

Dublin Inner City Partnership
Preventative Education
Case Study of the Primary School Initiative

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Introduction

This case study aims to provide a critical analysis of the Primary School Initiative funded by the Dublin Inner City Partnership, highlighting strengths and weaknesses and value to participants, schools and the community. It is hoped that this review will assist with the longer term planning of this and similar initiatives. The Initiative is now in its second year of operation with plans to run for three full years. Funding is not guaranteed post December 1999.

Background

The Dublin Inner City Partnership (DICP) was established in April 1991 with the brief of responding to long-term unemployment at local level. The organisation employs a 'partnership' approach, promoting the creation of links and networking among local organisations and statutory agencies within the inner city.

The idea for the Primary School Initiative (PSI) emerged from a number of schools in Dublin which had approached the DICP seeking assistance to provide additional supports for teachers, pupils and parents. The design of the initiative was overseen by the Partnership's Education and Training Working Group.

A feature common to the schools was that they were all small schools situated in the inner city. Due to demographic changes in their local communities, they no longer sustained large student populations, so income from capitation fees had declined, although maintenance costs had remained stable.

Added to this was the fact that schools were restricted in their ability to raise funds locally, owing to the disadvantaged status of communities in which they were based. The schools in general were under-resourced and experiencing pressure to maintain standards despite falling student numbers (See Appendix I). They were further disadvantaged in that they had a 'teaching principal,' i.e. one who could not devote his/her entire day to the responsibilities of being a principal.¹ In general, these schools had low levels of morale; teachers felt that the curriculum and traditional teaching methods were failing pupils. School Principals, the driving force behind the Initiative, were anxious to bring about radical change and improve the educational environment in their schools for both staff and students.

The issue of educational disadvantage falls within the brief of the DICP, since the organisation tackles the problem of long-term unemployment using a 'long-term' view of support. In other words, the Partnership focuses not only on supporting those presently

¹ PSI schools made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin TD, in relation to the issue of teaching principals. The submission highlighted the difficulties associated with a teaching principal and the demands placed on that role, and outlined the benefits of having an administrative principal (See Appendix II).

experiencing unemployment, but also on young people who may one day be vulnerable to unemployment. Measure 3 in their Action Plan (1996-2000) is entitled 'Tackling Educational Disadvantage and Promotion and Support for New Learning Opportunities'.

3.2 Significant investment will be committed to undertake an innovative intervention in selected local primary schools in cooperation with the management, staff and parents.

The objective of this measure was to establish an educational partnership that would be capable of addressing the problems of inner city Primary school children through co-operation between schools (DICP, nd:18).

The Partnership recognises the close relationship between educational levels and employment and is deeply concerned that poor scholastic attainment and early school leaving are common among the children of the unemployed. Many children in the inner city inherit at birth the burdens of unemployment and social exclusion. Educational failure is an important element in a complex web of forces and influences that shape the lives of these young people which cannot be adequately confronted without an integrated approach to education. (DICP Internal document on PSI)

The Partnership was anxious to promote co-operation between schools and facilitated the establishment up of a network consisting of the original eight self-selecting schools. Hence the Primary School Initiative was established in 1996, and formally launched in 1997. The Initiative has the overall aim of promoting active participation by schools in their own development and testing new models of intervention at Primary level.

Mission Statement

The PSI aims to facilitate the schools in the network to develop as centres of holistic education, so that pupils in partnership with teachers and parents are empowered to express and achieve their individual potential.

Outline of local context

The most recent baseline data report for the inner city area was that produced by Gamma for Area Development Management in 1998. This report stresses the strong link between educational attainment and earning capacity and notes that the level of educational disadvantage in an area "may be regarded as a proxy for social/or economic deprivation." (Gamma. 1998:12)²

In the DICP catchment area, 43 per cent of the adult population left school at or before the age of 15 years; this compares with a national figure of 35 per cent. Thirty six per cent of people in the area aged 15 and over had no formal education, or Primary education only. Again, when compared with figures for the county (31.5%) and national figures (29.5%), the inner city area rates higher (Gamma, 1998:13). Two fifths (39%) of the total unemployed population were educated to Primary level only.

² Appendix III contains additional statistics on educational attainment.

Rates for the completion of education for people aged 15 and under were higher in particular areas of the inner city: these included Ballybough A (61.9%); Mountjoy A (72.1%); and North Dock C (65.6%). In some wards, under ten per cent of the population receive Third Level education: these areas include Ballybough A (7.3%) Inns Quay C (8.7%), Ushers C (8.0%).

Scott Boldt's 1994 study on early school-leavers in the inner city of Dublin indicated that there was no single factor leading to early school-leaving. Instead, a series of events was responsible for an individual's decision to leave school. Boldt conducted open-ended interviews and focus groups with early school-leavers and people who were most familiar with them (including parents, principals and teachers). In all, 22 early school-leavers participated in the research.

One factor he uncovered concerned the tradition of early school-leaving among some inner city, working class communities. There appeared to be differences between middle class and working class communities in their perceptions of the value of education and their ability to identify with the system. During the research, pupils and participants were asked if they thought that different class backgrounds contributed to early school-leaving; most felt that socio-economic background impacted on differences in attitudes to school, and agreed it contributed to the problem of early-school leaving.

There was broad consensus among the sample that there are differences in values and expectations between the inner city and the school system. The view was shared among the sample that there are different traditions and approaches to life in the inner city which, in many cases, are seen to be opposed to the routine and 'ethos' of schools. With few opportunities available in the inner city, it was believed that many pupils have a sense of hopelessness or desperation. This is seen to create low expectations, a lack of confidence, and a 'living for the immediate with no direction for the future.' " (Boldt, 1994:53)

Thus in the inner city, residents often place a higher value on work than on educational qualification. Between 1980 and 1985, rates of early school leaving in Dublin were nearly three times as high as the National average (Boldt, 1994:4). People living in situations of poverty have little choice but to prioritise an immediate income over long-term goals, in an effort to cope with the daily demands of life. However, where traditionally it was possible to leave school early and find low-skilled employment, this is becoming increasingly difficult as the nature of the labour market changes. For example, between 1986 and 1996 there was an 18.5% decrease in work in the manufacturing industry in the Partnership area, and a 20.7% decline in jobs in building and construction. In contrast to this, there has been a 45.8% increase in work in commerce, and 31.3% increase in work in professional services (Gamma, 1998: Table 7.2). Hence the present labour force is far more likely to require an educational qualification than it was ten years ago.

In his policy document on educational disadvantage, Fine Gael's Richard Bruton notes that students who leave school with no qualification are ten times more likely to be unemployed than Third Level graduates (Fine Gael, 1998:12). This is particularly pertinent to the inner city

area, where rates of early school leaving are high and low levels of educational attainment among the indigenous population are common.

Outline of national strategy

In Irish society, failure in the education system can have life-long implications. It can increase the risk of experiencing unemployment or employment in low-paying and insecure jobs; it can also curtail personal development, the development of independence and self-confidence. These problems can become more pronounced over time, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and inequality that is passed on from generation to generation. Educational success is now recognised as an important key to unlocking better life chances. (CPA discussion papers, 1998:4)

In recent years, the State has begun to recognise the failings of the educational system for some pupils, and has responded through the Department of Education and Science by establishing various schemes and resources for selected schools.

There are two main programmes to address educational disadvantage at Primary level: remedial education and designated disadvantaged status. In the latter case, about 10 per cent of schools and 17 per cent of Primary pupils benefit. Schools with designated disadvantaged status are allocated an additional teacher and receive an additional capitation grant of £30 per pupil.³ However, the allocation of an extra teacher may not impact on overall teacher/student ratios to a significant degree:

The additional allocation of teachers serves to reduce average class size in areas of disadvantage by about 1.75 pupils. There is evidence to suggest that reductions on this scale actually make no difference. (Fine Gael, 1998:19).

Other programmes run by the Department of Education and Science are the Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL), Breaking the Cycle, Early Start and the Teacher Counsellor Scheme. Most of these are operating on a restricted or pilot basis; for example, the Early Start programme reaches 1.5% of the total pupil population and the Teacher Counsellor scheme⁴ operates in only 31 schools, although the programmes are under evaluation and review (Fine Gael, 1998).

Many of these programmes promote parental involvement in schools, which signifies a further attitudinal change on the part of the Department. The new Education Bill that is pending the President's approval has been welcomed by the National Parents Council (Primary) since it will place a legal duty on boards of management to consult with parents during the development of school plans (Irish Independent, 18 December 1998:3)

Goals have been established for the improvement of levels of educational attainment. For example, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) sets a target of a 90% Senior cycle

³ As noted earlier, the apparent increase in schools' income under the disadvantaged scheme due to increased capitation grants is partly offset by falling student numbers in certain areas.

⁴ At recruitment stage, the Teacher Counsellor scheme did not require special counselling training (Personal communication, Department of Education and Science, 18 December 1998). However, since the 27 posts were allocated, the Teacher Counsellors have attended an induction programme (in 1996) focusing on counselling skills and are currently participating in a Diploma course in Trinity College Dublin.

completion rate by the year 2000, and a 98% completion rate by 2007. According to Hugh Frazer, Director of the Combat Poverty Agency, this "holds out very real hopes of breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage." (Frazer, 1997:4)

Other educational targets of the NAPS are to eliminate early school-leaving before the Junior Certificate and to ensure no students have serious literacy and numeracy problems in early Primary education within five years.

A good deal of progress has been made already in cutting the numbers leaving school early, but the remaining core leaving before the junior cert is likely to prove more difficult to tackle. The value of a target of eliminating serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education will depend on transparent mechanisms being set up to monitor progress. (Nolan, 1997:7)

Bruton is somewhat critical, noting that the Department of Education and Science has no monitoring mechanisms for NAPS recommendations, nor any strategy by which to achieve them. He calls for "structured family links particularly for families whose parents themselves have had little positive experience of school." (Fine Gael, 1998:4) The 1997 figure for Senior Cycle completion of 82% does not bode well for the achievement of the NAPS target of 90% by the year 2000.

Other criticisms of the Department of Education and Science are that it does not track literacy or numeracy consistently and information on these topics is not made available to the public.

McCormack and Archer (1997) highlight the report on early school-leaving conducted by the National Economic and Social Forum, which set a target of five years for the elimination of early school leaving, beginning with a 20% reduction in year one. They note that at least 85% of early school-leavers are from poor families, and stress the necessity of educational qualification for competition in the labour market. They also add that retention within the educational system is not enough.

...school leavers from poor backgrounds are likely to continue to have the least valuable qualifications, on average, even if Senior Cycle completion rates reached 100%.

Students must be encouraged to engage with and succeed within the system, and the curriculum itself requires change, if this is to happen.

Annual spending on Primary education in Ireland is less than a third of the spending on Third level education, and proportionally far lower to Primary budgets in our neighbouring European countries. The average Irish class size is 50% higher at Primary level than in the rest of Europe. The National Competitiveness Council warns that, "These deficiencies, if allowed to continue, will have a negative long run impact on social cohesion and economic performance." (Walsh and McKenna, 1998)

According to the Partnership's Education Co-ordinator, "There is little use in talking about strategies to increase access to Third Level from disadvantaged communities if Primary education is neglected." Without adequate resources at Primary level, students will be

impeded in their progression to Second or Third level education. In terms of value for money, investment at Primary level can in the long-term decrease government spending in areas such as social welfare, and is therefore cost-effective.

The most recent response by Government to the on-going problem of educational disadvantage was announced by Minister Charlie McCreevy in December 1998. The 1999 Budget will boost spending on education by 9 per cent (*Irish Independent*, 3 Dec 1998), increasing it to £2,623 million next year (Department of Finance website). Included in this is the allocation of significant extra funding for education initiatives relating to disadvantage, to the amount of £19 million in a full year. These resources will be used to address the retention of children in school and the development of the psychological services, among other things. In his budget speech, Mr. McCreevy commented:

This Government is committed to improving opportunity at all levels of education because we see it as a key element in developing children and promoting social inclusion. The published Estimates already provide £205 million more than was provided in 1998 and allow for the largest increase in direct funding of primary schools in the history of the State. (Budget 1999 Speech by Minister McCreevy)

Methodology

The research method for this study employed a review of progress and end-of-term reports from the Primary School Initiative and DICP internal documents on the Initiative. An overall literature review drew on documents such as the National Anti-poverty Strategy, ADM/Gamma Baseline Data Report and the Partnership's own Action Plan, as well as other relevant Irish material.

As a full evaluation was being conducted by Scott Boldt of Marino Institute at the time this case study was being drafted, it was unnecessary to duplicate the collection of primary data. Instead, informal interviews with participating parents and pupils were carried out to assess their understanding of the initiative and their perception of benefits. In addition to this, feedback from the Initiative's Programme Manager and other key figures involved in the PSI informed the content.

Boldt's evaluation draws on interview with the 23 members of the Initiative's Management Committee, and 10 further interviews with selected teachers from participating schools. A draft of his report was consulted prior to the completion of this case study in order to obtain additional qualitative insight.

Organisational structures and processes

The process of design and implementation of the PSI was a lengthy one. Many individuals had devoted a good deal of personal time to promoting the idea of such an initiative prior to its establishment, demonstrating even in the early stages a level of commitment to the project

which has been sustained throughout the process (See Appendix IV for a Schedule of Activities). The first step was to carry out a needs assessment of schools to identify common training needs. Two visits to each school were conducted as part of the assessment. Six interest groups were formed out of this exercise, in the areas of Information Technology, Maths, English (Literacy), The Child, Whole School Development and The Arts.

When the Initiative commenced, eight schools formed themselves into a co-operative structure. The Department of Education and Science seconded a full-time Programme Manager to the project.⁵ The Management Committee comprises a chairperson, school principals, a teacher representative from each school, the Programme Manager and the Education Officer of the Partnership. The Committee generally meets once a month to discuss progress and plan the future direction.

The programme has on-going internal evaluation through consultative workshops. These are regular forums where participating staff can evaluate progress.

The Initiative employs the 'partnership' approach of creating links between schools and with external organisations to facilitate the sharing of information and skills to the benefit of the project. Among these agencies are Second and Third Level education providers, statutory and business organisations. A full list of organisations with whom the PSI has established links is contained in Appendix V.

Costs

The Initiative receives Partnership funding to the amount of £80,500 per annum, towards co-ordination, teacher substitution, in-service training, equipment, research, study visits, administration and promotion. The total costs of the project have been borne by the DICP, even though the original intention was to obtain part-funding from the Department of Education and Science.

The Programme Manager stated that the Initiative can operate comfortably within this budget, but their main constraints are time, and space for the provision of training, etc.

Item	Example of annual expenditure (1996-1997)
Research & Evaluation	7,000
Additional Support Services	4,000
Co-ordination/Facilitation	25,000
Administrative Support	5,000
Alternative Models of Intervention	8,500
Special Teacher Inputs	7,000
Substitute Teacher Cover	12,000
Communication Equipment	3,500
Facilities for staff and school	3,500
Festival/Exhibition	2,000
Evaluation of Project	3,000
Total	£80,500

⁵ The Programme Manager's salary is funded by the DICP, rather than by the Department of Education and Science.

Aims and of the intervention

The Initiative has three main aims: firstly, it aims to impact on teachers through the provision of training and support. This in turn realises the second focus of impacting on the classroom and pupils. Thirdly, the programme connects with the local community and parents. Simultaneously to each of these, the PSI engages with Department of Education and Science and other statutory representatives.

It was intended that the initiative would provide multiple benefits; teachers would experience increased co-operation among school staff and learn new teaching approaches; special needs would be identified through on-going assessment; students would become more involved in the system and place a greater value on education; and parents would take a more active role in their children's education and their own personal development. On a broader level, the objectives included the formation of cross-school interest groups and the development of networks between schools.

Target group

The target group comprises staff, students and parents of ten primary schools in the inner city; approximately 80 staff and over 1,000 students are directly involved.

Schools Involved
St. Gabriel's National School, Cowper Street, Dublin 7
Francis Street CBS, Dublin 8
Scoil Chaitriona CBS, Baggot Street, Dublin 2
St. Laurence O'Toole's CBS, Seville Place, Dublin 1
St. Patrick's BNS, Ringsend, Dublin 4
City Quay National School, Dublin 2
Central Model Jnr National School, Marlboro Street, Dublin 1
Central Model Snr School, Marlboro Street, Dublin 1
St. Laurence O'Toole's GNS*
Whitefriar Street NS*

* Joined before the end of the first year of the initiative.

During the first year of operation, the eight schools that had commenced the Initiative felt able to expand the programme. They decided that the maximum number of new schools they could accept would be two, since the Initiative would not receive an increase in resources. Approximately 40 inner city schools were circulated about this development; of these, 16 applied and 2 were selected to participate (St. Laurence O'Toole's G.N.S. and Whitefriar Street N.S.)

Gender ratios in the initial eight schools were 2:1 in favour of boys, although the expansion of the Initiative to include two other schools has increased levels of female participation. Present pupil gender ratios are 61% boys and 39% girls. This gender dimension should be viewed in light of the schools being a self-selecting sample. Added to this is the fact that boys are more at risk of early school-leaving than are girls: 62% of early school-leavers are male, while 38% are female (Fine Gael, 1998:6). In this way, gender ratios within the initiative are

reflective of national ratios for early school-leaving. Basing the initiative on a universal model of intervention also mitigates against gender bias in participation: all students in a particular school benefit, rather than individual students being selected for intervention.

Among the teaching staff, the trend is reversed with a majority of female (75%) and a minority of male teachers (25%).

School	Teachers			Pupils		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
St. Gabriel's NS	2	9	11	85	90	175
Francis Street CBS	3	4	7	75	0	75
Scoil Chaitriona CBS	2	6	8	48	43	91
St. Laurence O'Toole's CBS*	4	3	7	61	0	61
St. Patrick's BNS	3	7	10	103	0	103
City Quay NS	1	7	8	80	65	145
Central Model Jnr NS	0	7	7	49	23	72
Central Model Snr NS*	5	5	10	71	38	109
St. Laurence O'Toole's GNS*	0	6	6	0	83	83
Whitefriar Street NS	0	7	7	71	68	139
* These schools lost a teacher on 1 Sept. 1998	20	61	81	643	410	1053

Activities

One of the most striking features of the PSI was the breadth of activities undertaken and the fact that they catered directly for three groups: teachers, pupils and parents. In general, the activities resourced through the Initiative fell into one of the following areas:

- a. **Training/Education**
- b. **Technology and IT Support**
- c. **Arts**
- d. **Foreign Language**
- e. **Physical Education and Sports**
- f. **Study Visits and Establishing Links**
- g. **Environmental Concerns**
- h. **Publicity**

a. Training/Education

All teachers (except one) participated in in-service training that aimed to develop their teaching skills in order to improve the quality of provision. This Included:

- ? Computer training from the Dublin Institute of Technology (7½ days for 2 teachers from each school and a 5 day summer course)
- ? Workshop on the subjects of Whole School Development, the Child, English, Maths and the Arts (2½ day workshop for 75 teachers)
- ? Training from the Ark Children's Centre in process music (15 hours for 14 teachers, 2 in-service sessions in each school and 2 clinics)
- ? In-school training in Process Drama (Process Drama teacher supports all teachers in their classrooms; each class receives four visits)
- ? Training in French language teaching from specialist teacher
- ? A Summer course called 'A Better Life in the Classroom through Counselling and Drama' (Attended by 20 teachers)
- ? A Summer course on drama

To date, the PSI has provided 2,400 hours of in-service training for teachers. Of these, 1,400 hours took place in teachers' own time.

In addition to this, parents and teachers received training in the following:

- ? Paired Maths (or Maths Games)
- ? Paired Reading

The Maths Games programme aimed to develop students' enjoyment of Maths through activities that make the subject more visual and creative. The idea was to provide 'hands-on' active learning. This element of the Initiative was supported by the National Parents' Council who funded the purchase of the games. The idea behind the paired reading scheme was that it would improve children's appreciation of books and reading skills by linking parents with children and providing one-to-one attention.

Other supports include psychological assessment of children most in need; each school received £500 towards this. Junior Achievement has sent business people into classrooms to conduct a six-week 'enterprise' course. The organisation aims to "educate and inspire young people to value free-enterprise, understand business and economics and the role of business in a global economy, and to be career or job ready."⁶

b. Technology and IT Support

- ? Each school now has a fax/copier/answering machine to facilitate communication
- ? There are now 58 computers in the ten PSI schools (30 of these were provided by the PSI through links with Kevin Street DIT)

The PSI is participating in a 'Computers in Schools' project that involves twelve primary and ten secondary schools; between them, there are 4,500 pupils and 250 teachers. The Partnership has part-funded this programme, which also involves the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), the DIT and the private sector. Schools receive computer equipment from Siemens and NCTE, training and resource schools from NCTE, and technical support, management and administration from the Dublin Institute of Technology. The project, which has its own full-time Co-ordinator (provided by NCTE), aims to upgrade these 22 schools to high specification in multi-media computer capacity over a three year period.

c. Arts

- ? Children have taken part in drama and art
- ? There was an exhibition of the children's work in the Royal College of Surgeons
- ? Art teachers from the VEC 'Art Squad' are working in the schools
- ? Writing workshops were held in the Writers' Museum

d. Foreign Language

- ? Children are being taught French

e. Physical Education and Sports

- ? Students participated in an inter-school 'Sports for All' day
- ? There was a 'Sports Blitz Day' in October 1998 and a further one is being planned
- ? Dublin Corporation 'Healthy Cities Project' has resulted in having PE teachers in the schools

f. Study Visits and Establishing Links

To date, the PSI has developed links with a variety of organisations, some of which are listed below.⁷

- ? Liaison with Department of Education and Science
- ? Links with schools in the EU
- ? Links with secondary schools and Third Level colleges through the 'Computers in Schools' project and Visits to open days
- ? Visit to Belfast by 8 teachers to view 'Making Belfast Work' Project
- ? Visit to similar intervention project in Scotland
- ? Links with employer organisations, such as Siemens Ireland Limited
- ? Discussions with and support from INTO regarding the teaching principal issue

⁶ Junior Achievement is a non-profit organisation dedicated to building bridges between schools and the workplace. It has a long-term goal of fostering an enterprise culture in young people and encouraging them to fulfill their full potential. The organisation runs a range of educational programmes in schools for young people between the ages of 5 and 18.

⁷ Appendix III provides a full list of organisations with which the PSI has made contact.

The benefits of these links are manifold. For example, liaison with the business sector appears to be a fruitful development; Siemens Ireland has supported the 'Computers in School' project through the provision of computers at a reduced price and free technical support. In addition to this, the company has promised to employ two students from the secondary schools involved in the project. Similarly, the Junior Achievement element has brought business people into the classrooms.

g. Environmental Concerns

- ? School gardens and sunflower growing projects have been established in schools
- ? A mobile farm has visited all schools
- ? A project on derelict sites is being planned with St. Andrew's Resource Centre
- ? There are also plans to organise trips to Knocksink Wood and to County Wicklow
- ? The Initiative is working with Energy Action on environmental issues

i. Publicity

- ? Launch of the Initiative in October 1997
- ? Junior Achievement Project established in schools
- ? Radio programmes on Anna Livia FM and 98 FM
- ? Exhibition of children's work in the Royal College of Surgeons
- ? Presentation of School Attendance certificates
- ? Story writing competition
- ? Articles in the Irish Times, Irish Independent, Evening Herald, Inner City News and Big Issues.
- ? Coverage on community television and on RTE's 'Ear to the Ground' programme

Future plans for the Initiative include the involvement of other schools, although it may be more beneficial to create a new 'cluster' of schools rather than enlarging the present structure that is already operating successfully. Longer term plans are the creation of stronger links with the Department of Education and Science and strengthening of the project's position as a lobbying body on policy issues. The Initiative will also need to do more work on identifying potential funding sources, in light of the Partnership's uncertain future.

Parents' Viewpoint

In order to ascertain the views of parents benefiting from the project, the researcher met a group of mothers in City Quay National School who were participating in an NCIR certified 'Parents in Education' course.⁸ These parents had children either in City Quay N.S. or Baggot Street N.S. The DICP funded half the costs of the course, which complements the activities of the Primary School Initiative, although it is not directly part of it. The course runs for one full year and centres on assertiveness and personal development. Participants will be awarded certificates in November 1999, which will represent a major achievement for many of them. The group had previously taken part in Parenting classes. All of the parents had been initially contacted by the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator for City Quay and Baggot Street National Schools. Parents appeared well integrated into the school, and were comfortable in their own Parents' Room. All parents are welcome to drop in to the school in the morning for tea. Some work part-time during the day and call into the school later in the afternoon to collect children.

Parents noted the variety of school-based activities they took part in, such as computer training, which caters for different levels, and Paired Maths Games. They appeared to have very good working and social relationships with the teachers, who often come into the Parents' Room in the afternoon for tea or coffee. One mother commented on the success of a social evening they had with teachers, which had given parents the opportunity to engage with teachers outside of their professional roles.

Some commented that this system of parental involvement was far better than the traditional system where parents merely 'dropped children at the gates' of the school. A further advantage of this new approach is that it gives parents the opportunity to meet each other and make friends. Traditionally, the only forum for this interaction would have been parent-teacher meetings or participation in school committees. Developing links between parents and between teachers and parents can help to combat isolation in the community and strengthen community spirit. One woman felt it would be beneficial to have a similar system in operation in all schools, although she noted that lack of money and resources could be an impediment.

When asked about funding arrangements for the future (post 1999), the HSCL Co-ordinator indicated that they would have to apply for more funding, but it was intended that parent activities would continue regardless. This indicates that the Initiative has not bought into a 'dependency culture'; even without any guarantee of funding, the key players in the PSI have plans to continue.

⁸ Fathers also participate in the Initiative, mainly through computer training.

Pupils' Viewpoint

Four children from City Quay National School were interviewed in order to discover levels of student awareness of the Primary School Initiative and their attitudes towards the new activities introduced in their school. All spoke enthusiastically about the range of activities and appeared to have a sense of pride in their school. The children were familiar with the Initiative, but were unclear which activities were directly funded by the PSI and which ones would ordinarily take place in the school. When they first heard about the Initiative, they were surprised that their school had been selected and attributed this to being 'lucky' or perceived they were more deserving since they were 'better' than other schools.

They had met with the Programme Manager, although most of their activities are co-ordinated by their class teacher. The highlight of the Initiative for some was meeting with President Mary McAleese in the Royal College of Surgeons during an exhibition of students' work that included dance and music. Other activities they enjoyed were drama, French, sport and physical education. They had visited the Teacher's Club and attended open days in local Secondary schools.

Some of the activities take place in blocks of several weeks: French was taught for 2 weeks; drama for three weeks. Others are on-going, for example, Physical Education takes place every Monday for half an hour, and their own teacher takes their class for PE on Thursdays.

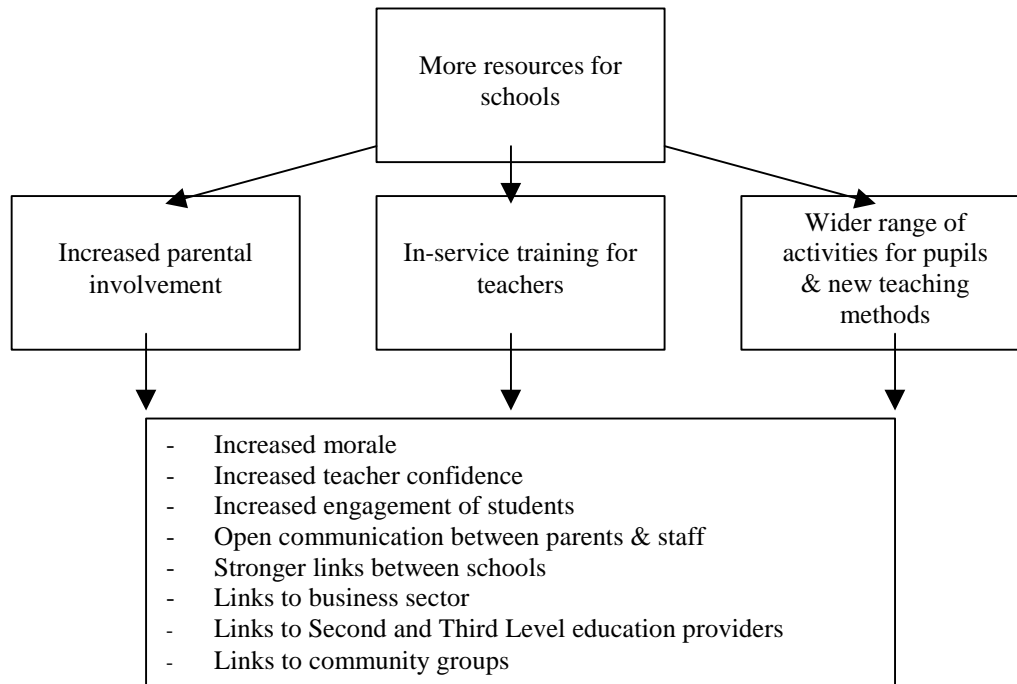
The City Quay school now has some computers, one of which has access to the Internet. Children can use the Internet in small groups, with supervision from their teacher. The students recalled how they looked up the web site of a school in Mayo. They would hope to be able to provide information on their own school when they get a web site.

When asked about their parents' involvement in the school, the children commented that parents had assisted with the sports day. Other parents are involved with school maintenance and fund-raising.

Even though the children had enjoyed school before the Initiative commenced, all commented that the school was better now. There was some ambiguity around which activities were funded under the Initiative and which were not, but the children were undoubtedly enjoying the extra attention and resources. All had plans to continue into Secondary school, and even longer term plans for careers. In general, they seemed very content with and proud of their school, and apart from wanting a bigger yard to play in, could think of nothing else they needed. This is a far cry from Scott Boldt's experience of inner city children who commonly described their attitude to school in terms such as 'hate', and findings from similar studies that highlight children's alienation from the educational system (Coveney et al, 1998).

Benefits

The benefits of the Primary School Initiative are summarised in the following diagram. ***The increase in resources for schools led directly to in-service training for teachers, parental involvement, and enhanced student engagement.*** In the longer-term, the benefits are even wider ranging with a knock-on effect for the whole community.



The main strengths of this model are outlined as follows:

- it is pro-active rather than reactive
- it employs a universal model of intervention rather than the selective model
- it is holistic in approach
- it allows for the transfer of skills
- it relies on networking

The PSI is pro-active in that it seeks to put in place supports for teachers and pupils and to promote retention of students within the educational system, before problems being experienced by schools reach a crisis stage. In this sense, it is not merely reacting to a problem when it is too late, but instead actively seeks out ways of improving a system in order to prevent deterioration of standards. In addition to this, schools had initially approached the Partnership and were the active players in developing the idea; the PSI was not put in place merely because a new round of funding was announced and in this sense it employs a 'ground-up' approach.

The universal model of intervention was chosen for the Initiative, which means that all the students within particular schools benefit from the extra resources. The alternative would have been to use the 'selective' model of support, whereby individual pupils are singled out for attention. This latter model can lead to the selected students being stigmatised by

their classmates. The PSI model benefits the maximum number of students possible and improves the learning environment for all involved.

Thirdly, the Initiative is holistic in approach, choosing to put in place an extremely wide variety of support and activities to the benefit of pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community. While other interventions might rely on the provision of extra classes in a particular subject, the PSI has successfully integrated a range of activities with the aim of improving the overall atmosphere and morale within schools. This holistic approach has a long-term value, since it can result in attitudinal change among participants, e.g. parents participating in the school may be viewed as role models by their children, who in turn may place a higher value on life-long education. The programme complements national policy by emphasising the value of parental and community involvement, and also assists teachers to implement the national curriculum in full, an achievement which has often been hindered by limited resources.

The transfer of knowledge through the initiative will have a beneficial long-term impact. Parents and teachers who receive training under the Programme may become future project leaders who can contribute to the development of this model in other schools or areas. Hence the value for money of this Initiative can only clearly be measured through long-term monitoring of developments emerging from this pilot.

Finally, the Initiative not only promotes networking between organisations but actually relies on this approach. While schools have traditionally worked in isolation, the PSI employs the 'partnership' approach of creating links between education providers, statutory and business organisations. Funds are not allocated to individual schools but rather to the entire network, facilitating the sharing of expertise and information. Schools in the same area are no longer in competition with each other for scarce resources. This is a time-saving feature, and also ensures that the united schools form a stronger body to pursue policy issues.

Discussion and Recommendations

Traditionally, educational disadvantage and early school leaving were attributed to some fault in the individual student or the student's family. This attitude assumed that, "...since the majority of pupils remain in school, schools must be adequate for the majority of pupils; therefore, the reasons why a minority of pupils drop out must be due to some factor or set of factors within their background or environment." (Boldt, 1994:6-7)

More recently, this notion has been challenged and there is now much more acceptance of the role that schools and the curriculum play in educational disadvantage. Questions have been raised about teaching methods, levels of school resources and staff/student ratios.

The new definition of educational disadvantage still lacks clarity, although attempts have been made to arrive at a precise understanding. Terms such as 'at risk', 'marginalised' and 'disadvantaged' are often used interchangeably with no clear definition of what they mean or how they can be measured. Cullen offers one description of educational risk factors.

Risk factors are variables that decrease the likelihood that students will have the abilities, willingness or opportunities to learn and/or perceive the value of academic achievement. Being poor is not necessarily a risk factor but risk occurs when differences arising from poverty limit the prospects of home, school and community interacting to encourage children to make use of their resources for educational purposes. (Cullen, 1998:5)

Boldt et al pose questions about the criteria for being classified as educationally disadvantaged: what precisely makes one person educationally disadvantaged, another at an acceptable level and someone else advantaged?; what is the cut-off point below which an individual or group is considered educationally disadvantaged?; should different criteria be used for different groups? (Boldt et al, 1998:8) In answer to these, they propose the following definition:

In relation to a student in the formal education system, educational disadvantage may be considered to be a limited ability to derive an equitable benefit from schooling compared to one's peers by age as a result of school demands, approaches, assessments and expectations which do not correspond to the student's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in which (s)he has been socialised (as opposed to those to which (s)he is naturally endowed). (Boldt et al, 1998:10)

The importance of having a clear definition is rooted in the need to measure levels of disadvantage. A clear measurement of the phenomenon can assist the development of national policies to counteract disadvantage. Similarly, it is necessary to have a system whereby the benefits of additional resources can be measured and valued. According to the PSI Programme Manager:

The reaction in schools to PSI has been very positive. The teachers feel supported and have responded in an open, flexible and imaginative manner. All have participated in training, some outside of school hours. A number have offered their services to other schools in their own areas of speciality. All have openly received the specialist teachers and have worked productively with them. The result is a general uplifting of morale, the benefits of which are not readily quantifiable." (End of Year Report, Dec.1997)

In order to quantify the benefits to staff, students and parents, it would be necessary for the Initiative to develop a structure for on-going evaluation of the project. This could include data on attendance, behaviour and performance, but should also take into account the experiences of parents and pupils, as well as teachers, Principals and the Programme Manager. Such an evaluation could ideally be conducted through survey research, which would lead to quantifiable data on benefits to participants and areas for improvement.⁹ This statistical data would complement the qualitative data obtained for this case study and Boldt's evaluation, and assist project leaders to make a stronger case for increased funding.

Added to this is the necessity of conducting follow-up research with students to ascertain the longer-term benefits of the Initiative. This could be achieved through the development of a

⁹ In situations where literacy problems present, participants could be assisted with survey completion.

tracking system for children. Data on whether students remain within the educational system or leave it early would assist with planning for intervention initiatives and would offset the dearth of information about the longer-term impact of initiatives on children's academic, social and personal development.

Although PSI students are undoubtedly conscious of the extra time being devoted to activities such as art and physical education, not all of them are specifically aware of the 'Initiative' per se. There could be value in introducing a formal system of imparting information about the programme to students. The advantages of informing children about developments in a more coherent way might include increased morale and pride in the school. Children may take a greater interest in school owing to the 'special' nature of the project, or feel they are being rewarded for their efforts and good behaviour.¹⁰

In relation to funding, there is a need for the Initiative to secure finances to enable it to operate in the longer term. Funding is not guaranteed post December 1999, and for this reason, the schools should set about accessing other sources of funding as a matter of urgency (this was mentioned by the Programme Manager as being one of their future plans). Boldt et al commented on problems experienced by some intervention programmes aimed at Primary level:

Difficulties are apparent in relation to funding. Many of the interventions...rely on funding which is not guaranteed in terms of its duration or amount, or they are reliant on multiple sources of funding which can create difficulties in the organisation and development of the programme. (Boldt et al, 1998:31)

The fact that future resources are uncertain has not impinged on the success of the Initiative to date, but long-term guaranteed funding would undoubtedly assist the development and future planning of the initiative.

The success of this initiative is evident to all involved and in order to replicate best practice, a discussion forum should be created. Through this forum, staff and participants from the PSI could transfer skills and knowledge to similar 'clusters' of schools, and lead to the replication of the approach in other areas of the city/country.

The approach of linking with employer organisations and Third level education providers should be maintained and enhanced to maximise benefits for students. The involvement of Junior Achievement with the schools could be strengthened, in order to encourage young people to stay in school. Emphasis on future employment opportunities may assist pupils to remain focused as they progress through the educational system. Presentations from employer organisations, representing *all* sectors of employment, would underline the value of an educational qualification to students.

¹⁰ In his evaluation, Boldt recommends that children and teachers become involved in the production of a newsletter about the Initiative on a regular basis.

There appears to be a lack of clarity around definitions of key terms associated with preventative education strategies. As already mentioned, the concept of educational disadvantage has yet to be pinned down to a specific definition; at present it is equated in a general way with marginalisation, poverty and poor academic achievement. Similarly, terms such as 'parental involvement' mean different things to the various schools involved in the PSI. Some may consider imparting information to parents as a way of involving them, or parents may be involved in the school through having their own Parents' Room. Yet others would understand parental involvement to mean inclusion and consultation in the planning and delivery of educational services. With regard to future planning, schools also need to define what they mean by 'mainstreaming'; whether this refers to core funding from the Department of Education and Science for schools to run projects of this nature, or whether it means the Department would take over the ownership of such initiatives in their entirety is not obvious. PSI schools may wish to remain independent of the Department and in control of initiatives, even when projects are mainstreamed. The PSI schools should clearly outline their understanding in relation to each of these concepts.

This case study recommends the increased commitment of the Department of Education and Science to projects of this nature. Area Based Partnerships take the risk of investing in pilot projects, and when the projects have proven their worth, they should be supported with core funding. Lessons in good practice should be transferred to other schools and networks. This is central to the concept of mainstreaming.

- Recommendation 1 ?** Collection of quantitative data on the Initiative to complement qualitative data
- Recommendation 2 ?** Follow-up research with students to assess longer-term impact
- Recommendation 3 ?** Formal description of Initiative to participating students
- Recommendation 4 ?** Sourcing of funding for the post-1999 period to assist with long-term planning of the programme
- Recommendation 5 ?** Creation of a forum to transfer skills and knowledge and facilitate replication of good practice model
- Recommendation 6 ?** Enhancement of links with employer organisations
- Recommendation 7 ?** Clarification of terms such as 'educational disadvantage', 'parental involvement' and 'mainstreaming'
- Recommendation 8 ?** Core funding from the Department of Education and Science

The Primary School Initiative funded by the DICP has acted as a catalyst, improving the morale and self-sufficiency in schools. Schools are active in the design, implementation and assessment of the programme. The Management Committee acts independently of the DICP. Schools have built on the foundations of the PSI by introducing further activities that are not funded by the Partnership, such as a drama group for parents and drug awareness for parents and teachers. One HSCL Co-ordinator commented that the Initiative had really helped the schools, particularly in terms of extra activities for children and in-service for the other teachers. This has had a 'multiplier effect' on the entire community, increasing the profile of education, pride in the community, self-sufficiency in terms of designing and

managing projects and providing long-term positive impacts for children as they progress through the educational system.

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Appendix I Level of under-resourcing in disadvantaged s

School	Breaking the Cycle	Early Start	Concessionary Teacher	Teacher Counsellor	Remedial Teacher
St. Gabriel's NS	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Francis Street CBS	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Scoil Chaitriona CBS	No	No	Yes	No	Shared
St. Laurence O'Toole's CBS	Yes	No	Yes	Shared	Yes
St. Patrick's BNS	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
City Quay NS	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Central Model Jnr NS	Yes	No	Yes	Shared	Yes
Central Model Snr NS	Yes	No	Yes	Shared	Yes
St. Laurence O'Toole's GNS*					
Whitefriar Street NS*					

* Supernumerary

Appendix II Teaching Principals

The issue of teaching principals is considered in need of urgent attention by the schools involved in the Primary Schools Initiative. As small, disadvantaged schools with declining student numbers, feelings of demoralisation were prevalent prior to the establishment of the PSI. Added to this was the perception of that their concerns were not being recognised by the Department of Education and Science. As small schools, they were not entitled to an Administrative Principal but rather were allocated a Teaching Principal. Schools feel that this impacts negatively on the quality of education they can provide to their students.

The PSI is campaigning on this issue and has made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science, Michael Martin, TD, outlining the difficulties associated with having a Principal who must also fulfil a teaching role. A submission made to the Working Group on Principal Teachers noted the physical and mental impossibility for teaching principals to be as available as they should be to children, other teachers, parents and representatives of various groups and agencies. It highlighted some of the disadvantages of having a teaching principal:

- ✍ Inability to deal with immediate problems, (e.g. discipline, accidents)
- ✍ Loss of class contact/teaching time due to interruptions
- ✍ Insufficient communication with parents
- ✍ Underdevelopment of links with local community
- ✍ Lack of time to track children at risk
- ✍ Lack of opportunity for staff development
- ✍ Restrictions on long-term planning and curriculum development
- ✍ Under-utilisation of human and material resources
- ✍ Under exploitation of outside services
- ✍ Lack of security

Principals need to be able to assume a leadership role and deal with a variety of events on a daily basis without the interruption of class time. Teachers, on the other hand, need to be able to devote themselves to teaching the students without external interruptions. At present, teaching principals play a juggling role between the two positions, both of which they feel ought to be full-time.

Teaching principals, then, on a daily basis, are making compromises which seriously affect, on the one hand the children in their class who deserve their fullest attention and on the other hand, the smooth running of the school. The result is that all the children in the school are suffering. Tensions and misunderstandings that could be solved on the spot are allowed to fester, ideas that need to be developed go stale, resources that could be useful are not acquired, supports available in the wider community are not explored or exploited. All of this leads to a frustration and demoralisation that needs to be addressed. (Submission to the Working Group on Principal Teachers)

In an effort to maintain high standards, many teaching principals resort to coming into school early, leaving late, working extra days during holidays, or arranging meetings in the evening, but this is still not sufficient to overcome the associated difficulties. Unplanned interruptions such as accidents, sickness or home problems often require the Principal's immediate attention. If a school teacher is concerned about a child's attendance, the most appropriate way to address this is for the Principal to make contact with the home, a response that is impeded by having teaching duties. A former Teaching Principal who became an Administrative Principal noted improvements in attendance within twelve months. Other areas of improvement cited were:

- ✍ Improved school planning and whole school development
- ✍ Maximisation of class contact time
- ✍ More effective use of human and material resources
- ✍ Greater parental contact and involvement
- ✍ Intensified home-school-community links
- ✍ Improved facilitation of good practice
- ✍ Improved discipline

- ✍ Smoother liaison with outside services
- ✍ Increased security

In the inner city area, social problems such as drug abuse, unemployment and crime impact on the population. School Principals in this area increasingly liaise with outside agencies, including the Health Board and Gardai. Again, teaching duties do not facilitate this type of working relationship. In addition to this, recently introduced Department of Education and Science initiatives, such as the HSCL and Breaking the Cycle schemes, while highly valued, often place more demands on the Teaching Principals' time.

The real question being raised by PSI schools pertains to the quality of the service to children – how is this being affected by having a Principal who must also fulfil the role of Teacher?

Appendix III Educational Attainment

	Pop No Formal or Primary Education Only (%)	Pop Lower Secondary Education (%)	Pop Upper Secondary Education (%)	Pop 3 rd Level Education (%)	Age Educatio Ceased < or = (%)
DICP area	35.7	16.8	21.8	25.7*	42.7
County	31.5	19.0	27.1	22.5	38.5
Region	25.0	19.2	30.5	25.4	48.9
National	29.5	20.9	29.9	19.7	34.5

(Gamma, 1998)

* According to the table, the rate of access to Third level education for inner city residents is higher than either the county or region. To bear in mind that this figure reflects the large numbers of students from all over the country living in the area population.

Appendix IV Schedule of Actions

October 1994	Proposals from 2 schools seeking DICP assistance for supplementary curricular support for pupils
November 1994	DICP Working Group agreed to support a primary school initiative
December 1994	Meeting of Primary School Principals convened
January 1995	Sub-committee of the DICP's Education and Training Working Group appointed to draft a proposal on behalf of group
March 1995	Proposal presented to the Education and Training Working Group
April 1995	DICP representatives met with Department of Education and Science officials to discuss funding DICP gave commitment to part funding
May 1996	DICP contacted Department requesting funding commitment
June-November 1996	On-going discussions regarding funding with the Department
January 1997	Needs assessment sent to DES for support
March 1997	Project commenced among eight schools
October 1997	Launch of initiative
March 1998	Exhibition of Children's Work
December 1998	Evaluation and Case Study of PSI

Appendix V Established Links

The PSI has created links with the following organisations:

Agri Aware
Allied Irish Bank, International Finance Services
Belfast Education and Library Board
Department of Education and Science
Dublin Chamber of Commerce
Dublin Corporation 'Health Cities'
Dublin Diocesan Education Office
Dublin Institute of Technology
FÁS
Friends First Assurance Company
IBEC
Irish Times
Junior Achievement
Marino Institute of Education
National Centre for Technology in Education
National Parents' Council
North Ayrshire Council, Education Department
Pigeon House Science Centre
Royal College of Surgeons
Siemens Ireland Limited
The Ark Children's Centre
Trinity College Dublin
V.E.C. Art Squad
Whirlpool Financial Services