you're down on the ground that you see the worth of it...I mean the amount of work that's gone on here, the work gone over the years. You know the different changes that have happened over the last number of years it's incredible, absolutely incredible you know. And the kids, you know we have merit awards due to SCP, we've attendance awards...we have a spirit of the school award, and we've the golden medal award. And they are hugely invaluable. (Inishmore, chairperson and principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

#### 10.3.4 Lack of Human Resources Structures

Across all clusters there are differing arrangements regarding the employment contracts of SCP staff. In particular concerns were raised where employers do not 'accept responsibility for employment issues' (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, ETB, low intensity, diverse).

For each project, depending on whether they're ETB, or not ETB. And even various ETBs have a different [rule] about employment...like, our ETB doesn't expect, doesn't accept responsibility for employment issues. They don't see themselves as our employers, so clarity around that would be great...and if there was structure, I suppose, at a national level, around each coordinator, each, each project being governed in the same way...on, around employment issues. And I suppose, more directives rather than guidelines; we've a lot of guidelines. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

I know some projects were in trouble with that in that who are they employed by. Are they employed by us, the committee, are they employed by Tusla now. Or was it under school completion, was is department of education, is it a limited company. A lot of questions...that whole area needs to be tied up. (Bere, chairperson, rural, medium size, diverse).

This lack of transparency means that if employment issues arise, employees have no support structure:

There's no human resources support...we have no one to link in to there if you have any issues with staff or you know yourself. And then no supervision either as well. So I feel we really do lack support that way...there's nobody in the department to go to. Like I rang up before about an issue with the NEWB but nobody ever got back to me. You know so I mean thankfully you don't need it very often but when it does, you know it would be nice to have that kind of support there, someone to link in with. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

One principal argued that given the different types of employment structures for different SCP staff, there was a greater need for oversight from head office:

It's very important that there's some oversight and some, someone looking and checking. Otherwise, I think 'cos the amount of people that are involved, for example there may be two or three people employed here. Paid, might be employed by the school but paid extra, through some School Completion funding, for whatever activity they're doing. And there's a number of people in every other school, so the amount of people who are actually getting some payment from school completion is quite large. (Basket, principal, medium, urban, diverse).

Another principal called for an employment template to be created to give different clusters guidance about employment and staffing more generally:

We've had no problems, we've been lucky, maybe other places have had problems where money has run out and people had to be maybe laid off or whatever, we haven't had any of that. So in a general sense I would think maybe that Tusla or whatever should be looking maybe at making sure that there is a sort of a template, a general template for completion programmes... to follow and maybe guidelines or maybe more than, stronger than guidelines, that only certain amounts of budgets can be spent on project staff. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

Furthermore, many of those interviewed noted the lack of transparency in the line management within SCP:

There's a lack of line management for I think [coordinator] and those. Then if you're not reporting to somebody, then I think, not just [coordinator] but I'm talking about the whole lot of us, then there's lack of transparency I think in the whole thing. (Gorumna, chairperson, urban, large, diverse).

Coordinators also felt that there was a need for clear line management, particularly as existing management is stretched:

We don't have a proper line management as such. I mean they haven't replaced anybody who has left. So our [national SCP] management team,

there's only three of them and they're very stretched. So we don't get to see them. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

This is of particular concern given the increasing level of uncertainty around their positions and the SCP more generally:

Every year we have this thing about the budgets being cut or our contract is going to be renewed and it's terrible to work under, you know. Because we came out of the last in-service thinking 'oh we're going to be made redundant', you know. And it's awful working under that all the time. So that would be a main weakness because you're there going well why should I be pouring my heart and soul into this when I'm going to be gone with no redundancy, with nothing. (Lettermore, coordinator, small, urban, diverse).

The interviews also highlighted a lack of clarity about the role of coordinator, chairperson and other SCP staff such as project workers. One coordinator felt that more guidance was needed as to the role of the coordinator as it could be an 'isolating job':

I suppose a bit more support from the department, a bit more guidance, you know. We survive alone on emails from them, you know, it can be quite an isolating job really because we're not really part of any staff so in terms of that, and something a bit more standardised, our roles differ from coordinator to coordinator so much... Something a bit more standardised though because sometimes you just feel like you're feeling your way around in the dark and you don't know whether what you're doing is the right way or if it's effective so a bit more guidance would be fantastic. (Rathlin, coordinator, urban, medium size, in-school).

One stakeholder suggested that more guidance was needed in terms of their role within the objectives of SCP:

There may be need for more guidance in terms of what the objectives are, how are they supposed to work with the marginalised or at-risk students, the parameters of the role, and then expectations regarding liaison with other services that are working with, if not directly with the child, then with the child's family. There possibly needs to be more guidelines at that respect. (Stakeholder).

The lack of definition around the role of coordinator also appears to impact on their working relationship with the HSCL coordinator and the EWO. Some principals found that the role of SCP coordinator and HSCL coordinator were too similar at times and there was sometimes a duplication of effort by the two staff members:

The waters are completely muddy...in terms of, some of the areas like retention...obviously involves attendance and all that sort of thing. So the monitoring of attendance and so on is very, very important... I would've thought under normal circumstances that that would be a role that the SCP, should be heavily involved in. And it hasn't been here...that role has been done a lot by the HSCL right. Now, you could argue, that it is their role as well. You know, someone not coming to school, you need a face to go out there and so on. And you could argue that if you have two faces going out there, a SCP face going out there and a HSCL face going out there. You say, well that gets a little bit complicated and so on. (Arranmore, principal, rural, small size, diverse).

I mean the School Completion coordinator and the home school liaison for example would work very closely together. Now who does what, you know, they even debate it themselves, is this my role, is this your role, but to be honest I think for the school and for the parents, they need to know the person, again they need to have a relationship with the person so a better outcome is for the home school liaison to communicate with the parents because...if they don't know the School Completion coordinator then they're not going to be as open to the communication. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

### 10.3.5 Lack of Expertise/Diversity on LMC

Issues around line management and human resources structures in SCP often overlapped with views around the skill set of the LMC. In particular, expertise around aspects of governance, law and finance were often seen as lacking:

We've a lot of expertise in our committee... but as far as the legal side of things and our governance side of things, I think that maybe employee law and some of the areas around responsibility for that and employees. I think that's probably a weak area. It's an area that we've always asked, it's been going on for quite a while, the SCP that people have asked, what we were told was that they were going to bring in a section that would have an expertise area in that governance. And would help us through. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

In one cluster the coordinator was unhappy with the amount of reporting required. She felt that her job would be much easier if there was a trained accountant available to 'deal with work and admin':

You're relying on account services within the schools or buying in, you know buying in a service. But we've had an awful lot of reporting to do and rightly so you know, we're spending government money, of course you have to spend it properly and account for it. But it can be quite tense, you know, filling out that report, making sure you've, even though you know you've done everything right, it's the reporting procedure part of it, you know. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

### 10.3.6 Cluster Arrangements

The interviews highlighted difficulties experienced in some clusters around cluster arrangements and particularly issues where target children were transferring out of the cluster. One coordinator felt that it was important to have ‘follow through’ so that children targeted in SCP at primary level would have the same level of support when they reach post-primary level:

The cluster arrangements, I would change them, to make sure that there’s follow through from kids, that were receiving it at primary level, right through to the end of secondary school. (Bere, coordinator, rural, medium size, diverse).

The chairperson of the same cluster noted that some students were not only leaving the SCP cluster but were transferring to non-DEIS post-primary settings where there would be no HSCL supports. This was a particular issue where there were greater numbers of primary schools in the cluster and fewer post-primary schools to transfer to. One principal felt that:

Once they leave the primary school they’re lost.... there’s no follow on for, a lot of those children are going to fall through the net, you know. (Inishmore, chairperson and principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

Another coordinator also criticised the lack of tracking of students when they leave the SCP cluster at primary level, particularly given the level of supports provided until they reach sixth class:

If we’re working with them and we’ve had them since pre-school. And they’re here six or seven years and then they suddenly go to a different school outside of our area, then we lost contact with them. It’s very hard to track them, all of them. Whereas if they go straight to our secondary school, immediately they’ve got a face they know, we’ve a transfer programme straight in. And everyone knows each other in schools and there could be, it could be just so much better for the kids. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

So that’s a big gap actually and it’s a big loss when you’ve done so much work to get them to sixth class and to get them to transfer because we’d help them transfer, even if it is a school outside our cluster. But it’s once they step inside that school then, it has nothing to do with us so the tracking is huge, it’s huge. (Gorumna, coordinator, urban, large, diverse).

In one cluster, a primary school principal noticed a past pupil returning to the school even though they had made the transition to a non-DEIS post-primary with no SCP:

Another little one was there outside the door every week, you know, every day for a couple days and I called her in and we said you know why are you here, what are you, why are you not at school today, and it actually boiled down to the fact that she didn't have the proper shoes and she was told not to come back to school until she had the proper shoes. You know and in a school like ours with the DEIS and the School Completion projects and all the support for them, that would never happen. If push came to shove somebody would pay for the shoes you know. (Inishmore, principal, rural, medium size, in-school).

In some cases, primary schools are located physically beside each other but in two separate SCP clusters which to the principals involved seems ineffective:

Whatever way this cluster was set up they were excluded and they're probably but maybe five hundred yards down the road...yeah. So it's a pity because we work together as principals on everything else, you know. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

### 10.3.7 Using Evidence

Many of the principals interviewed were frustrated at the lack of feedback from the various reports submitted by their cluster each year. Coordinators are circulated with a composite report based on data from the Annual Progress Reports but it is unclear whether this information is always communicated to schools. This lack of feedback meant that some principals felt they had little understanding of SCP nationally in terms of attendance and retention of students over time:

I mean I'd like to know a little bit more statistically about this cluster or children from this area, how do we do nationally, you know, what is our attendance like, there doesn't seem to be an awful lot of that information available. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

One principal from the same cluster felt that this lack of a national evidence-base resulted in subjective judgements or decisions being made about 'what is best for these children' (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, BOM, high, diverse). Clusters are therefore dependent on 'anecdotal evidence where the parents come back to let us know how the kids are getting on or the children come back themselves to let us know':

We've absolutely no figures for anything like that, you know... we've spent an awful lot of time, effort and energy and we've no clue what happens after that, you know. (Gorumna, principal, urban, large, diverse).

### 10.3.8 Inconsistency in Provision Among Clusters

Interviewees noted the wide variation between clusters in the types of programmes provided. Some noted that this variation is both positive and negative in that

the strength is that we are so different and we can actually adapt, you know to our individual communities and schools so I think that's a really strong point...but there is vast differences between the different projects, from what I hear. (Basket, coordinator, medium, urban, diverse).

Some suggested that greater consistency and accountability was needed to ensure that clusters ran similar programmes:

I'd also like to see that maybe that the same model was used throughout and so there's a bit more sort of ownership and maybe accountability as to where it could be, you know I think all school completion programs should be the same. (Bere, principal, rural, medium size, diverse).

This model could possibly reduce the level of variation:

It seems to me that you don't have that level of cohesiveness across the entire country...if there's, if there's a weakness it is that, that homogenous sense doesn't seem to pervade. That different aspects seem to be promoted in different areas. (Lettermore, chairperson, small, urban, diverse).

## 10.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the key strengths and weaknesses of SCP as described by stakeholders, coordinators, chairpersons, primary and post-primary school principals and other members of the local management committee. Interviewees stressed that the flexibility in the types of supports provided was a key strength of the SCP. This meant that programmes could not only be evaluated and modified within individual schools but that different programmes could operate in different schools in the same cluster depending on the needs of the students. Principals in particular noted the strength of SCP in providing immediate supports (such as therapeutic interventions) to children during times of crisis. The SCP was considered invaluable in gathering information about target students' families and home lives more generally. This information could then be used to guide



provision of services more effectively. Across clusters, principals agreed that SCP personnel had a more informal relationship with parents and families of target children and thus could be more effective than principals or teachers in improving children's attendance. Other strengths highlighted during the case-study cluster interviews include the fact that SCP could provide small sums or subsidies to schools where children had basic needs to be met or where they could not attend an activity (such as swimming with their class) due to a lack of money at home. SCP was recognised as being important in monitoring and tracking student attendance in a practical way where follow-up with absent students could be arranged. Finally, some clusters highlighted the importance of SCP in opening the school out to the wider community, involving local groups and creating a more positive view of schools among target children and their parents.

The second part of this chapter examined the main weaknesses of SCP based on interviews in the ten case-study clusters and with stakeholders. One of the views most frequently raised by those interviewed was the damaging effect of funding cuts to the SCP over the past number of years. Some mentioned this has led to a lack of long-term planning and uncertainty about the future of the programme. Interviewees also felt that the SCP had a weak governance structure and a lack of clarity in relation to line management. Many were critical about the lack of support from Tusla head office in relation to several aspects of SCP but particularly in relation to human resources. Some coordinators pointed out that they themselves and members of the LMC often lacked specialist expertise in areas such as employment law and finance. Cluster boundaries did not always reflect school transfer at local level, an issue which was seen as particularly problematic when students make the transition from primary where SCP is provided to a non-DEIS post-primary school with no SCP. Many felt that this left vulnerable students exposed and at greater risk of early school leaving. The interviews also highlighted the need for an evidence base that could be utilised to improve student outcomes.

# Chapter 11

---

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

This report has presented an analysis of the operation of the School Completion Programme. The central aims of the study have been to review existing provision and to provide recommendations regarding the appropriate nature of structures and provision for the future. More specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What are the aims of the School Completion Programme from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including coordinators, Local Management Committee chairpersons and school principals?
- What criteria do local projects use to target children and young people?
- What kinds of activities are provided as part of SCP? How successful are they deemed by stakeholders? Do activities vary across different clusters?
- How do clusters vary in size and composition? What are the implications of such variation for targeting and provision?
- How does the programme relate to other aspects of DEIS provision?
- What issues arise in relation to project governance and the roles of the coordinator, chairperson and Local Management Committee?
- How are resources used by clusters?
- What do stakeholders see as the outcomes of SCP?
- What do they see as the key strengths and weaknesses of the programme?

In addressing these questions, the study has drawn on a rich array of data, including:

- Administrative data from the Annual Progress Reports and retention plans;
- Data from the Governance Survey conducted in relation to 2012/13;
- A new and detailed survey of SCP coordinators and chairpersons relating to provision in 2014/15;
- In-depth interviews with coordinators, chairpersons, school principals and LMC members in ten case-study clusters, selected to capture diversity in key

aspects of cluster organisation, including size, employer arrangements, location, balance of provision and intensity of targeting;

- Thirteen interviews with key stakeholders (comprising 15 individuals) to explore their perspectives on SCP provision and structures.

This chapter outlines the main issues arising from the study findings and presents recommendations based on these findings.

## 11.2 AIMS AND PURPOSE

Coordinators, chairpersons, principals, LMC members and stakeholders refer to a rich and varied set of aims of the School Completion Programme, including making school a positive experience, providing support for children and young people in crisis situations, enriching students' experience of learning, and helping students bond with the school community, all of which feed into the ultimate goal of school retention. At present, the title of the programme appears to focus rather narrowly on retention and does not capture the broader focus on engagement and enrichment of the school experience. **It is recommended that rebranding the programme to reflect this broader focus would contribute to a clearer vision of the focus and purpose of SCP.**

Across Europe and internationally, a good deal of provision for at-risk youth focuses on compensatory measures, that is, programmes and schemes that address the needs of young people who have already dropped out of mainstream education (see Chapter 1). However, international research points to the fact that early intervention is more effective in terms of both impact and costs. **There is broad consensus that the value of SCP rests in its emphasis on addressing the needs of at-risk children at an early stage and in its flexibility to respond to local needs at the school and community level.** SCP is seen as a crucial complement to other aspects of DEIS provision, with principals reporting that their schools would not have access to these supports in the absence of SCP. In particular, it provides a means to address socio-emotional difficulties which are a barrier to school engagement and learning. It is complementary to the work of the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator, leading to more integrated work with at-risk students and their families. **While principals value the funding for activities for at-risk students, most emphasise the importance of access to skilled personnel who can work with children in crisis situations.**

## 11.3 TARGETING

Clusters employ a wide range of criteria in identifying children and young people for participation in SCP. These criteria largely reflect family circumstances and

socio-emotional well-being rather than educational difficulties. In identifying at-risk students, clusters mainly draw on information from principals, HSCL coordinators and school pastoral care teams, though individual classroom or subject teachers are seen as playing an important role in highlighting emerging issues. **Generally the procedures for identifying at-risk students appear to work well, as clusters draw on a range of information from different sources to identify students in need of support. The fact that the majority of clusters tend to allow additional students to join the target group as needs emerge during the school year means that schools can be responsive to new information on students and/or to specific events such as bereavement. It is recommended that this need for flexibility be recognised in the way that resources are allocated to clusters.**

What is more challenging is deciding on the relative size of that target group. Principals report difficulties in being able to focus only on those with the very greatest difficulties in school contexts with a high concentration of disadvantage and complex needs among the student cohort. Furthermore, coordinators report some pressures to reduce the size of the target group in the context of scarce resources. At present, clusters vary significantly in the proportion of the student cohort who are in the target group. There are important trade-offs in deciding the size of the target group, particularly the tension between providing intensive support for students in very difficult circumstances and the potential stigma arising from separating these at-risk students from their peers for specific activities. **In practice, clusters with a larger cohort of students in the target group usually couple some activities (such as afterschool provision) for a larger number with more intensive one-to-one work with a small number of students. This approach is seen optimal by many coordinators and principals,** especially given that it appears there are no negative trade-offs between relative size of target group and perceived outcomes.

Across clusters, more students are targeted at primary than at post-primary level, reflecting a focus on early intervention and prevention. While the majority of coordinators indicate that the criteria used to target students are reviewed annually, there is a relative stability in the numbers of students targeted across age-groups, with a slight increase in numbers around the transition from primary to post-primary education. **Targeting a larger cohort of young people draws in more students across all age groups, particularly those in the early years and in senior cycle. Firstly, this has benefits in terms of early intervention, especially given the large body of international research highlighting the importance of early years educational experiences in promoting later engagement and achievement. There would appear to be scope to review existing provision for**

**younger students, with a view to ensuring they are provided with targeted supports. Secondly, this approach has benefits in addressing the needs of older students, in a context where coordinators feel they have not made as much progress as desired in relation to senior cycle retention. As junior cycle retention is now very high, it is worth reviewing provision for older students to ensure that activities reflect their needs.**

A further issue relates to differences in relative needs across clusters and among schools in the same cluster. Targeting a larger proportion of students may mean greater need among the student population or it may reflect the provision of more comprehensive supports for a larger group of students. Clusters with larger target groups have greater provision of therapeutic interventions and counselling, indicating that the proportion of students targeted reflects, at least to some extent, greater need. Other research has shown that urban DEIS Band 1 schools have a concentration of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds but also cater to more students from immigrant families, from Traveller backgrounds and with special educational needs (McCoy et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2015). Given this complexity of need, **it is recommended that the size of the target group should reflect the concentration of disadvantage in schools and that the resources should reflect this concentration.**

#### **11.4 CLUSTERING**

Clusters vary in size and in composition, chiefly, in the balance between primary and post-primary schools and in the relative number of non-DEIS schools. While some coordinators, chairpersons and principals are satisfied with clustering arrangements, many express concerns. In rural areas, some concerns are expressed regarding the effect of geographical dispersion on the provision of activities. What is more marked though is the extent to which cluster boundaries, which have been largely fixed over time, reflect local neighbourhoods, with the same families being served by different clusters in some cases, and the (changing) patterns of school transfer. Having students transfer into or out of clusters poses challenges, on the one hand, for early intervention (if students move into post-primary education from primary schools outside the cluster) and, on the other hand, for continuity of support (where students transfer to second-level schools outside the cluster, in some cases, to non-DEIS schools). Follow-up with students is challenging in the latter circumstances, with concerns expressed by coordinators and principals regarding school retention of these young people. **It is recommended that the determination of cluster boundaries be revisited to maximise the extent to which clusters serve the same local neighbourhood and school community. This exercise should be conducted in tandem with the current review of DEIS being carried out by the Department of Education and**

**Skills.** Any reallocation of schools between clusters should be handled incrementally, given that it will disrupt established partnerships between schools, though there appears to be significant potential for buy-in from schools in these clusters given principals' own concerns.

Findings are less clear-cut regarding appropriate cluster size. There is a clear trade-off by cluster size in the role of the coordinator, with those in smaller clusters having much more direct involvement with students and reporting somewhat greater involvement of parents and students in decision-making. On the other hand, in some smaller clusters coordinators and chairpersons report less clarity about their roles and find that LMC involvement is more challenging. Smaller clusters also spend proportionately more on staff costs, reflecting some economies of scale in medium and large clusters. In contrast, coordinators in larger clusters spend less face-to-face time with students and more time on administration and managing staff. Very large clusters are viewed as posing challenges in relation to cohesion and coordination. **It is recommended that, in revising cluster boundaries as suggested above, attention should be paid to the trade-off between economies of scale and issues of cohesion. However, in addressing student needs, the necessity for clusters to reflect the local neighbourhood and patterns of school transfer appears more important than cluster size *per se*.**

## 11.5 GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES

### 11.5.1 The SCP Coordinator

The SCP coordinator is responsible for managing the provision of programmes within the cluster. A major part of the role is liaising with school principals and external community-based agencies in addition to developing and maintaining relations with students and families of target students. Responsibilities of the SCP coordinator include: setting up and monitoring programmes, managing finances, reporting SCP activities to head office, and working with principals and other SCP staff. The role is broad and extremely varied across clusters but varies somewhat by cluster size. Those working in smaller clusters are more likely to be engaged in one-to-one activities with target children compared to larger clusters where the coordinator has a greater management or administrative role. **The study findings point to the importance of maintaining flexibility in the coordinator role in order to address local need. At the same time, it is important that the boundaries of their role are clearly defined, especially in a context where coordinators are often expected to 'bridge the gap' where other supports for students are not accessible to schools.** A clear definition of their role would aid coordinators themselves but also help to inform principals of their key responsibilities and capacity constraints. **Streamlined governance and reporting**

**arrangements (discussed below) would help to ensure clarity around the role of the coordinator and facilitate their key role in arranging and providing supports for at-risk students.**

### 11.5.2 Management and Governance

Governance is seen as *the* major weakness of current SCP arrangements by coordinators, chairpersons and stakeholders. The legal structures vary significantly across clusters, with some coordinators employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), others by Local Management Committees (LMCs), others by a school Board of Management (BOM) and a small number through Teacher Education Centres. Current arrangements mean that local coordinators are the main agent in almost all aspects of SCP (see above), with principals playing a very strong role in the identification of the target group and deciding on the nature of provision. In the majority of cases, coordinators report a good and supportive working relationship with the chairperson. Local management committees vary in their size and composition, with a challenge for some clusters in involving parents and non-school agencies and groups, at least to some extent, reflecting differences in the local infrastructure of community provision. Coordinators spend a relatively large amount of time on administration, especially upward reporting to EWS/Tusla, but report a lack of downward feedback regarding strategic direction. The change in setting for SCP from DES to NEWB to Tusla is seen as having posed challenges regarding communication with local clusters and in imparting a clear vision for SCP at national level.

The variation in employment arrangements means inconsistency regarding support for human resources and other specialised functions, with some of these functions centralised where an ETB is the employer but in most cases handled by the coordinator, chairperson and LMC. This is a particular issue where members of the LMC lack the specialist skills to address increasingly complex financial, legal and HR issues, and where many are unclear about their precise role.<sup>11</sup> Current structures have also resulted in the absence of a clear chain of accountability for coordinators. **It is recommended that one clear and consistent governance and employment structure be applied across all clusters. There are three potential models for such a structure, and the study findings suggest that these models have different strengths and weaknesses.**

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that this issue is not unique to SCP as similar issues are reported in relation to the governance of second-level schools (see Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

Model 1, Local Management Committee (or allied) structure: this would involve the LMC being the employer for all SCP clusters. This approach would ensure consistency across clusters but would not address existing issues about the lack of specialist expertise to deal with complex financial, legal and HR expertise at local level. More detailed administrative guidelines would help in this respect but are unlikely to fully address risks resulting from the lack of clarity in the role of the LMC and in the chain of accountability for local coordinators. It would also maintain the administrative burden on coordinators (and chairpersons), reducing the time available for arranging and running interventions for at-risk students.

Model 2, regional or locally-based supports for clusters through existing structures such as ETBs or Teacher Education Centres: this would involve the extension of the current model whereby some clusters receive administrative and/or HR support from ETBs or Teacher Education Centres. To secure consistency across clusters, this would require that all clusters be aligned with an ETB (or Teacher Education Centre) and that clear guidelines be developed on the exact responsibilities of those structures vis-à-vis clusters. This approach could reduce the administrative burden on coordinators and some of the risk exposure by hiving off payroll, financial, HR and legal tasks to a local structure. It would not fully address the issue of accountability and would require that clear guidelines be put in place regarding the relationship between the coordinator, LMC and Tusla head office.

Model 3, direct employment of project staff (coordinators and project workers) by Tusla: This would enable a clear line of accountability to Tusla management structures. It would also curtail the risks involved in having non-specialists dealing with complex HR, financial and legal issues by providing centralised support for payroll, HR and legal functions. In the longer term, it may also facilitate greater integration of SCP activities with other Tusla functions. It is likely that sessional staff would still be employed by the LMC, thus maintaining some administrative responsibilities at local cluster level.

The three models would have very different implications for the role of the LMC. The study findings point to a lack of clarity on the part of many LMC members as to their role. **Aside from the issue as to whether the LMC retains a full governance role, there are two key functions for the LMC in any future structure. Firstly, it should serve as a way of identifying local need and deciding the appropriate provision to be put in place to reflect this need. Secondly, current LMC arrangements have built up networks, often strong networks, between groups of principals at local level and the LMC could usefully play an ongoing role in fostering a 'community of practice', allowing for the exchange of**



**ideas on good practice and supports among principals.** Clarification of the role of the LMC may also foster greater involvement of non-school groups, if the focus is shifted away from more technical legal and financial issues towards the planning of provision.

### 11.5.3 Integrated Service Delivery

Another important part of SCP organisation is the way in which it is embedded in other parts of DEIS provision. The study findings indicate a good working relationship between SCP coordinators and HSCLCs in the vast majority of clusters (see below). However, the extent of involvement of SCP coordinators in DEIS planning varies across and within clusters. There appears to be good co-operation around target-setting for attendance and retention but less input from coordinators regarding other aspects of DEIS provision. It is hoped that the removal of some of the administrative burden from local coordinators, as recommended above, would free up time to allow them to contribute to a whole-school approach to DEIS planning in schools in their cluster. **It is recommended that principals treat SCP as an integral part of their DEIS planning, consulting with coordinators regarding target-setting and appropriate provision to meet those targets.** At a broader level, the Department of Education and Skills is currently reviewing DEIS provision. **It is crucial that any changes in SCP structures and provision be seen in the context of the review of the broader DEIS programme.**

In many clusters, the frequent communication between the SCP coordinator, the HSCLC and the EWO was seen as vital. This team approach appeared to facilitate a comprehensive and seamless service to children at-risk of disengagement and early school leaving. Regular communication between the three parties appeared to be beneficial in ensuring consistency of supports for children and in preventing duplication of efforts. In other instances, however, coordinators and principals reported that it was difficult to secure back-up from EWOs unless children had been absent from school for very considerable periods of time. This posed challenges in early intervention with those who were not yet chronic non-attenders but were at risk of being so in the future. The establishment of Tusla provides an opportunity for a genuinely integrated approach to service delivery to at-risk children and their families. An earlier consultation process (NEWB, 2011) pointed to the potential for structured communication, information-sharing and planning across the three pillars of Educational Welfare Services. **It is recommended that good practice at local level be supported by an immediate move to integrating these services at a formal level, taking account of learning from the pilot phase of the *One Child* model. In fully integrating these services, it is crucial that respective roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. *Better***

*Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) highlights the importance of inter-agency co-operation to enhance child outcomes. There is considerable scope for an integrated Educational Welfare Services to link with other services, such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (VTHI Service) or Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VTVI Service) (now operating within the NCSE's Inclusion Support Service).

## 11.6 FUNDING

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the current level of funding for SCP at local level. The impact of cuts in SCP expenditure has resulted in reduced provision in the context of growing needs and reduced service supports within and outside school as a result of the recession. Increases in the rates of child poverty and material deprivation, which are linked to greater socio-emotional difficulties among children, have posed particular challenges for DEIS schools. SCP cuts in funding have led to reduced staffing levels, particularly regarding the use of sessional staff. Study findings highlight that such reductions have had a particular impact on after-school and holiday provision. In some cases, they have constrained access to the therapeutic interventions and counselling deemed necessary to support children in crisis situations. Reductions in funding have been applied proportionately across clusters but this does not necessarily reflect the level of need, and the concentration of greater disadvantage in some local areas. **Currently there is a lack of clarity about how funding is, and should be, divided within clusters, with many arrangements reflecting historic decisions rather than need.**

The study findings indicate that expenditure cuts have curtailed SCP provision at a time of growing need at the school level. This is at odds with international evidence that early intervention is likely to have greater impact and be more cost-effective than remedial intervention after disengagement and drop-out from school. Principals and stakeholders report that in the absence of SCP, schools will not be in a position to provide these designated supports to foster the socio-emotional well-being of at-risk students. **There appears to be little scope for further cuts in expenditure without seriously compromising the viability of SCP. There is a case for rebalancing, and even increasing, funding for those schools serving very complex student needs, urban Band 1 DEIS schools and very disadvantaged second-level schools. Given the lack of clarity about the distribution of funding within clusters, there is a need for detailed guidelines and direction, again with the aim of targeting resources towards greater need.**

### 11.7 PROVISION

There is now a large body of research on the individual and societal costs of school absenteeism and early school leaving (see, for example, Levin, 2009). There is also a large body of research on ‘what works’ in education, particularly for disadvantaged groups of children and young people. In spite of the volume of such research, there is relatively little consensus on what specific interventions will help to secure improved outcomes. Levin (2008) highlights robust evidence for the positive effect of high quality early years education, reduced class size and instructional reform on levels of high school completion among disadvantaged groups. Other researchers have pointed to the value of a combination of strategies in targeting at-risk students (Lamb and Rice, 2008), indicating that ‘no strategy worked unilaterally in addressing the participation, attendance and retention of children in education’ (Morris and Parashar, 2012). Strategies found to be effective involve multi-agency approaches, family involvement, supportive school cultures, and early identification and intervention (Morris and Parashar, 2012). Research exploring particular types of provision has highlighted the positive impact of after-school activities and holiday programmes on young people’s socio-emotional well-being and engagement (Kataoka and Vandell, 2013; Martin et al., 2013).

A consultation with SCP projects attempted to identify the core elements within SCP, pointing to 16 strategies that were seen as the most effective (SCP, 2008). These included (in order of the frequency mentioned) extra-curricular activities, after-school/homework clubs, personal development work, breakfast/lunch clubs, counselling and therapeutic interventions, summer programmes, learning support, attendance tracking, transfer programmes, staff, interagency collaboration, family supports, behaviour management, targeting of at-risk students, mentoring and transport. The survey of coordinators and chairpersons conducted for the current study collected detailed information on the kinds of provision offered by clusters, for the first time allowing a detailed analysis of the *combinations* of interventions offered across and within clusters.

Currently the bulk of provision in SCP clusters relates to in-school provision, though two groups of clusters are evident; one which focuses on in-school interventions and activities and one which has a diverse array of provision covering the four pillars of SCP, namely, in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision. Urban clusters are more likely to have diverse provision while rural clusters focus more on in-school provision, especially on support for formal learning. Coordinators would like to see a greater emphasis on after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision than is currently the case. Indeed, many coordinators report that after-school and holiday provision have been curtailed in

the light of expenditure cuts (see above). This is of concern given the role of such activities in providing a way of fostering a sense of belonging to the school, improving interaction with parents and providing a safe haven for students in neighbourhoods where they may otherwise be at risk.

The nature of activities provided in specific clusters and in individual schools within clusters is largely decided by school principals in tandem with the local coordinator. This flexibility is seen as providing a way to meet the diverse needs of students in particular schools and local areas. This trade-off between allowing for flexibility to respond to local need and having certain provision in place for all students is evident in much international provision for at-risk groups (see, for example, the Sure Start centres in England) and in several parts of the school system (for example, the Transition Year programme, with very marked variation in the number and type of activities provided at school level; see Smyth et al., 2004). Indeed, despite a centralised curriculum (and at second-level, assessment) structure, schools in Ireland have a good deal of discretion over key parts of organisation and process, which impact significantly on student outcomes (Smyth, 1999). **On this basis, it would appear crucial that the potential for local flexibility be retained in SCP.**

**The survey findings indicate that the interventions currently provided by SCP clusters fall within the ‘core elements’ identified as effective in the earlier consultation (SCP, 2008).** The provision offered can be seen as falling into three broad but inter-related categories. Firstly, there are interventions to monitor attendance on the one hand while making school a more engaging and attractive place through the provision of after-school and holiday activities. Secondly, there are interventions designed to enhance children’s socio-emotional well-being, ranging from providing a ‘friendly face’ at breakfast club through to structured therapeutic interventions. Thirdly, there are interventions which aim to facilitate learning during the school day<sup>12</sup> and/or by providing access to study support after school. **These three strands would appear to provide a complementary way of creating the conditions for at-risk children and young people to engage with learning and include practices shown to have an impact on child outcomes internationally.** However, there is currently a lack of evidence on the extent to which *particular types (and combinations) of activities* impact on student outcomes in the short-, medium- and long-term (see below on the challenges in assessing outcomes). **It is recommended that the development of an outcomes-focused framework (see below) be used to help review best practice in the**

<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it is important to ensure that learning activities provided through SCP are complementary to those provided through other aspects of DEIS provision.

**kinds of interventions provided by clusters and by individual schools within clusters. In this regard, continuous professional development, perhaps in conjunction with an online forum to create a 'community of practice', has an important role to play in exchanging ideas and experiences between schools and clusters, and in providing coordinators and principals with a repertoire of tried and tested activities to draw upon.**

A guiding principle of SCP provision should be that it is complementary to the activities otherwise provided in the school setting. Cuts in public expenditure have placed increasing pressures on coordinators to compensate for a reduction in access to certain services, particularly around child and adolescent mental health. This raises important issues around the boundaries of SCP. However, in many instances an emergency response is needed at the school level and can only be facilitated through SCP. It is worth noting too that schools are the only State service that children access directly on a regular basis, so schools have enormous capacity to identify at-risk children and young people before they have come to the attention of other services. **It is recommended that SCP retain the capacity to respond to situations where children are in crisis but that in the longer term interagency collaboration should aim to enhance the complementary role of SCP in integrated service delivery.** SCP currently provides a range of interventions to support learning within and after school and is valued by principals for offering these supports. However, it is important to ensure that such supports are complementary to other aspects of DEIS provision for teaching and learning. **Greater coordination with other aspects of DEIS planning (see above) would enhance the complementarity of SCP supports for learning and reduce any potential duplication.**

There appears to be some uncertainty on the part of coordinators and chairpersons regarding the role of out-of-school supports in SCP provision. At the moment, some clusters have no such supports in place while others cater for very small numbers, with supports ranging from providing advice and information to young people and their families up to very intensive one-to-one work with young people. Coordinators report challenges in having the resources to offer such one-to-one work as well as the potential tensions in being based in a school premises when the young person has disengaged from school. **It is recommended that a review be undertaken of the role of out-of-school supports in the continuum of SCP provision and in relation to other alternative education provision.**

## 11.8 STUDENT OUTCOMES

Since the inception of SCP, there has been an improvement in primary attendance levels and in rates of retention to Leaving Certificate, though these trends cannot be attributed to SCP alone. However, SCP, along with other strands of DEIS provision, is likely to have played an important role in this respect. Analyses of *Growing Up in Ireland* data indicate that disadvantaged children are much less likely to be involved in out-of-school activities (such as sports and cultural activities). However, rates of involvement in out-of-school activities among nine-year-olds in urban Band 1 DEIS schools are higher than might be expected, given their profile, a pattern which is likely to relate to SCP and other DEIS supports. The survey of coordinators and chairpersons indicates that SCP is seen as having had a positive impact on attendance, on making school a more positive experience for students and on junior cycle retention. Interviews with DEIS principals echoed these views, with many also highlighting the impact of SCP on being able to put supports in place at short notice for children in crisis.

Current SCP reporting arrangements have resulted in a strong emphasis on reporting 'outcomes'. Although feedback from students, parents and teachers is invaluable in planning and adjusting provision, it does not represent a rigorous measure of impact. Indeed, stakeholder feedback along with international experience indicates the complexity of assessing impact for a multi-faceted programme such as SCP. This complexity reflects a number of factors:

- 'Softer' measures of engagement are more difficult to measure than attendance and retention but are the key drivers of these behaviours.
- Different activities are offered across clusters and among different schools within clusters.
- Specific activities target different groups of children so that some interventions such as counselling involve very disadvantaged groups while other supports such as homework clubs have a more heterogeneous composition, making it difficult to compare 'like with like'.
- Students may participate in multiple SCP activities in any given year and/or over time so any impact will reflect the cumulative influence of these activities.
- Students taking part in SCP are provided with a variety of supports within school (through DEIS, learning support etc.) and outside school (through other area-based interventions, community youth provision, social work services etc.), making it extremely difficult to attribute causality.

It would nonetheless be possible to assess the impact of SCP on outcomes with a longitudinal study which sought to capture these different factors, including measures of school engagement and socio-emotional well-being. However, such a study would require significant resources and would yield findings only in the longer term. In the short and medium term, there are two important avenues for development.

Firstly, evaluation of DEIS was built into the programme from the outset but this has not involved the systematic inclusion of SCP. **It is recommended that SCP be included in evaluations of DEIS conducted by the Educational Research Centre and DES inspectorate. SCP provision could also usefully be considered in whole-school evaluation inspections**, particularly given new work by the inspectorate on a template regarding school provision to support student well-being, an area in which SCP provision is crucial. **While there is potential to engage the Tusla inspectorate in assessing SCP provision, involving the DES inspectorate in this function would appear to reduce the risk of duplication of effort given the ongoing programme of whole-school evaluations.**

Secondly, current reporting requirements marry the provision of information on 'outcomes' with reporting for accountability purposes, which may have the perverse incentive of leading coordinators to report on the 'success' of provision rather than critically reflecting on its potential impact. Composite reports of data collected from the Annual Progress Reports do indeed show that interventions are reported as 'very successful' or 'successful'. **The changes in management and accountability structures recommended above should help to clarify the purpose of Annual Progress Reports and other such reports.** More specific recommendations regarding the collection and reporting of data are as follows.

- A good deal of information is collected from coordinators but much of it is not in a form which is amenable to easy analysis. **There should be greater use of 'tick boxes', for example, on type of provision, to reduce the administrative burden but, more importantly, to enable the use of these data to systematically analyse patterns across clusters. Online completion of templates would be a cost-effective way of collating and analysing the information in a timely fashion. On the other hand, there is more scope for providing some detail on variation within clusters, particularly given the different needs of primary and post-primary schools.** Very detailed categories are required for reporting early school leaving which has resulted in inconsistent quality of data. **The reporting template should be simplified.** There would seem to be considerable potential try to link to DES data on early school leaving based on the Post-Primary Pupil Database.

- At present, coordinators and principals do not have access to timely national data against which to benchmark themselves on objective outcomes such as attendance. Until very recently, the most recently published national attendance data related to 2010/11. There is scope too to provide more detailed information on attendance by class and year group, a potentially useful benchmark to inform schools' target-setting and planning.
- Coordinators are encouraged to report specific and measurable targets and link these clearly to reported outcomes, though they vary in the extent to which they do so (see also *SCP Data Bulletin no. 6*). **Coordinators should be encouraged through clear guidelines to indicate specific outcomes on objective measures such as attendance and early school leaving. However, the value of reporting socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes in relation to engagement should be emphasised**, even though they are not easily measurable given the tools available to coordinators.<sup>13</sup> **It is recommended that an outcomes-focused quality assurance framework be developed, in consultation with local coordinators, which combines 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes to give a rounded picture of progress.**

Perhaps the strongest tool in fostering student outcomes through SCP lies in continuous professional development both in group settings and through an online forum. It is crucial that CPD be used in the communication of best practice not only to coordinators but also to principals who are key decision-makers in shaping the nature of provision at school level.

---

<sup>13</sup> Existing survey research does, however, provide a battery of instruments for assessing student engagement and well-being. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), for example, has been used as part of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, providing useful insights into the prevalence of behavioural difficulties and the influences on their emergence.



## References

- AbtAssociates (2001). *National Evaluation of Family Support Programs. Final Report Volume B: Research Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.
- Ayalon, A. (1994). Monopolizing knowledge? The ethnic composition and curriculum of Israeli high schools. *Sociology of Education*, 67(4), 264-278.
- Belfield, C.R. and H.M. Levin (2007). *The Price We Pay: The Costs to the Nation of Inadequate Education*. Washington, DC.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Belfield, C.R. and H.M. Levin (2009). *High School Dropouts and the Economic Losses from Juvenile Crime in California*. New York. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education.
- Berends, M. (1995). Educational stratification and students' social bonding to school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16(3), 327-351.
- Blau, P.M. and O. Dudley Duncan (1967). *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Biggart, A., K. Kerr, L. O'Hare and P. Connolly (2012). *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Childhood Development Initiative's Doodle Den Literacy Programme*. Belfast: Childhood Development Initiative.
- Boudon, R. (1974). *Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality: Changing Prospects in Western Society*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Bourdieu, P. and J.C. Passeron (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Brown, T.M. and L.F. Rodriguez (2008). School and the co-construction of dropout. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(2), 221-242.
- Brunello, G. and M. De Paola (2013). *The Costs of Early School Leaving in Europe*. Brussels: European Expert Network on Economics of Education
- Bryk, A.S. and Y.M. Thum (1989). The effects of high school organization on dropping out: An exploratory investigation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26, 353-383.
- Byrne, D. (2008). *The Influence of Early Work Experience undertaken before Leaving Second-level education on the Socio-economic Outcomes of School Leavers in the Republic of Ireland*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh.
- Byrne, D., S. McCoy and D. Watson (2009). *School Leavers' Survey Report 2007*. Dublin: ESRI and Department of Education and Science.
- Byrne, D. and E. Smyth (2010). *No Way Back? The Dynamics of Early School Leaving*. Dublin: ESRI.
- Cairns, R.B., B.D. Cairns and J. Neckerman (1989). Early school dropout: configurations and determinants. *Child Development*, 60(6), 1437-1452.
- Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2014). *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2012*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

- Coleman, J.S., T. Hoffer and S.B. Kilgore (1982). *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic and Private Schools Compared*. New York: Basic.
- Comiskey, C.M., K. O'Sullivan, M.B. Quirke, C. Wynne, P. Kelly and S. McGilloway (2012). *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Childhood Development Initiative's Healthy Schools Programme*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).
- Comptroller and Auditor General (2006). *Report on Value for Money Examination - Educational Disadvantage Initiatives in the Primary Sector*, Dublin: C and AG.
- Croninger, R.G. and V.E. Lee (2001). Social capital and dropping out of high school: benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *Teachers College Record*, 103(4), 548-581.
- Croxford, L. and J. Ozga (2005). *Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) Attainment of National Qualifications in the Scottish Pilots*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- Cummings, C., A. Dyson, D., Muijs, I. Papps, D. Pearson, C. Raffo, L. Tiplady and L. Todd (2007). *Evaluation of the Full Service Extended Schools Initiative: Full Report*. Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Dale, R. (2010). *Early School Leaving Lessons from research for policy makers* Brussels: European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture.
- Dalziel D. and K. Henthorne (2005). *Parents'/carers' Attitudes Towards School Attendance, Research Report RR618*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.
- Darmody, M. and E. Smyth (2013). *Governance and Funding of Voluntary Secondary Schools in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI.
- Davis, K.S. and D.R. Dupper (2004). Student-teacher relationships: an overlooked factor in school dropout. *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, 9(1), 179-193.
- DCYA 2014. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2018*. Dublin: DCYA.
- Dearden, L., C. Emmerson, C. Frayne and C. Meghir (2005). *Education Subsidies and School Drop-out Rates*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- Department of Education and Skills (2015). *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools, 2008 Entry Cohort*, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Department of Education and Skills (2015a). *Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Primary Schools*, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Department of Education and Skills (2005). *The School Completion Programme Booklet*. Dublin Department of Education and Science.
- Department of Education and Skills. *The School Completion Programme Booklet*. Dublin Department of Education and Science.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2008). *Aims and Principles of the School Completion Programme*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

- DICE Database (2012). 'Tackling Early School Leaving in Europe: Different Policies', Ifo Institute, Munich, online available at [www.cesifo-group.de/DICE/fb/ZhbflWwyJ](http://www.cesifo-group.de/DICE/fb/ZhbflWwyJ)
- Downes, P. (2011). *Multi/Interdisciplinary Teams for Early School Leaving Prevention: Developing a European Strategy Informed by International Evidence and Research*: NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training).
- DPER (2011). *Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014*. Dublin: DPER.
- Edwards, A. and P. Downes (2012). *Developing Multiagency and Cross-sector Synergies in and around Education*. Oxford University: NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training).
- Erikson, R. and J.O. Jonsson (1996). *Can Education be Equalized? Sweden in Comparative Perspective*. Westview Press.
- European Commission (2013). *Reducing Early School Leaving: Key Messages and Policy Support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*. Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2011). *Reducing Early School Leaving. Accompanying Document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving*. Brussels: European Commission Staff Working Paper.
- Galvin, J., A. Higgins and K. Mahony (2009). *Family, School, Community Educational Partnership*. Limerick: Mary Immaculate College.
- Garnier, H.E., J.A. Stein and J.K. Jacobs (1997). The process of dropping out of high school: A 19-year perspective. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(2), 395-419.
- GHK Consulting Ltd. (2011). *Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU*. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Goldsmith, P.A. (2003). All segregation is not equal: The impact of Latino and Black school composition. *Sociological Perspectives*, 46(1), 83-105.
- Goldthorpe, J.H. (1996). Class analysis and the reorientation of class theory: the case of persisting differentials in educational attainment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 47(3), 481-512.
- Hawkins, J.D., R. Kosterman, R.F. Catalano, K.G. Hill and R.D. Abbott (2005). Promoting positive adult functioning through social development intervention in childhood: Long-term effects from the Seattle Social Development Project. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 159:25-31.
- Hawkins, J.D., B.H. Smith, K.G. Hill, R. Kosterman, R.F. Catalano and R.D. Abbott (2007). Promoting social development and preventing health and behavior problems during the elementary grades: results from the Seattle Social Development Project. *Victims & Offenders*, 2:161-181.
- Hayes, N., S. Keegan and E. Goulding (2012). *Evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

- Hayes, N., I. Siraj-Blatchford, S. Keegan and E. Goulding (2013). *Evaluation of the Early Years Programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).
- Jimerson, S., B. Egeland, L.A. Sroufe and B. Carlson (2000). A prospective longitudinal study of high school dropouts examining multiple predictors across development. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(6), 525-549.
- Kataoka, S. and D.L. Vandell (2013). Quality of afterschool activities and relative change in adolescent functioning over two years. *Applied Developmental Science 17*(3): 123-134.
- Keane, C., T. Callan, M. Savage, J.R. Walsh and B. Colgan (2014). 'Distributional Impact of Tax, Welfare and Public Service Pay Policies: Budget 2015 and Budgets 2009-2015', Special Article in *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, Winter.
- Kearney, C.A. (2008). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: a contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*(3): 451-471.
- Kelly, E., S. McGuinness (2015). Impact of the Great Recession on unemployed and NEET individuals' labour market transitions in Ireland. *Economic Systems*, online.
- Kelly, E., S. McGuinness, P.J. O'Connell, D. Haugh and A. González Pandiella (2014). Transitions in and out of unemployment among young people in the Irish recession. *Comparative Economic Studies*, online.
- Kerckhoff, A. C. (1986). Effects of ability grouping in British secondary schools. *American Sociological Review, 51*(842-858).
- Kratochwill, T.R., L. McDonald, J.R. Levin, H. Young Bear-Tibbetts and M.K. Demaray (2004). Families and Schools Together: An experimental analysis of a parent- mediated multi-family group program for American Indian children. *Journal of School Psychology, 42*, 359-383.
- Lamb, S. and S. Rice (2008). *Effective Intervention Strategies for Students at Risk of Early Leaving: Discussion Paper*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Layte, R., A. Nolan and B. Nolan (2007). *Poor Prescriptions: Poverty and Access to Community Health Services*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Lee, V.E. and D.T. Burkham (2003). Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure. *American Educational Research Journal*(2), 353-393.
- Levin, H.M. (2009). The economic payoff to investing in educational justice. *Educational Researcher, 38* (1): 5-20.
- Lyche, C.S. (2010). *Taking on the Completion Challenge: A Literature Review On Policies To Prevent Dropout And Early School Leaving*. Paris: OECD.
- Martin, K., C. Sharp and P. Mehta (2013). *The Impact of the Summer Schools Programme on Pupils*. Slough: NFER.
- McCoy, S., A. Quail and E. Smyth (2014). The effects of school social mix: unpacking the differences, *Irish Educational Studies, 33* (3): 307-330.
- McCoy, S. (2000). *Do Schools Count? Key School Structural and Process Influences on Early School Leaving*. Ph.D. thesis: The Queen's University of Belfast.

- McCoy, S., A. Quail and E. Smyth (2012). *Influences on Nine-year-olds' Learning*. Dublin: ESRI/DCYA.
- McDonald, L. and S. Fitzroy (2010). *Families and Schools Together (FAST) Aggregate FASTUK Evaluation Report of 15 Schools in 15 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) across the UK*. London: Middlesex University.
- Morgenroth, E. (1999). *Estimated Social Rates of Return to Educational Interventions to Prevent Early Educational Failure*. Dublin: ESRI, Report to the Department of Education and Science.
- Morris, M. and U. Parashar (2012). *Addressing the Participation, Attendance and Retention of Children in Education: A Review of Best Practice*. Dublin: National Educational Welfare Board.
- NEWB (2011). *Providing Integrated Support for Pupil Attendance, Participation and Retention in Education: Report of the Consultation for the National Educational Welfare Board*. Dublin: NEWB.
- NIAO (2004). *Improving Pupil Attendance at School*. Belfast: The Stationery Office and Northern Ireland Audit Office.
- NREPP (2007). *SAFEChildren: Intervention Summary*.  
[www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=40](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=40).
- Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- OECD (2014). *Education at a Glance*. Paris: OECD.
- O'Hare, L., K. Kerr, A. Biggart and P. Connolly (2012). *Evaluation of the Childhood Development Initiative's Mate-Tricks Pro-Social Behaviour After-School Programme*. Belfast: Childhood Development Initiative.
- Posner, J.K. and D.L. Vandell (1994). Low-income children's after-school care: are there beneficial effects of after-school programs? *Child Development*, 65(2), 440-456.
- Robins, L.N. and K.S. Radcliffe (1980). The long-term outcomes of truancy. In L. a. B. Hersov, I. (Ed.), *Out of School*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Rothman, S. (2004). Staying longer and school and absenteeism: evidence from Australian Research and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. *International Education Journal*, 5(1), 113-123.
- Rumberger, R.W. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 583-625.
- Rutter, M., B. Maughan, P. Mortimore and J. Ouston (1979). *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and their Effects on Children*. London: Open Books.
- Ryan, C. (1999). *Early School Leaving: A Sharing of Responsibility*. Dublin: ASTI.
- SCP (2005). *Guidelines Towards Best Practice*. Dublin: SCP.
- SCP (2006a). *The School Completion Programme, Administrative, Financial and Employment Guidelines, Revised Edition 2006*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- SCP (2006b). *SCP Guidelines on Identifying Young People at Risk of Early School Leaving*: SCP and DES.

- SCP (2008). *The Core Elements of the School Completion Programme*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- SCP (2012a). *Data Bulletin no. 2: Governance*. Dublin: SCP.
- SCP (2012b). *Data Bulletin no. 3: Interagency Cooperation*. Dublin: SCP.
- SCP (2012c). *Data Bulletin no. 6: Review, Target-Setting and Outcomes*. Dublin: SCP.
- SCP (2014). *National Overview of the School Completion Programme for reporting period 2012-2013*. Dublin: SCP.
- Sewell, W., H. Archibald, O. Haller and G. Ohlendorf (1970). The educational and early occupational status attainment process: Replication and revision. *American Sociological Review*, 34, 1014-1024.
- Sewell, W., H. Archibald, O. Haller and A. Portes (1969). The educational and early occupational status attainment process. *American Sociological Review*, 34, 82-92.
- Smyth, E. (1999). *Do Schools Differ? Academic and Personal Development among Pupils in the Second-Level Sector*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with The Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Smyth, E., A. Dunne, M. Darmody and S. McCoy (2007). *Gearing Up for the Exam: The Experiences of Junior Certificate Students*. Dublin: The Liffey Press in association with the Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Smyth, E. and S. McCoy (2009). *Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage, Research Series No. 6*. Dublin: ESRI.
- Smyth, E., D. Byrne and C. Hannan (2004). *The Transition Year Programme: An Assessment*. Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI.
- Smyth, E., J. Banks and E. Calvert (2011). *From Leaving Certificate to Leaving School: A Longitudinal Study of Sixth Year Students*. Dublin: The Liffey Press/ESRI/ NCCA and Department of Education and Skills.
- Smyth, E., S. McCoy, G. Kingston (2015). *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*. Dublin: ESRI.
- Smyth, J. (2005). An argument for new understandings and explanations of early school leaving that go beyond the conventional. *London Review of Education*, 3(2), 117-130.
- Sneddon, H. and M. Harris (2013). *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Children's Learning*. Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.
- Stamou, E., A. Edwards, H. Daniels and L. Ferguson (2014). *Young People At-risk of Drop-out from Education: Recognising and Responding to their Needs*. Oxford: University of Oxford.
- Statham, J. (2013). *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Improving Child Behaviour*. Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.
- Teddle, C. and D. Reynolds (2000). *The International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research*. London: Falmer.
- Tolan, P., D. Gorman-Smith and D. Henry (2004). Supporting families in a high risk setting. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(5): 855-869.

Tusla (2014). *Business Plan 2014*. Dublin: Tusla.

Wagner, B., Dunkake and Weiss. (2004). *Truancy in Germany: A theoretical and empirical analysis*. Paper presented at the conference European Society or European Societies?, Granada, Spain.

Watson, D., B. Maitre, C.T. Whelan and J. Williams (2014). *Growing Up in Ireland: Child Economic Vulnerability and Socio-emotional Development*. Dublin: DCYA.

Weir, S. and S. Denner (2013). *Evaluation of the School Support Programme under DEIS*. Dublin: ERC.

Weir, S., L. McAvinue, E. Moran and A. O'Flaherty (2014). *A Report on the Evaluation of DEIS at the Second Level*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Whelan, C.T. and B. Maitre (2014). The Great Recession and the changing distribution of economic vulnerability by social class: the Irish case. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24(5):470-485.





The Economic & Social Research Institute  
Whitaker Square  
Sir John Rogerson's Quay  
Dublin 2, Ireland  
+ 353 1 863 2000 [www.esri.ie](http://www.esri.ie)  
ISBN 978 0 7070 0388 7