



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Looking at DEIS Action Planning for Improvement in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

The quality of leadership and  
management; teaching, learning and  
professional development

Inspectorate  
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## Foreword

This report is the first of three which the Department of Education Inspectorate intends to publish as part of the review and evaluation of the implementation of the DEIS Plan 2017 in schools. The report presents composite findings from inspections<sup>1</sup> in relation to critical areas of school life: the leadership of DEIS action planning for school improvement and the quality of teaching, learning and professional development.

The second and third reports will address Inspectorate evaluation findings in relation to DEIS action planning for literacy, numeracy and examination attainment and the DEIS themes of attendance, retention, transitions, and partnership with parents and the school community.

The three reports are intended to inform an evaluation of the impact and outcomes of the DEIS Plan 2017 which is currently being undertaken by the Department's Social Inclusion Unit. The evaluative insights outlined in these Inspectorate reports will also inform and support the work of teachers and DEIS schools as they engage in action planning for school improvement. The findings and recommendations from this report will provide useful guidance for the various supports services that work with DEIS schools at primary and post-primary levels. Following the publication of this report, the Inspectorate has planned a series of co-professional engagements with schools, management bodies, support services and various sections of the Department to progress the report's findings and recommendations.

## The DEIS Plan 2017

The DEIS Plan 2017 is a policy that focuses on improving equity and the quality of provision in primary and post-primary schools. It is one of the many educational policies that impact on the work of schools. These new policy directives encompass curricular reform - including the reform of the Junior Cycle in post-primary schools; the new Primary Language Curriculum for primary schools; the national strategy on literacy and numeracy; the revised model for allocating special education teaching resources for pupils/students with special educational needs; the introduction of Wellbeing as a key

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<sup>1</sup> The Inspectorate uses a range of inspection models to evaluate all schools, including DEIS schools, and other learning settings on an annual basis. The inspection models range from short one-day, unannounced incidental inspections, to more intensive whole-school evaluations and inspections that follow-through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports. DEIS schools are inspected using a range of these models. This report is based on the findings of one model of inspection which focuses on the **Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools**. Further information on the range of inspection models used and the inspection reports generated is available from <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b9e7d3-inspection-reports/#inspections-in-primary-and-post-primary-schools>

policy priority and the development of the school self-evaluation process. Additionally, further emphasis has been placed on anti-bullying procedures and child protection policies and procedures. The Digital Strategy for Schools: Action Plan 2019 has also been introduced. These policies align with DEIS action planning in schools and are intended to complement and support the goals of the DEIS Plan 2017.

The level of additional supports and resources allocated to schools participating in the DEIS programme varies according to the level of disadvantage in the school community. Urban primary schools are divided into two 'bands', depending on their assessed level of disadvantage, with those in Band 1 having greater concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than those in Band 2. Rural DEIS primary schools receive additional funding and access to initiatives. Further details of these supports are provided in Appendix A.

DEIS schools are not homogenous; the level of economic deprivation and concentration of poverty in individual communities and the profile of each cohort of pupils/students vary considerably. DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools have a much higher concentration of disadvantage than other primary schools. These schools cater for more pupils with more complex needs.<sup>2</sup> 53% of all Traveller pupils at primary level are enrolled in 274 DEIS schools with very high concentrations (20% to 50% of total enrolment) of Traveller pupils in twenty-four DEIS primary schools.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Education's Statistics Section reports that schools located in areas of significant economic disadvantage have a greater number of pupils/students for whom English is an additional language and pupils/students with special educational needs.<sup>4</sup>

Inspectorate evaluation reports reflect the unique contexts in which schools and pupils/students work. They also provide an important evaluative insight into the quality of provision in individual schools in differing contexts. The DEIS schools evaluated by the Inspectorate from 2017 to 2020 were selected following the application of the Inspectorate's National Inspection Planning tool. The schools chosen comprised DEIS Band 1 primary schools (N = 40) and DEIS post-primary schools (N = 38). Rural DEIS primary schools and DEIS Band 2 primary schools were not evaluated during this period. Table 1 outlines the number of schools evaluated between 2017 and the first week of March 2020.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Smyth, E., McCoy, S. and Kingston, G. (2015). Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS: Research Series Number 39. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute

<sup>3</sup> Pavee Point (2015). Irish Traveller and Roma Children: Shadow Report. A Response to Ireland's Consolidated Third and Fourth Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Pavee-Point-Shadow-Report-for-UNCRC-on-Traveller-and-Roma-Children1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education: Statistics Section (2021). Data retrieved from the Primary Online Database for the school years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. May 2021.

<sup>5</sup> The Covid 19 Pandemic resulted in the closure of schools in March 2020.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of DEIS Band 1 Primary Schools Evaluated</b>	<b>Number of DEIS Post- Primary Schools Evaluated</b>
<b>2017</b>	10	8
<b>2018</b>	10	10
<b>2019</b>	19	18
<b>2020</b>	1	2
<b>Total</b>	40	38

Table 1. Number of DEIS schools evaluated each year from 2017-2020<sup>6</sup>

Since 2005, schools participating in the DEIS Programme have been required to engage in action planning for improvement across a number of areas or ‘themes’<sup>7</sup>. Inspectors have supported schools in the process of DEIS action planning and completed 511 advisory visits during the period 2017 to 2020. Further details of these supports are provided in Appendix C.

Since 2011, the Inspectorate has evaluated the impact of the DEIS Action planning process in primary and post-primary schools.<sup>8 9</sup> With the publication of the DEIS Plan 2017, a further review of provision in DEIS schools was prioritised. Between 2017 and

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<sup>6</sup> Twenty evaluations of DEIS Action Planning were undertaken by the Inspectorate in 2016. The data from these evaluations is not included in the findings presented in this report as the scope of the inquiry covered the period from January 2017 to March 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Schools are expected to develop an action plan for improvement encompassing the following areas (themes): attendance; retention; transitions; literacy; numeracy; examination attainment (pp) partnership with parents and others. Three themes (leadership, wellbeing and continuing professional development) were introduced in 2017. Schools were not required to devise separate action plans for these new themes but were asked to plan for these additional areas when they were reviewing the original themes in their action plan.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2011a). An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS in DEIS Post-Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skill; Department of Education and Skills (2011b). An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS in DEIS Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills

<sup>9</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2011b). An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills

2020 inspectors conducted 78 evaluations in DEIS primary and post-primary schools. The purpose of these evaluations was to:

- Ascertain the extent to which schools were engaging in the action planning process and in devising action plans encompassing the designated themes
- Evaluate the quality of leadership of the DEIS action planning process
- Establish the extent to which schools could indicate the impact of their action plans on the quality of teaching and on the learning outcomes for students.

This report focuses on the quality of leadership of action planning and the impact of this leadership on the quality of teaching, learning and professional development; these areas form the core of the Inspectorate's *Looking at our School 2016* quality framework for both primary and post-primary schools. The framework outlines a set of standards for teaching and learning and for leadership and management. It is used by schools to support their self-evaluation processes and to inform the work of inspectors as they monitor and report on the work in schools.

During their evaluations, inspectors generate a dataset based on a quality continuum (see Appendix B). Evaluation reports provide descriptive and evaluative narrative on the provision in each setting. This composite report seeks to capture both insights; summary information from evaluations which is captured in the Inspectorate's information management system and descriptive narrative on each DEIS theme explored by inspectors when in schools.

Two further reports will be published by the Inspectorate from the same data set. These will focus on:

- (a) DEIS Action Planning for literacy, numeracy and examination attainment in primary and post-primary schools. The report will also review action planning for examination attainment at post-primary level
- (b) The third and final report in this series will focus on the DEIS themes of attendance, retention, transitions, and partnership with parents and the school community.

## Section 1 The DEIS Plan 2017

### 1.1. An overview of the DEIS Plan 2017

The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)<sup>10</sup> Plan 2017 aims to provide children and young people (from pre-school through second-level education and onwards to further education) with an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education. The DEIS Plan outlines the Department of Education's vision for education to "...more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion."<sup>11</sup> It outlines five high-level goals which are further developed into 108 actions. These goals and actions are underpinned by a commitment to guide policy through data-informed decisions. The goals of the DEIS Plan 2017 are:

- To implement a more robust and responsive assessment framework for identification of schools and effective resource allocation
- To improve the learning experiences and outcomes of pupils/students in DEIS schools
- To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage
- To support and foster best practice in schools through interagency collaboration
- To support the work of schools by providing the research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan.

#### 1.1.1 The DEIS Programme: overview of additional supports for schools

The DEIS Plan 2017 seeks to support pupils/students attending schools that have high concentrations of pupils/students from areas of social and economic disadvantage through programmes that:

- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools (including continuing professional development for teachers in literacy and numeracy, active learning methodologies, supporting pupils'/students' wellbeing, and positive behaviour support programmes)

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Science (2005). DEIS (Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Education Inclusion. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2017). DEIS Plan 2017: Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.



- Provide additional supports so that pupils/students are ready to access education (improving attendance, school meals, homework clubs, after school clubs, School Completion Programme, programmes that support pupil/student wellbeing, summer camps)
- Increase the engagement of parents in the education of their children (the Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL), Parents' Councils)
- Enhance the transition of children from pre-school to primary school; from primary school to second-level; and to retain students in second level through the provision of national curriculum programmes /curriculum frameworks such as the Junior Certificate Schools Programme which is aimed at students who are at risk of learning school without formal qualifications; and to support students until they complete the Leaving Certificate or its equivalent and can then transition to third level, further education, apprenticeships or work.

The level of additional supports and resources allocated to schools participating in DEIS varies according to the level of disadvantage in the school community. Urban primary schools are divided into two 'bands', depending on their assessed level of disadvantage, with those in Band 1 having greater concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than those in Band 2. Rural DEIS primary schools receive additional funding and access to initiatives. Table 2 shows the number of schools participating in the DEIS programme in the current school year (DE, 2020).

Number of primary schools			Number of post-primary schools	Total
Urban Band 1	Urban Band 2	Rural		
229	104	356	198	887
52,364 pupils	31,361 pupils	26,820 pupils	75,967 students	186,512

Table 2. Number of schools participating in the DEIS Programme (2020/21 school year)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The number of pupils/students in this table is based on the September 2019 returns – Source: Social Inclusion Unit.

With the publication of the DEIS Plan (2017), additional supports have been provided to facilitate schools to:

- Further prioritise the wellbeing of pupils/students and extend the implementation of evidence-based programmes that build mental resilience and personal wellbeing. These include programmes such as the *Incredible Years* and *Friends* programmes. There has been an increase in the allocation of National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) resources to DEIS schools to assist with these initiatives.<sup>13</sup>
- Lead and manage DEIS action planning for improvement and to enhance the governance and management of the schools. Principals and other leaders in DEIS schools have priority access to the programmes and coaching and mentoring services provided by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) as well as supports provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).<sup>14</sup> At the end of 2020, 185 DEIS principals had availed of one-to-one coaching provided through CSL since 2017. All teachers (including teachers in DEIS schools) have access to the Professional Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL) which aims to develop teachers' leadership skills and their understanding of the concepts underpinning leadership. The fees for this course are subvented by the Teacher Education Section in the Department of Education. To date, the number of teachers working in DEIS schools who have completed this diploma in leadership is outlined in the table below.

Cohort	Start year	DEIS	Non DEIS	Other	Total
1	2017	71	166	3	240
2	2018	63	196	1	260
3	2019	73	204	4	281
4	2020	79	205	4	288

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<sup>13</sup> In 2018, Minister for Education Richard Bruton (29 August, 2018) announced the appointment of 19 new educational psychologists had been sanctioned, thus bringing the total number of educational psychologists to 194, an increase of 19% in the numbers of psychologists since 2012/13.

Table 3. Number of teachers in DEIS schools that have undertaken the Professional Diploma in School Leadership

The DEIS Action Plan 2017 provides targeted continuing professional development which supports high-quality teaching and learning and engages students. These professional development supports, delivered by PDST, include Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery training for primary teachers, team teaching and workshops on assessment, literacy and numeracy; and Junior Cycle for Teachers supports on aspects of methodology, differentiation, formative assessment and Junior Cycle reform. A range of professional development courses for individual teachers and for whole-staffs is provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

In addition, under the DEIS Plan 2017, schools are actively encouraged to:

- Participate in the School Excellence Fund-DEIS programme, an initiative which promotes innovation and creativity in interventions planned and designed by schools to tackle educational disadvantage. These school-based interventions facilitate schools to network and cluster and focus on innovation in teaching approaches in language development, wellbeing, STEM and literacy and numeracy.

The full range of supports provided to schools under the DEIS Programme is outlined in Appendix A. The programme of supports provided by PDST to support the leadership of schools is detailed in Appendix D. The supports provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are outlined in Appendix E.

## 1.2. The DEIS action planning for improvement process

Schools that receive additional supports and resources through participation in DEIS are required to engage in systematic action planning for improvement at individual school level and at school cluster/community level.<sup>15</sup> A critical element of the DEIS action planning for improvement process is the monitoring of actions implemented by schools arising from their planning work. DEIS schools are required to devise an action plan which addresses their work in the DEIS themes (see Figure 1). As part of that process, they are required to devise SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound) for the themes. Targets should be agreed at whole-school level, with all staff members taking them into account as appropriate in their individual preparation for teaching and learning. These requirements have been in place since the introduction of the DEIS programme in 2005.

The DEIS Plan 2017 introduced three additional themes (wellbeing, leadership and continuing professional development (CPD)). Schools were not required to devise separate action plans for these three additional themes. Rather, in their annual review of the action plan for each of the original DEIS themes, schools were asked to identify ongoing requirements for CPD to support the implementation of high-quality teaching and learning, and to identify measures that would support the leadership of the school and the DEIS action planning process. They were also requested to identify and prioritise the wellbeing of the targeted and most at-risk pupils/students.

DEIS schools are required to develop a three-year improvement plan for these themes:

- Attendance
- Retention
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Supporting Educational Transitions
- Partnership with parents and others
- Examination attainment (post-primary only)
- Leadership
- Wellbeing
- CPD

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Education and Science (2005). DEIS (Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Education Inclusion. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Figure 1. The DEIS Themes (DEIS Plan 2017)

A key focus of the action planning process is to ensure that DEIS supports, including the use of the DEIS grant, is targeted at those students most at risk of educational disadvantage.<sup>16</sup> The involvement of students, parents, local communities and agencies operating at local level is considered an important dimension of the planning process. Schools are required to outline the strategies and interventions intended to achieve the SMART targets, ensuring that the interventions are designed to meet the needs of the most-at-risk pupils/students or targeted pupils/students. They are also required to implement these strategies and interventions and to monitor the implementation and progress of these plans as part of the school improvement process.<sup>17</sup>

Circular 0040/2016 (Post-Primary)<sup>18</sup> and Circular 0039/2016<sup>19</sup> (Primary) highlighted that the school's DEIS Action Plan is also the school's improvement plan for the purposes of school self-evaluation. It states "Schools in the DEIS Programme are required to develop and implement three-year improvement plans as a condition of their participation in DEIS. These plans are the school's improvement plan for the purposes of school self-evaluation and no additional or separate improvement plan is required."

The six-step school self-evaluation process is outlined below.

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Education (2020). Guidelines on the appropriate use of the DEIS Grant in DEIS Primary and Post-Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education.

<sup>17</sup> The Inspectorate supports the process of DEIS action planning through its advisory visits to schools and through its evaluation programme. It also provides regular updates and guidance on DEIS action planning on its website [www.schoolself-evaluation.ie](http://www.schoolself-evaluation.ie). Workshops and other supports on DEIS action planning are provided by the PDST. Appendix D details the number of SSE advisory visits which have been undertaken by inspectors to DEIS primary and post-primary schools between 2017 and 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Education (2016). Circular 0040/2016: Continuing Implementation of School Self-Education 2016-2020. Dublin: Department of Education.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education (2016). Circular 0039/2016: Continuing Implementation of School Self-Education 2016-2020. Dublin: Department of Education.



Figure 2. The six-step school self-evaluation process which underpins DEIS planning

Therefore, in devising their DEIS action plan, each DEIS school is required to engage in the six-step school self-evaluation process as outlined above. This will involve gathering evidence and analysing data to make judgements; setting priorities for development and improvement; writing and sharing the DEIS improvement plan; implementing the action plan and evaluating its impact.

DEIS schools, like all other schools, are required to examine their action plan annually and identify the areas where progress has been made and evaluate the extent to which targets have been achieved. It is at this annual review that data in relation to targets set and the specific interventions which have been implemented can be reviewed in terms of their effectiveness and their impact on teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils/students. This process provides an opportunity for schools to refine targets and adjust plans in light of this review and in light of the pupils'/students' changing priority educational needs.

### 1.3 Evaluating the implementation of the DEIS action planning process in schools: DEIS evaluations 2017–2020

The Inspectorate uses a range of inspection models to evaluate all schools, including DEIS schools, and other learning settings on an annual basis. The inspection models range from short one-day, unannounced incidental inspections, to more intensive whole-school evaluations and inspections that follow through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports. DEIS schools are inspected using a range of these models. The Inspectorate has also developed a model of inspection which focuses on the Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools. Since 2010, the Department of Education's Inspectorate has used this model to undertake evaluations of the effectiveness of school-based action planning processes in DEIS Band 1 primary schools and in DEIS post-primary schools. Composite evaluation reports outlining the findings were published in 2011<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> and again in 2015.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> Between 2017 and March 2020, inspectors undertook evaluations in a sample of 40 DEIS Band 1 primary schools and 38 DEIS post-primary schools. This report presents the composite findings from these seventy-eight evaluation reports. It outlines inspectors' findings in relation to the leadership of the DEIS action planning for school improvement process, qualitative findings in relation to overall school leadership which were provided by inspectors in their reports and findings in relation to the quality of teaching and learning in the DEIS schools evaluated. The DEIS evaluation activities and quality continuum used by Inspectors as part of the evaluation process are provided in Appendix B.

In the preparation of this composite report, the following sources of evidence were used:

- Forty individual evaluation reports issued to primary schools following DEIS evaluations
- Thirty-eight individual evaluation reports issued to post-primary schools following DEIS evaluations

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<sup>20</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2011a). An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS in DEIS Post-Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skill

<sup>21</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2011b). An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS in DEIS Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skill;

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2015a). Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2015a). Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Post-Primary Schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

- Information arising from seventy-eight DEIS evaluations in primary and in post-primary schools which was inputted into the Inspectorate's information management system
- Data from various DEIS-related reports published by the Department and other agencies.

## 1.4 The evaluation quality continuum

In judging the quality of schools' action planning for improvement in the context of each DEIS theme, inspectors used a five-point quality continuum (very good, good, satisfactory, fair, and weak). Each aspect of the action planning process (quality of planning for improvement and quality of implementation and outcomes in respect of each DEIS theme) was assigned a rating on the quality continuum. In compiling this report, quantitative terms were used to illustrate percentages, as follows.

Quantitative terms	Percentage of occurrence
Almost all	>90
Most	75 - 90
Majority	50 – 74
Fewer than half	25 – 49
A small number	16 – 24
A few	Up to 15

Table 4. Qualitative terms used in this composite report



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## Section 2 DEIS evaluation findings 2017-2020

### 2.1 Quality of Leadership of DEIS Action Planning for Improvement

The Department of Education's framework for leadership and management, outlined in Circular Letters<sup>24 25</sup> and in *Looking at our School 2016*,<sup>26 27</sup> is underpinned by the belief that schools leaders' core task is the improvement of educational outcomes for students. The purpose of school leadership (principal and members of the in-school management team) is to create a shared purpose and vision for the school and to establish and sustain an environment that promotes high quality in pupil/student care, learning and teaching.

This framework for leadership and management, provided in recent circulars and Department of Education guidelines, is based on the understanding that effective leaders exercise an indirect but significant influence on the effectiveness of schools and on the achievement of students (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000<sup>28</sup>; Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016<sup>29</sup>). The policy envisioned for principals encompasses both transformational leadership and instructional leadership as core to successful leadership. The circulars also delineate the structures to promote the distributed model of leadership in schools. This model focuses on building leadership capacity through the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the school. Through the creation of formal leadership roles (such as assistant principal positions) it builds the leadership capacity of teachers through assigning them formal leadership roles as, for example, curriculum leaders, SEN coordinators, heads of department, subject coordinators and teacher mentors.

Distributed leadership is most likely to contribute to school improvement and to build the school's internal capacity for this work (Harris, 2004).<sup>30</sup> This form of leadership is

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2018a). Circular Letter 03/2018. Leadership and Management in Post-Primary Schools; DES (2018b).

<sup>25</sup> Circular Letter 70/2018. Leadership and Management in Primary Schools; Department of Education and Skills (2018b) Circular Letter 70/2018. Leadership and Management in Primary Schools. DES (2018b)

<sup>26</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2016a). *Looking at our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills; Department of Education and Skills (2016b). *Looking at our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*. Dublin

<sup>27</sup> Department of Education and Skills; DES (2016b). *Looking at our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

<sup>28</sup> Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2000). The Effects of Transformational Leadership on Organisational Conditions and Students' Engagement. *Journal of Educational Administration* 38(2), 112-129

<sup>29</sup> Day, C. and Sammons, P. (2014). *Successful School Leadership*. Retrieved from [www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com](http://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com)

<sup>30</sup> Harris, A. (2004). Distributed Leadership and School Improvement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32(1), 11-24

closely aligned to one of the key goals of the DEIS Plan 2017 which is to develop the leadership capacity of school leaders to deploy available resources effectively and to manage the action planning for improvement process to improve outcomes for all learners.

## 2.2 Features of effective leadership of DEIS schools

Leadership for school improvement is shaped by the contexts in which schools and their leaders find themselves. Each school context is unique and includes pupils/students of all levels of ability and background as well as families, teachers and resources. All of these factors define and shape leadership practice in schools (Coldren & Spillane, 2007, p. 387).<sup>31</sup> Research on effective school leadership in schools located in areas of social and economic disadvantage indicates that effective school leaders require a range of skills, personal qualities and knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al. 2007).<sup>32</sup> Informed by this research, it is expected that successful and strategic leaders of DEIS schools:

- Ensure that a positive school culture is promoted and that all staff members are focused on and committed to the achievement of the DEIS goals and targets. School leaders influence staff's **motivation**, dedication and their working conditions. Successful schools have leaders at all levels in the school that build a nurturing and trusting environment for staff which, in turn, promotes staff and pupil/student wellbeing and respect. Positive relationships are modelled and valued by management and staff and are understood by all as being a prerequisite for ensuring that successful learning takes place.
- Are guided by a **moral and ethical purpose** which is to provide the best learning opportunities and hold the highest expectations for their staff and their pupils/students. This moral purpose underpins the mission and vision for their school.
- Prioritise **instructional leadership**. Hallinger and Murphy (2012) observe that instructional leadership involves "...an influence process through which leaders identify direction for the school, motivate staff and coordinate school and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching and learning" (p.7).<sup>33</sup> In post-primary schools, distributed and teacher leadership are critical in the effective co-ordination and team approach to the delivery of curricular

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<sup>31</sup> Coldren, A. F., & Spillane, J. P. (2007). Making connections to teaching practice: The role of boundary practices in instructional leadership. *Educational Policy*, 21(2), 360–396.

<sup>32</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

<sup>33</sup> Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (2012). Running on empty? Finding the time and capacity to lead learning. *NASSP Bulletin*, 97(1), 5-21.

programmes such as Junior Certificate School Programme, Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and to bringing about successful outcomes for students.

- Build and communicate a compelling **vision**; developing shared goals; engaging in effective planning and organisation; motivating and inspiring others; and setting high performance expectations for all.<sup>34</sup> Research indicates that teachers with high expectations of their pupils/students, have the most impact on pupils'/students' outcomes (Hattie, 2011)<sup>35</sup>
- Value **networking and collaboration** within the school. These principals capitalise on the expertise and knowledge that external agencies can offer and they recognise the benefits that formal and informal partnership with a wide range of groups and agencies can provide in terms of enhancing their pupils'/students' experiences of education or in supporting their pupils/students with specific needs. These leaders value communication and the input of all staff members to the development of the school's strategic action plan.
- Promote **distributed and teacher leadership**. Effective leaders in DEIS schools share and distribute leadership responsibilities in terms of DEIS action planning with other staff members. They build leadership capacity throughout their schools. Senior leaders are aware of the strengths of the school team and create a network or team of teachers (many with leadership responsibilities) that lead the DEIS action planning process.
- Promote pupil/student performance through providing **continuing professional development (CPD)** for their teachers which fosters high-quality teaching and learning, encourages innovation and empowers teachers. They monitor the impact of the DEIS action plan on their pupils/students, school climate and the quality of teaching.

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<sup>34</sup> Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

<sup>35</sup> Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge: Abingdon.

## 2.3 Indicators of highly effective leadership of the DEIS action planning for improvement process

For this study, very good or highly effective leadership of the DEIS action planning process by principals and leadership teams was characterised by the following:

### Communication

- Establishing clear and effective **communication structures** and protocols; principals and other senior leaders foster a shared vision among staff and management to progressing DEIS action planning as a whole-school process to improve teaching and learning and to enhance the life chances of pupils/students so that they reach their potential.

### Action planning for improvement

- Implementing the **six step approach to action planning for improvement** (outlined in the SSE process) as fundamental to the DEIS action planning process

### Managing data

- **Analysing baseline data** and information available to the school, including the views and perspectives of the teachers, parents and pupils/students and data from formative and summative assessment so that measurable targets are set in order to identify expected outcomes for pupils/students

### Target setting

- **Setting, monitoring and reviewing targets** across the DEIS themes which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) in a three-year action plan
- Ensuring that **pupils/students who are most at-risk are identified** and specific targets are set for these pupils/students to ensure that interventions and additional school resources can be used to meet their needs.

### Whole-school implementation

- All teachers demonstrating very high levels of awareness of whole-school targets and of their respective roles in contributing to the achievement of these targets
- Placing teaching and learning as central to the school improvement process and linking targets in each theme to the work in the classroom

- Identifying effective teaching and learning practices and integrating these purposefully into the strategies to support DEIS action planning for improvement
- Integrating whole school DEIS targets into classroom and subject department plans and implementing these targets consistently in lessons in various subject departments (post-primary)
- Choosing actions or strategies for each of the DEIS themes which are evidence-informed and have the greatest impact on pupils'/students' learning, wellbeing and engagement with school
- Outlining a wide range of whole-school actions which are closely linked to the targets set
- Ensuring that actions are implemented consistently throughout the school.

#### **Monitoring and reviewing actions**

- Gathering data on the effectiveness of these actions and interventions frequently throughout the school year and analysing the data to measure the effectiveness of how the school is deploying its resources
- Monitoring the plan to ensure that accurate and useful data is available and enables identification of areas in need of further development
- Publishing a summary of the improvement plan for parents and other members of the school community in order to fulfil the school's reporting obligations under Circulars 0039/2016 and 0040/2016
- Monitoring the DEIS action plan for improvement discussing it at board of management meetings.

## 2.4 Findings on the quality of leadership of DEIS action planning for improvement

This section focuses on the Inspectorate’s findings in relation to the quality of leadership of action planning in the DEIS schools evaluated. The findings are illustrated with excerpts from the qualitative narrative provided in the evaluation reports.

The quality of the leadership of DEIS action planning for improvement was found to be good or very good in almost three-quarters (73%) of primary schools with almost all of primary schools achieving a satisfactory, good or very good rating overall. Figure 3 below outlines the findings for primary schools.

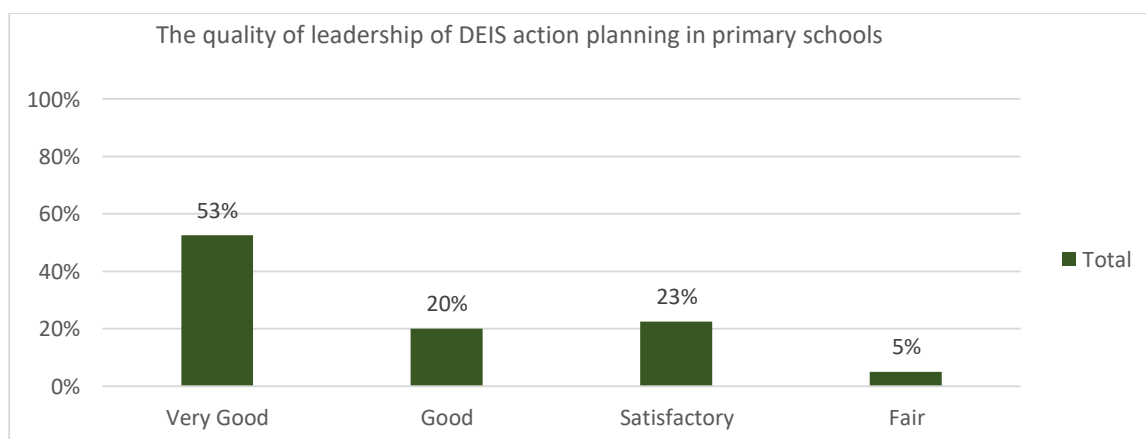


Figure 3. The quality of leadership of DEIS action planning in primary schools (n=40)

Findings in relation to the leadership of DEIS action planning at post-primary level were slightly less positive with two-thirds (66%) of the schools evaluated as good or very good and 84% of schools achieving a satisfactory, good or very good rating. These findings are illustrated in Figure 4 below.

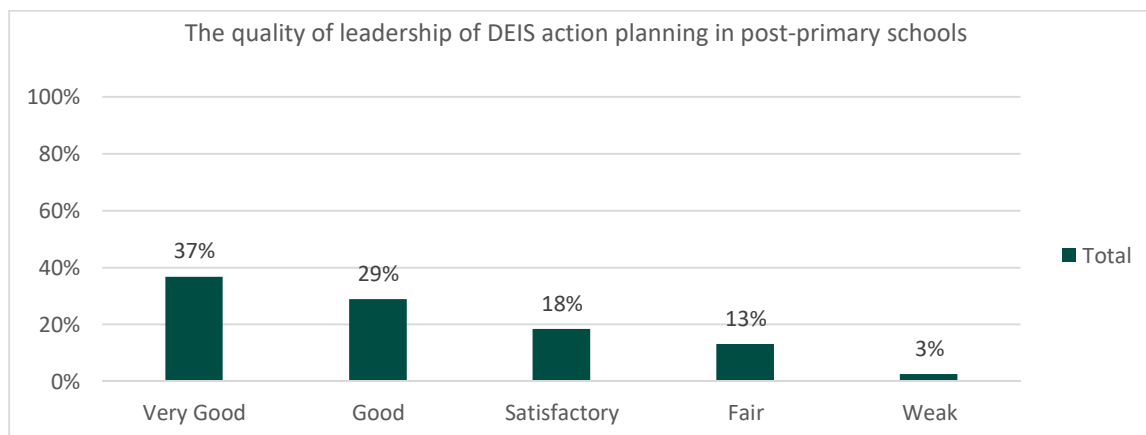


Figure 4. The quality of leadership of DEIS action planning in post-primary schools (n=38)

In their reports, inspectors focused on the quality of leadership of action planning including the quality of targets that schools set and on the collaborative nature of the action planning process. They also focused on the implementation of the targets and the monitoring and evaluation of these targets in terms of their impact on student outcomes. Inspectors also commented on the overall governance structures in the schools and the factors that contributed to the positive quality of leadership of the action planning for improvement process.

### 2.4.1 Target setting

As part of their focus on school improvement, schools are required to devise action plans that incorporate SMART targets under each of the DEIS themes. Overall, inspectors found that target setting was good or very good in 69% of schools evaluated. Target setting involves gathering data and evidence, analysing it and using the information to formulate targets.

Both primary and post-primary schools based their SMART targets in literacy and numeracy on the analysis of pupils'/students' results from standardised tests to measure reading ages and mathematical skills, and on teachers' observations of pupils'/students' learning and engagement during English and Mathematics' lessons. Post-primary schools also analysed the data available from students' attainment in certificate examinations and, in some instances, the PDST Mathematics competency tests. Targets were devised in relation to improving scores on standardised test results and also in improving attitudes to reading and/or Mathematics.

The first step in setting targets is for teachers to analyse the available data and to assess the extent to which areas for improvement are needed at whole-school level and in classrooms. Setting SMART targets that are informed by a range of data should be agreed at whole-school level, with all staff members then taking them into account as appropriate in their individual planning and preparation for teaching and learning. In that regard, some excellent practice was noted in published evaluation reports. Inspectors' observations on effective target setting included the following:

*Targets are based on data and are specific, measurable, relevant and attainable. Very effective use is made of statistical data and its year-on-year analysis to provide baseline information that informs the improvement targets for the school. Some attitudinal data from surveys of teachers, parents and pupils has also been used to inform the target-setting process.*

*For each DEIS theme, specific and measurable improvement targets have been identified for the school's priorities through very effective data analysis. These targets are carefully linked to a range of strategic actions and implementation strategies, and practice is regularly reviewed.*

DEIS action planning places a responsibility on teachers and school leaders to identify the specific needs of their students and to craft and implement strategies to meet those needs. Schools are required to identify the pupils/students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage and to target additional resources to meet their specific needs in terms of attendance, retention, transitions, teaching and learning. Some schools were advised to reflect pupil/student voice at each stage of the DEIS action planning process. The following extract from one inspection report reflects this finding:

*There is scope for incorporating the pupils more fully into elements of the planning process. In particular, there is a need to make provision for the systematic, frequent gathering of information about pupils' attitudes, learning dispositions and interests, and to use that information in target-setting, the implementation of interventions, and the subsequent monitoring of the extent to which targets have been achieved.*

Where good or very practice was evident, inspectors noted that instructional leadership was a key focus of school leaders and they noted the following practices in their evaluation reports:

- There was very good communication and awareness of DEIS priorities and targets in all learning settings and across the school. DEIS action plans were shared with staff members, parents and members of the community. Effective communication with parents and other agencies ensured widespread knowledge of the range of supports available to all children and parents
- All teachers were members of various DEIS teams that led the development and implementation of the action plan (including devising the SMART targets) for each



of the themes. This resulted in a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for the plan and its implementation

- Teachers and school leaders were aware of target groups and the learning needs of the various cohorts of pupils/students. Targets for specific groups were outlined and there was good use of the *Continuum of Support* and provision for a range of pupils'/students' needs. Interventions were implemented that met the needs of targeted pupils/students. Effective assessment and tracking of pupils'/ students' progress were in place.
- The systems devised by the school for monitoring and evaluating interventions and changes to instructional practices were comprehensive and informed the review and evaluation of the various DEIS targets. *Looking at our School (2016)* was used to as a benchmark to guide learning experiences and outcomes
- There were very clear improvements in pupils'/students' outcomes as a result of the various targets and interventions and successes were maintained.

However, even where purposeful and adaptive leadership was provided in schools, inspectors found aspects of provision that could be improved, particularly in the priority given to the central role of pupil/student learning as the core work of schools, principals and teachers. As a result, in these schools the DEIS targets were not stated in specific terms to meet the needs of the most at-risk pupils/students. In addressing this issue in published evaluation reports, inspectors recommended that:

- SMART targets should be set for the students on a categorised basis to ensure that they reflect the various cohorts of pupils/students within the school (e.g. pupils/students with English as an additional language, pupils/students who have poor attendance/punctuality; pupils/students with poor engagement in class; pupils/students underperforming in literacy/numeracy)
- Targets should be stated in in terms of improvement in pupil/student outcomes (across each of the DEIS themes)
- The DEIS plan should be communicated more effectively and systematically to ensure that all teachers had ownership of all DEIS targets and actions for improvement
- The data underpinning targets should be interrogated more thoroughly in each of the DEIS themes.

## 2.4.2 Implementation of the DEIS action plan

The implementation of the DEIS action plan was consistently strong in almost three-quarters of primary schools and two-thirds of post-primary schools. Inspectors observed a range of lessons and interventions to evaluate how plans to improve literacy and numeracy were put into action in the classroom and within the school. Where implementation of the DEIS plan was good or very good inspectors noted that:

- The DEIS action plan was disseminated to all teachers. The SMART targets were closely aligned to pupils'/ students' learning. Teachers had a good understanding of the DEIS targets and strategies and how they applied to classroom practice
- The target groups of pupils/ students for intervention and support were well defined and, consequently, implementation of DEIS planning was appropriately focused
- DEIS strategies and interventions were well co-ordinated and consistently implemented and were closely monitored and reviewed systematically
- Teachers actively engaged with professional development to support the achievement of DEIS targets through the various interventions
- Structures of the school day were updated to reflect a greater focus on teaching and learning. Post-primary schools reviewed their timetables with lessons scheduled for one hour instead of the shorter period of 45 minutes.
- Timetables and staffing were reviewed to provide for literacy/numeracy hours and other evidence-based interventions such as *Friends for Life*.

Where good or very good implementation of the DEIS action plan was noted, school leaders ensured that plans were monitored frequently in terms of their impact on teaching and learning. Effective schools generated and analysed their own data to show that outcomes had improved or that they had adjusted targets or strategies having reviewed the progress made.

Where weak or fair practice was identified in target-setting practices, school leaders and teachers were unable to identify the initiatives which were most effective in terms of impacting on pupils/students. Inspectors reported that while many of the interventions or programmes were implemented effectively, schools had not measured their impact as pupils'/students' progress was not being tracked in a systematic manner. There was a lack of baseline data and interrogation of available information to inform schools on the efficacy of their decision making on pupils'/students' learning and whether the strategies and initiatives chosen for implementation were the most appropriate to meet with the needs of the individual pupils/ students. Fostering and leading a culture of data-based

decision making in relation to instructional practices and the use of resources was a challenge for these schools.

### 2.4.3 Transformational and instructional leadership

Inspectors found that highly effective principals (53% in primary schools and 37% in post-primary schools) used the DEIS action planning for improvement process to secure overall school improvement which included improvements in teaching and learning, school climate and learning outcomes in their school. In these schools, the characteristics of instructional and transformational leadership were evident. Inspectors found that effective school leaders had a clear and shared vision for the school, held high expectations for their staff and students and valued the strengths and talents of the staff in contributing to school improvement. In these schools, inspectors noted that:

- The leadership team shared a common vision that centred on creating a positive school environment where students were encouraged and supported to stay in school and to reach their potential
- The talents, interests and leadership potential of teachers were recognised as central to the successful implementation of the DEIS plan
- The principal and other school leaders fostered a shared vision of empowerment and creativity in relation to DEIS action planning for improvement within the school community and maximised the use of allocated resources for their school
- Distributed leadership was valued and these schools had highly committed staffs who had high expectations for their students. In these schools, the initiatives and interventions provided were firmly grounded in enhancing pupils'/students' learning.

In very effective schools, inspectors commented on the extent to which principals placed teaching and learning at the core of their leadership work. In these schools, the leadership of the DEIS plan became synonymous with instructional leadership. The DEIS action plan informed the daily operation of the school and was closely connected to classroom practices. The staff members interviewed during the evaluations perceived the DEIS plan as central to their work. Inspectors noted that most lessons observed in these schools had student-centred and active learning approaches as core to the work with student affirmation and engagement as key elements of practice. This in turn fostered a positive classroom and school climate.

#### 2.4.4 Effective distributed leadership

Evaluation reports indicate that highly effective leaders in DEIS schools share and distribute leadership responsibilities in terms of DEIS action planning with other staff members. Senior leaders are aware of the strengths of the school team and create a network or team of teachers (many with leadership responsibilities) that lead the DEIS action planning process.

Where the leadership of DEIS action planning was very good, highly effective structures were in place in the school. These schools had formed a DEIS core team, comprising members of the senior management team. The lead teacher for each theme reported on the progress of their group at the weekly meetings of the DEIS core team. Inspectors noted in their reports that the attendance of members of senior management at DEIS planning meetings provided important leadership, oversight and support for the work of these teams and for the planning process.

Where very effective leadership was evident, inspectors found that:

- Principals and other members of the senior management team were aware of the *Looking at our School (2016)* framework for school improvement. They had interrogated the two dimensions that directly impact on students' learning, outcomes and experiences – teaching and learning and leadership and management. They had linked the standards and statements of effective/highly effective practice in these dimensions with the DEIS Action Planning process.
- Middle leaders' roles and responsibilities were reviewed in light of the Department of Education publication of circulars outlining the framework for leadership.<sup>36</sup> The roles were reviewed to prioritise distributed leadership for all DEIS themes.

The importance of building leadership capacity, both formal and informal, as a means of supporting school improvement and DEIS action planning was recognised in the DEIS schools with the most effective leadership.

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<sup>36</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2018a). Circular Letter 03/2018. Leadership and Management in Post-Primary Schools; Department of Education and Skills (2018b). Circular Letter 70/2018. Leadership and Management in Primary Schools

### **2.4.5 Leadership of amalgamated schools**

A significant number of the primary school leaders and a small number of the principals of post-primary schools had to navigate the school improvement process while at the same time overseeing the amalgamation of their school with neighbouring schools. The principals, school leadership teams and staffs of these schools had to manage complex school factors such as forming new relationships among staff and students, creating new policies and procedures, including a new DEIS Action Plan, to guide the newly-formed school and establishing a positive school climate. These factors posed additional challenges for the leadership of the school and also impacted on the DEIS planning process.

### **2.4.6 Sectoral issues in DEIS action planning**

It is a matter of concern that 10% of post-primary schools (4 schools) had developed a DEIS action plan as well as a separate SSE school improvement plan. In these schools, both planning processes were seen as separate undertakings. It is an important function of school leadership to ensure that planning for school improvement through the DEIS action planning process is undertaken utilising the SSE process.

Schools need additional supports to understand that SSE is the process by which DEIS action planning is undertaken. Ultimately, SSE and DEIS action planning for improvement have a shared focus on improving students' educational experiences and outcomes. Systematic action planning for improvement underpins both SSE and DEIS. Schools should understand that its DEIS action plan is also its school improvement plan and that there is no additional or separate improvement plan required. The SSE six-step approach to action planning for improvement, should be applied to the DEIS action planning process.

## **2.5 Findings in relation to weak or fair practice in DEIS action planning for improvement**

While the overall number of the sample of schools included in the evaluation is relatively small (78 schools out of a total of 887 DEIS schools) it is a cause of concern that overall the quality of leadership of the action planning for improvement process was found to be fair or weak in 10% of the sample of schools evaluated (see Figure 5 below). Of further concern is the fact that most of these schools that require more effective leadership of DEIS action planning are in the post-primary sector. In two schools, there had been a significant turnover of senior management staff and changes in the leadership of the school at the time of the evaluations.

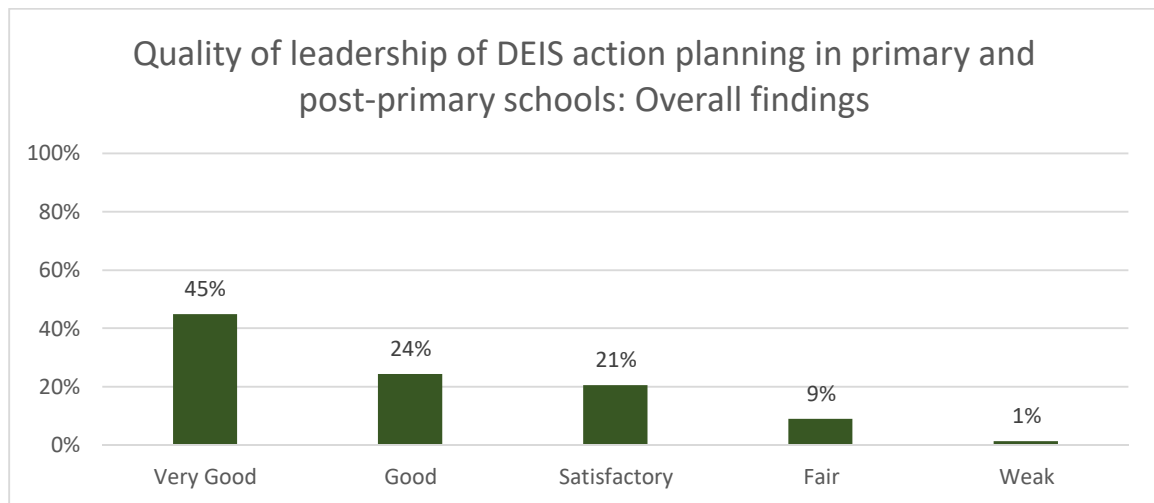


Figure 5. Composite findings for leadership of DEIS action planning in primary and post-primary schools (n=78)

In other instances, middle management posts were not filled and there was a lack of key personnel to drive the action planning process. In a few schools, the leadership and management was described as 'fractured' with a considerable number of staff members described as disaffected and not providing supports for the principal or school leadership team. Two schools evaluated did not have a current DEIS action plan.

Where there was scope for developing leadership, greater attention needed to be given to one or more of the following factors:

- More systematic and co-ordinated approach to the overall DEIS planning process
- Using the school self-evaluation process to underpin DEIS action planning for school improvement
- Involving all staff members in the DEIS planning process and sharing the plans developed with all staff members
- Discussing the DEIS themes and the specific targets at staff meetings on a regular basis
- Interrogating and analysing baseline data (generated through pre-testing and post-testing of initiatives) to guide decision making regarding the setting of targets and to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of initiatives
- Placing further attention on devising and writing SMART targets which are linked to the core work of schools; teaching and learning

- Basing SMART targets on the analysis of relevant data across the DEIS themes and including specific in-class teaching and learning strategies which are agreed, implemented and monitored at a whole-school level
- Exploring with the staff members the targets set and the strategies that will be used to achieve these targets. Ensuring that the staff members understand the difference between targets and strategies
- Ensuring that the range of initiatives which is being implemented in the school support the achievement of the SMART targets
- Placing greater attention on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies at a whole-school level and measuring the progress made in the achievement of the SMART targets.

The evidence suggests that, in terms of the action planning for improvement in DEIS schools, some school leaders need to:

- Enhance their understanding of school self-evaluation and the DEIS action planning process. They need to recognise that the school improvement plan and the DEIS plan are a single entity that is based on the six-step process of school self-evaluation. Further, school leaders need to understand that systematic action planning for improvement, based on the analysis of range of evidence, underpins effective DEIS action planning
- Align middle management responsibilities with the current needs of the schools and the DEIS action planning for improvement process. School leaders should establish structures in schools to support DEIS action planning and should nominate a DEIS co-ordinator and a DEIS planning team to lead the DEIS action planning process in collaboration with the senior management team
- Devise SMART targets that are based on reliable data. They should ensure that the impact of the various DEIS initiatives and interventions in the school are monitored and measured, and track the progress made by students
- Discuss the DEIS action plan, the data and the targets at formal staff meetings to ensure ownership of the DEIS action plan among staff members
- Place teaching and learning at the centre of each DEIS target so as to remind schools and teachers of the centrality of the core work in the classroom
- Align the school's continuing professional development (CPD) programme with the DEIS action plan for school improvement in order to provide a highly effective framework for change at whole-school and classroom level.

The next sections present the detailed findings of inspectors' evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning including commentary on the quality of continuing professional development. The section on each theme begins with a short account of context factors, then provides the composite findings in relation to the area examined and includes extracts from reports to provide insights into practices in the classrooms. Tables are

presented to show the percentage incidence of strong or weak practice for the theme evaluated.



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## Section 3 The impact of DEIS Action Planning on teaching and learning in DEIS schools

### 3.1 Context

One of the main goals of the DEIS Plan 2017 is to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of students in DEIS schools. Research indicates that teacher quality is the most important school-related factor in terms of student performance outcomes (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005)<sup>37</sup>. Sanders and Rivers (1996)<sup>38</sup> argue that students taught by effective teachers progress academically at high rates and the effects of good teachers on student achievement are both additive and cumulative over class levels. Further, they contend that lower achieving students are the most likely to benefit from increases in teacher effectiveness. Hattie (2003)<sup>39</sup> argues that teachers account for 30% of the variance in student learning. He argues that teachers with high expectations for all students, and who constantly seek evidence to check and enhance these expectations, have the most impact on students' outcomes (Hattie, 2012, p.81)<sup>40</sup>. Therefore the quality of teaching is a critical determinant of student achievement.

### 3.2 Findings

Inspectors found that DEIS action planning had a good or very good impact on teaching and learning in 75% of primary schools and 63% of post-primary schools. These findings are illustrated in Figures 6 and 7 below:

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<sup>37</sup> Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A. and Kain, J.F. (2005). Teachers, schools and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March, 2005), 417–458

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996). Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Centre.

<sup>39</sup> Hattie, J. (2003). Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence? Paper presented at the Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us? Paper presented at the Building Teacher Quality: ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from [http://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference\\_2003/4/](http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2003/4/)

<sup>40</sup> Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*. Routledge, London & New York.

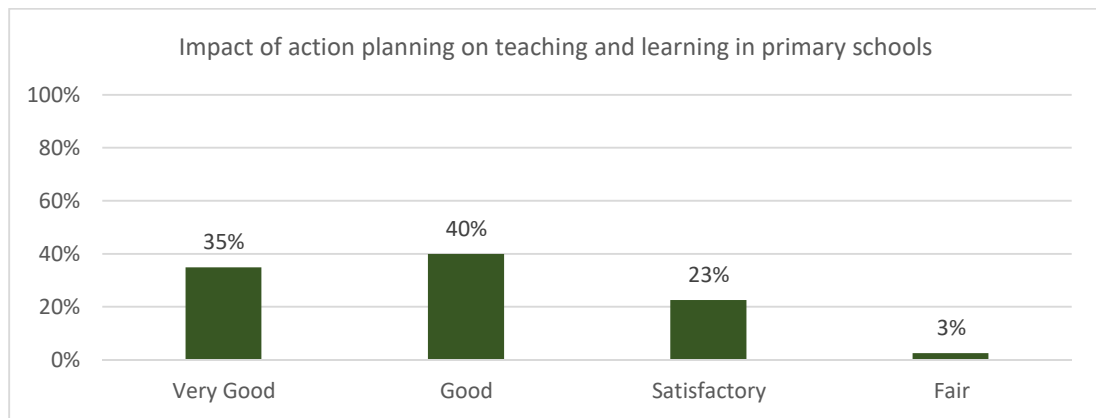


Figure 6. Impact of action planning on teaching and learning in primary schools (n=40)

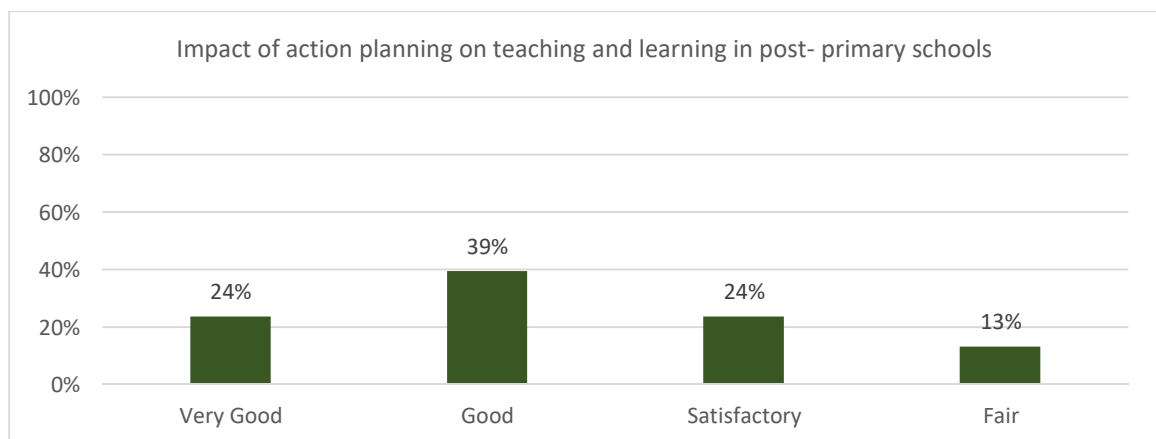


Figure 7. Impact of action planning on teaching and learning in post-primary schools (n=38)

Notwithstanding the previous positive findings, there is a significant number of schools in the sample (8%), in both sectors, where the DEIS action planning for improvement process is not having a meaningful impact on the quality of teaching and learning observed. These findings are presented in Figure 8.

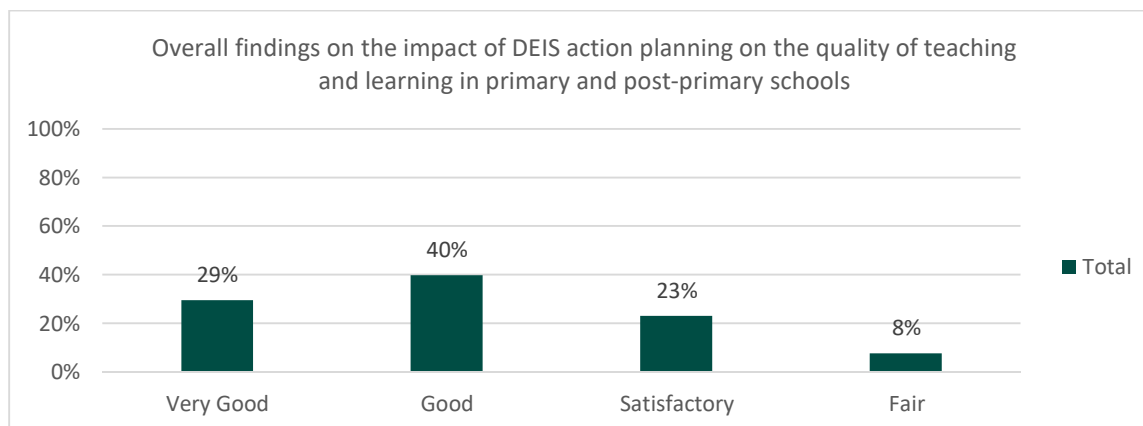


Figure 8. Overall findings on the impact of DEIS action planning on teaching and learning in primary and post-primary classrooms (n=78)

In the most effective schools evaluated, the DEIS action planning process had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms. In these schools, teachers were aware of the DEIS action plan and its targets and were engaged in the implementation of evidence-based strategies in their teaching. Inspectors found that teachers worked collaboratively as a staff to set targets, to plan and to implement interventions in the classroom. Examples of good practices observed and reported upon in published reports included:

*The quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is very good; teacher collaboration, peer observation and whole-school approaches are highly commendable*

*There is very good evidence of collaborative implementation of agreed strategies and these were having an impact on learning outcomes for the majority of pupils*

In 69% of schools, inspectors rated teaching and learning as good or very good. In these settings, a broad range of teaching methodologies, approaches and strategies was evident with teachers providing valuable collaborative and task-based learning activities for their students. Teachers used strategies such as pair work, traffic lights, whiteboards, exit tickets and KWL<sup>41</sup> sheets to engage the pupils/students. Inspectors found that teachers also skilfully crafted high-quality learning experiences that allowed

<sup>41</sup> KWL charts are graphic organisers that are used to activate pupils/students' prior information before, during and after a lesson. They prompt pupils/students to answer three questions at different stages throughout the lesson - What do you know about this topic? What do you want to know about this topic? What did you learn?

all pupils/students to achieve while also challenging the more able pupils/students. In these settings, lessons were carefully planned, highly organised and well resourced. Where very good practice was in evidence, inspectors found that teachers' classroom practices were likely to bring significant benefits to the pupils/students in the long term.

### 3.3 Inclusive classroom environments in DEIS schools

With the introduction of the Special Education Teaching model in primary and post-primary schools in 2017<sup>42</sup>, schools were advised to provide a range of teaching supports for pupils/students including team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs. Team teaching was one of the strategies used to create an inclusive learning environment and this practice was observed in almost all primary schools and in some post-primary settings.

In almost all primary schools in the sample, mainstream classroom teachers worked collaboratively with special education teachers (SETs) in order to improve pupils' learning experiences and their engagement in learning. Evaluation reports note that a range of interventions such as Power Hour in literacy, Literacy Lift Off, small group literacy instruction (SGLI) and Maths Hour was provided to cater for differentiated teaching. The classrooms were organised in different stations or groups and where effective practice was observed, teachers engaged in collaborative planning for these team teaching initiatives. Inspectors commented on the range of high-quality teaching as follows:

*Teachers used a range of initiatives including differentiated class-groupings, station teaching and withdrawal support to foster improvement in pupils' literacy development across all strands*

*A recent increase in the prevalence of team teaching is an indication of the continued drive towards an inclusive approach to education. In cases where team teaching was observed during the evaluation, it was very well planned and executed.*

As team teaching is at an earlier stage of development in the post-primary sector, inspectors recommended that this approach should be further developed so that teachers could share and develop pedagogical practice to improve the learners' classroom experiences and to provide supports for students within their classroom and with their peers. They advised that the same teams should work with different students

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<sup>42</sup> Department of Education (2017). Circular Letter 14/17. Circular to the Management Authorities of all Post-Primary Schools: Secondary, community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards.; Circular Letter13/17. Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation.

across year groupings to provide consistency and better structure for the work undertaken in classrooms. Where excellent practice was observed in post-primary settings, inspectors commented on the explicit links between the DEIS action plan and the continuum of supports for students.

In a few settings, inspectors commented that the withdrawal of students during class time for activities organised by the School Completion Programme resulted in students missing out on valuable teaching and learning time. They also recommended that engaging activities should be timetabled for early mornings as this would promote punctuality and attendance. Ensuring that all students have access to the full curriculum should be a priority for all school leaders.

In a small number of post-primary schools, inspectors noted that there were very good strategies in place to ensure students' preparedness for learning and to assist them to organise themselves. In these contexts, students reported in their focus groups that they felt very well supported by teachers, they were making progress and they were given good advice on how to improve their work, and their behaviour for learning. Inspectors noted that these schools were successful in supporting students and their participation in school life so that they could reach their full potential.

### **3.4 Impact of DEIS action planning on teachers' individual planning**

In highly effective schools, the DEIS action plan impacts on the practices of teachers at individual class level. Teachers work collaboratively to plan and to ensure that the interventions and initiatives are implemented systematically at each class/year level. The DEIS plan is clearly connected with classroom practice and teaching and learning strategies are an integral part of the actions outlined in the plan. Where planning was most effective in primary classrooms, teachers had differentiated their planning for various target groups in their class and initiatives were aligned to specific learning needs. In-class support for pupils with specific learning needs was provided and there was good use of the special education *Continuum of Support* in evidence to provide for varying abilities and learning needs. One published evaluation report commented on effective planning as follows:

*The plan identifies targets and initiatives for each of the DEIS themes. The coordinators are highly committed and have organised a variety of good quality initiatives that are clearly linked to the identified areas for improvement. The focus on constructive collaborative planning at each class level and the strong*

*sense of teamwork support a whole-school awareness and implementation of the agreed initiatives and strategies.*

In some post-primary schools, subject plans reflected the DEIS targets and teachers were aware of the DEIS plan and the targets and strategies that were being implemented. Some excellent practice was noted where schools had devised a planning template to support the alignment of subject department planning with the key targets of DEIS plan. These templates had mapped whole-school DEIS strategies to specific subject contexts and included details of whole-school classroom practices that support DEIS planning, with particular reference to literacy and numeracy initiatives.

### **3.5 Use of assessment to inform teaching and learning**

Where good or very good teaching was observed, inspectors commented on the positive use of assessment practices to inform teaching and learning and to contribute to the DEIS action planning process. One published primary evaluation report noted:

*....very good use of assessment to inform suitable learning programmes. Baseline data is established and there is effective use of that data to inform differentiated learning groups. Pre- and post-testing in First Steps Writing, self-assessment learning folders for each pupil (are features of practice in the school).*

By working together and talking about professional practice, teachers play a vital role in developing their own professional learning and that of their colleagues. Collaborative professional practice is at the heart of effective schools (Hattie, 2008; 2011)<sup>43</sup> and is a policy promoted by the Teaching Council through its Cosán framework.<sup>44</sup> Through reflective interactions, teachers share and transform action plans and targets into practical teaching and learning experiences to help their students in a holistic manner. Where teaching and learning were described as very good, inspectors noted that teachers engaged systematically in reflective practice and all interventions were reviewed on a regular basis to ensure maximum impact on teaching, learning and pupil/student attainment.

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<sup>43</sup> Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

Hattie, J. (2011). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor Francis.

<sup>44</sup> Teaching Council (2016). *Cosán; The Framework for Teachers' Learning*. Maynooth: Teaching Council. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Teacher-Education/Cosan-Framework-for-Teachers-Learning.pdf>

Where effective or highly effective practice was in evidence, teachers planned active learning experiences for their pupils/students and guided them to understand how to make improvements to their learning. Formative assessment practices were used widely in these settings and pupils/students understood how to self-evaluate their learning and the progress that they were making in the different areas of the curriculum. In some classrooms, inspectors noted that assessment practices should be enhanced and extended to take into account pupils/students' abilities and capacities.

Where practices in teaching, learning and assessment were weak or fair, inspectors advised teachers to focus more clearly on the achievement of DEIS targets.

In some schools where high-quality teaching was in evidence, there was still scope for improvement observed in terms of interrogation of data generated through assessment practices and the setting of targets and the selection of interventions. Inspectors commented on the following:

*Target-setting for improvement in literacy and numeracy is not sufficiently focused to optimise the impact of the very good quality teaching that was observed. Teaching and learning will be further enhanced by a target-setting approach which is more clearly informed by data identifying pupils' ability levels.*

The following extract is taken from the Inspectorate's information management system:

*There is a wealth of information gathered at whole-school level. The teachers display a very good knowledge of the needs of the children. It is advised that the school uses the wealth of information gathered to develop more meaningful targets for each class level based on the pupils' identified needs and to ensure that there is a target for the priority areas identified which is supported by strategies to achieve the target.*

Schools were also advised to give more feedback to pupils/students to support them in their learning. In particular, inspectors advised that pupils/students should receive more consistent, ongoing feedback in their copybooks and that a whole-school policy on formative assessment should be devised to guide practice.

### **3.6 Findings in relation to weak or fair practice in planning for the quality of teaching and learning**

In over one-third of primary and post-primary schools, the DEIS action planning process had satisfactory or fair impact on teaching and learning. In some schools, many positive actions and interventions are described in the DEIS plan, but few of these were related to developing teaching and learning in the classroom. In other schools, a wide range of strategies to support literacy and numeracy was being implemented but staff members were not aware of the school-level targets and of how the interventions addressed the targets for particular groups of pupils. Inspectors recommended that teachers, in their subject departments at post-primary level or at different class levels at primary level, should set appropriate targets and develop and embed active teaching and learning strategies into their work in the classroom. They also recommended that differentiation should be enhanced within the mainstream class and that all DEIS targets should be grounded in the core work of schools; teaching and learning.

Inspectors noted that teachers in these schools were not undertaking enough pre-assessment activities before interventions were introduced. Similarly, some teachers were not undertaking post-intervention assessment activities to assist them in analysing how initiatives were impacting on students' outcomes. Inspectors recommended that teachers should avail of further professional development supports in the areas of special education provision, the use of data to inform teaching and learning and in numeracy.

In two schools, serious deficiencies were identified in terms of leadership and teaching and learning. In one context, the evaluation team noted that staff morale and disaffection, teacher and student absenteeism and the lack of a focus on teaching and learning had a significant negative impact on learning outcomes. Where weak leadership was evident, these serious challenges were not addressed and improvements in teaching and learning and in the DEIS action planning process were not advanced.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The Inspectorate uses a wide range of advisory and evaluation models to follow-through on significant aspects of practice that are evaluated as weak, fair or poor during school evaluations. These include follow-through evaluations, incidental inspections, advisory visits and school improvement advisory visits.



The model of supports for students with learning needs was weak in a few schools with an over-reliance on the withdrawal of students from mainstream class for additional supports.

*Special education provision is a particular problem. The only model of support in use is withdrawal and this is very unsatisfactory in how it is managed. ... Additional forms of support, such as team teaching, should be researched and implemented and additional staffing resources should be used for their designated purposes.*

Inspectors found that in a small number of post-primary schools, the frequency with which students have free classes due to teacher absence demotivated the students and led to poor student attendance. They recommended that these practices should be addressed and reduced.

In a small number of schools, inspectors were critical of the Transition Year Programme provided. They found that in these schools students became disengaged and their motivation to participate was poor. Students arrived late, left early and skipped classes. The assignment of homework to students was inconsistent and students often found the homework difficult to complete. Inspectors found that there was variation in the feedback provided to students. Inspectors recommended that a whole-school policy on homework and the provision of formative feedback should be developed and implemented on a school-wide basis. In a third school, inspectors found that teachers' comments in student journals were predominantly negative and as a result of poor climate, engagement in learning was also poor.

### **3.7 Findings in relation to good and very good practice in planning for the quality of teaching and learning**

Key elements of success in relation to teaching and learning in DEIS schools that were identified include:

- Setting high expectations of outcomes for all learners
- Using explicit teaching strategies to ensure pupils/students are motivated, active in their learning and experience success
- Classroom teachers/subject teachers and special education teachers working collaboratively to provide pupils/students with opportunities to learn in an inclusive learning environment
- Preparing for teaching and learning so that the needs of the targeted pupils/students are met in the lessons
- Building teaching capacity to implement new programmes, initiatives or adopt new instructional and assessment practices
- Using assessment data to inform teaching and learning, to monitor how effective different teaching strategies are and to highlight areas for professional learning for staff members
- Providing feedback to pupils/students on how they are progressing in their learning and how the steps that they can take to improve their learning outcomes
- Engaging in reflective practice to review teachers' practice and to ensure that teaching is meeting the pupils'/student's learning needs
- Adopting teaching practices and lesson structures that support the implementation of evidence-informed programmes.

#### **3.7.1 Implications of DEIS evaluation findings for teaching and learning**

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in DEIS primary and post-primary schools was found to be good. However, inspectors recommended that schools could further enhance teaching and learning by prioritising the following aspects of practice:

- The use of pupil/student-centred, active-learning strategies so that pupils/students are motivated and engaged in their learning
- Whole-school policy on the provision of high-quality written developmental feedback to pupils/students on their work should be devised and implemented

- DEIS targets should be linked with subject-specific or curriculum targets, and appropriate teaching and learning strategies adopted by subject departments and class teachers
- Measures to achieve targets should be grounded in the core work of teaching and learning in the classroom; teachers, in their classes and subject departments, should set appropriate targets and develop teaching and learning strategies to achieve these targets
- The frequency with which students have free classes (at post-primary) due to teacher absence, which serves to demotivate them and leads to poor student attendance in itself, should be reduced as far as possible
- As well as gathering baseline data to support DEIS targets for numeracy and literacy, schools should ensure that pupils/students are re-tested to monitor and track progress and to identify the interventions that are having an impact on pupils'/students' engagement in learning and on their learning outcomes
- Schools should give greater attention to differentiation within lessons so that pupils/students can actively participate and achieve. The provision of in-class special education teaching through team teaching and other initiatives should support pupils/students who require specific supports in their learning.

## Section 4 Continuing professional development for teachers

### 4.1 Context

The DEIS Plan 2017 prioritises the continuing professional development of teachers in DEIS schools. The policy also supports the concept of teachers improving teaching and learning through accessing high quality professional learning activities and developing content knowledge linked to their teaching responsibilities. In particular, the primary schools that were included for the first time in the DEIS Programme in 2017 were provided with a range of supports from the Professional Development Support service for Teachers (PDST) to enable them to implement evidence-based programmes such as Maths Recovery and Reading Recovery.

The model of continuing professional development employed for these initiatives, at primary level, includes a series of related workshops, onsite professional dialogue and reflection activities with a teacher leader. This rich format of job-embedded professional development for teachers is designed to assist schools to provide more engaging, rigorous and relevant instruction and more differentiated learning and classroom experiences for pupils/students. Professional development was provided for schools in relation to Social, Personal and Health Education and the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023<sup>46</sup>. In addition to building positive climate and encouraging full pupil/student engagement in their learning and in school life, DEIS schools received training from NEPS psychologists on evidence-based wellbeing programmes including Incredible Years (primary) and Friends programme (primary and post-primary). Continuing professional development provided for DEIS schools also includes a focus on curricular change at national level (Primary Languages at primary level and the introduction of the Junior Cycle at post-primary level).

The Department has prioritised the provision of induction and mentoring programmes for new principals through the Centre for School Leadership and through the Misneach programme delivered by the Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST). The PDST also provides professional development for principals through the

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<sup>46</sup> DES (2019) Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. Retrieved from <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/>

Forbairt programme and for deputy principals through the Tánaiste programme. PDST also supports principals and other school leaders on the leadership of DEIS action planning through these leadership programmes. The Education Centre network organises principal and deputy principal support networks where school leaders can exchange ideas and learn from their peers. Newly-qualified teachers receive the supports of their teacher colleagues through the Droichead<sup>47</sup> process.

## **4.2 Findings in relation to good and very good practice in planning for the quality of professional development**

Inspectors commented on the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) in almost half of post-primary and almost all of the primary evaluation reports. This section therefore relies on the narrative provided in these reports to illustrate findings and trends.

In almost half of post-primary schools, teachers had availed of opportunities to increase their skills across a range of areas including special educational needs, teaching and learning strategies, formative assessment, and Junior Cycle implementation. In a few schools, in-house professional development was provided where teachers disseminated the findings from their courses and modelled strategies and approaches with their colleagues. Inspectors noted in their reports that school management had supported teachers to participate in CPD which was central to a number of DEIS themes. Some teachers were also pursuing instructional leadership training or engaging with action research projects. A number of teachers were involved in teacher networks, that focused on DEIS themes, organised through their patron body (such as the ETBI).

In the primary school evaluation reports, inspectors noted a strong culture of continuing professional development in most schools. They commented that the expertise that teachers developed through engagement in evidence-informed initiatives such as Reading Recovery or Maths Recovery had significant positive impact on the implementation of the DEIS targets and prioritised actions. Schools that had invested significantly in professional development were characterised by very good teaching, increased teacher knowledge and confidence and classroom interventions that were chosen to meet the needs of individual pupils/students. The following comments from inspection reports exemplify these practices:

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<sup>47</sup> Droichead is the Teaching Council's Integrated Professional Induction Framework for newly-qualified teachers

*The teachers in this school are very committed to ongoing professional development in relation to the teaching of literacy. This is impacting very positively on the delivery of specific literacy initiatives and on day-to-day literacy teaching and learning.*

*Most members of the numeracy team have undertaken additional CPD in the area of Maths Recovery, and knowledge of this approach has been shared very effectively throughout the school, especially through well-co-ordinated in-class support methodologies and the presence of a Maths Recovery trainer on the staff.*

Schools also availed of professional development in the DEIS action planning process. The following comments, noted in published evaluation reports, illustrate these findings:

*There is a strong culture of continuing professional development in the school and the expertise gained in this process informs the identification and implementation of strategies and interventions. These are implemented in a very effective manner.*

*The effectiveness of the school's use of continuing professional development (CPD) to support action planning for improvement is at a very high level; teacher modelling and sharing of practice are among its strong features.*

Inspectors noted that participation in Droichead and the School Excellence Fund (DEIS) promoted peer collaborative review and teachers shared expertise with other staff members. In schools where continuing professional development was embedded in teachers' professional practice, inspectors noted that there was a very high level of staff engagement in professional development opportunities which were linked to the DEIS targets in literacy, numeracy, wellbeing, oral language development and on supporting pupils/students to engage in positive behaviour.

Schools that had been granted DEIS status following the publication of the DEIS Plan 2017 had engaged in professional development that focused on managing school improvement through DEIS action planning and setting SMART targets which was provided by the PDST. Inspectors recommended that schools engage in continuing professional development in areas such as assessment for learning and differentiation as a means of further improving attainment for pupils/students of all abilities. They also recommended that schools build on inclusive educational practices through accessing courses on team teaching and differentiation. The following recommendation from an evaluation report illustrates this finding:

*A strong ethos of care permeates the life of the school and there is good support for targeted students and those with additional needs within the mixed-ability class groupings. There were some lessons however, where the higher-ability students would have benefited from further challenge while in other lessons the students experiencing greater difficulty were not expected to make optimum effort to participate or improve. In order to best support the needs of*

*all students, it is recommended that future whole-school professional development prioritise interventions on differentiation and Assessment for Learning (AFL.)*

### **4.3 Implications of DEIS evaluation findings for continuing professional development**

Inspectors made several recommendations to schools to further enhance teaching and learning through accessing continuing professional development in relation to various aspects of their classroom practice as well as the DEIS action planning process. These recommendations included:

- Where necessary, schools should seek further supports from the PDST, JCT or the National Council for Special Education on how to implement team teaching, formative assessment strategies and the implementation of the Continuum of Support in their classrooms
- Newly-qualified teachers and experienced teachers who are recruited in DEIS schools require additional access to professional development courses in evidence-informed programmes in language and communication, literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and supporting positive pupil/student behaviour. These teachers should be prioritised for inclusion in CPD events.
- Schools need further assistance to become more skilful in measuring the impact of their interventions with individual pupils/students and with groups of pupils/students and in determining whole-school progress of various programmes and initiatives through the DEIS action planning process. Further guidance on the use of assessment data to provide evidence of impact of teaching approaches needs to be provided.

## Section 5 Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Introduction

When the first programme of supports for schools serving pupils/students from areas of educational and social disadvantage was provided in the 1970s, external evaluation was the main impetus for providing assurances in terms of quality of provision in primary schools. With the introduction of school-based DEIS action planning for improvement processes in 2005, together with school self-evaluation processes (2012) and *Looking at our School (2016)*, the quality framework for school evaluation, there has been a growing professional confidence within schools to evaluate their own provision and to assess for themselves how they are providing for their students. This Inspectorate report provides an external evaluation of the quality of these action planning processes and their impact on student outcomes.

This section highlights the main findings in relation to the quality of the leadership of the action planning in DEIS schools and the impact of these plans on the quality of teaching and learning. The conclusions are stated for all schools. In some instances, sectoral-related recommendations are outlined.

### 5.2 Conclusions

- Overall, in the schools inspected, there was a strong culture of planning for improvement. School leaders had established structures within their schools (such as appointing a DEIS co-ordinator and establishing DEIS teams) to promote planning for improvement as a shared responsibility among the leadership team and within the staff. Leadership responsibilities were distributed and there was a sense of shared ownership of the DEIS action plan
- Where leadership of DEIS action planning was good or very good (73% of primary schools and 66% of post-primary schools), school leaders provided strong instructional leadership to their schools; they shared a common vision with their staffs and their focus was on providing the best learning experiences for their students and to improve their life chances
- Where the most effective practice was observed, DEIS action planning for improvement was the vehicle to drive overall school improvement and was based on the principles of the SSE process. The DEIS action plan was the school's self-evaluation improvement plan



- Schools are now generating significant amounts of baseline data as part of the DEIS action planning process. Some schools need further assistance in analysing this data and in devising SMART targets based on the data that are meaningful and realistic within their specific contexts. Devising SMART targets and understanding the data underpinning them remains a challenge for over a third of schools
- Generally, schools are implementing a significant number of interventions to bolster literacy, numeracy and the wellbeing of their students. In some instances, these interventions need to be monitored more closely and their effectiveness in improving outcomes for pupils/students needs to be kept under review. Where good or very practice is in evidence, schools review the targets and interventions annually to establish their effectiveness and to make necessary adjustments
- Most schools target their resources and specific interventions and supports to meet the needs of pupils/students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage. Further assistance needs to be given to some schools so that all the interventions support the core work of the schools which includes supporting pupil/student wellbeing and teaching and learning
- Primary schools have access to a range of evidence-informed initiatives to support their work in literacy and wellbeing and a limited range in numeracy. There is a significant lack of evidence-informed programmes in use in the post-primary schools evaluated, outside of the NEPS programmes to support wellbeing and some of the NCSE programmes referenced in inspection reports such as the Vocabulary Enrichment Programme.
- Evaluation evidence shows that continuing professional development has been prioritised and embedded in the work of teachers in almost all primary schools and in half of the post-primary schools evaluated. The professional development accessed is closely aligned to the interventions in place and the targets devised as part of the DEIS action planning process
- In the most effective DEIS schools (75% of primary schools and 63% of post-primary schools), the DEIS action plan underpins the core work of the school: teaching and learning. Teachers' planning and subject plans reflect the DEIS action plan in many schools. However, there is scope for schools to integrate whole-school DEIS strategies into the subject-specific contexts in post-primary schools
- Schools are endeavouring to create inclusive classrooms. Differentiated supports are provided within the mainstream setting in all primary schools and in some post-primary schools and classrooms, teachers and special education teachers are working collaboratively to meet the needs of pupils/students. Team teaching is beginning to be a feature of DEIS post-primary schools

- DEIS action planning is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning observed in schools. Teaching and learning was good or very good in 75% of the primary schools and 63% of post-primary schools evaluated. The key elements of success in relation to teaching and learning in these good or very good DEIS schools included setting high expectations for all learners, using explicit teaching strategies to ensure pupils/students are motivated and active in their learning and experience success; teachers working collaboratively to provide pupils/students with opportunities to learn in an inclusive learning environment; preparing for teaching and learning so that the needs of the targeted pupils/students are met in lessons and implementing evidence-informed interventions to bolster pupils'/students' literacy, numeracy and wellbeing
- DEIS action planning for improvement has provided the mechanism for schools to manage change and to develop their own agenda for school improvement. The process of DEIS action planning promotes ownership among teachers of their change agenda and their plan for overall school improvement
- Two of the new DEIS themes (leadership and CPD), which are the focus of this report, are receiving additional attention in schools. The policy on the leadership framework outlined in circular letters to schools and also reflected in the *Looking at our School 2016* quality frameworks aligns with these new themes and provides additional policy impetus for these areas to receive additional focus in schools.

### 5.3 Recommendations

DEIS action planning for school improvement has a positive impact on many aspects of school life. However, there are areas where schools require additional supports to ensure that the process is embedded in everyday practice and planning cycles in the school.

#### **The leadership of DEIS action planning for improvement**

- A level of uncertainty still exists in a schools regarding the setting of SMART targets, the use and analysis of data and the monitoring and evaluation of the targets set. Schools require additional guidance from the Professional Development Support for Teachers (PDST) on these areas. Further clarity needs to be provided on the interface between school self-evaluation and DEIS action planning to bring about school improvement
- Teachers, principals, and support services should be enabled to have a thorough understanding and appreciation of the need to foster a culture where data is used more effectively within DEIS schools. School leaders and teachers should be

supported on how to interrogate their own data, set SMART targets that are informed by the data and make data part of an ongoing cycle of school and instructional improvement. Targeted and focused programmes of professional development supports should be provided to support schools to enable them to use data systematically, to monitor pupils'/students' progress and to tailor instruction to meet the needs of each pupil/student

- The Inspectorate of the Department of Education should continue to liaise with schools, boards of management and the support services to build system capacity to undertake and lead the process of action planning for improvement in DEIS schools
- Networks of DEIS schools should be facilitated by the Centre for School Leadership and the PDST and schools encouraged to disseminate and share aspects of their effective practice and their DEIS action planning. The PDST and CSL should support school leaders to develop collaborative cultures in their schools, prioritise instructional leadership and support school leaders in their work of transformational leadership. The development of case study videos which provide exemplars of effective practice should be developed so that schools have resources which assist them in improving their practices

### **Supporting high-quality teaching and learning in DEIS schools**

- High-quality professional development should continue to be provided for DEIS schools on evidence-based strategies and approaches that bring about improvements in teaching and learning. Specific guidance for literacy and numeracy as well as generic teaching strategies that are found to be most effective should be devised and shared with post-primary schools
- Further supports should be provided to post-primary schools in their work to build inclusive school and classroom environments. Specifically, supports should be provided by the National Council for Special Education on how to implement team teaching within mainstream classrooms and the best methods to support differentiation of pupils/students in different subject areas.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Supports for schools participating in the DEIS Programme

DEIS Band 1 schools (primary)	DEIS Band 2 schools (primary)	DEIS Rural primary schools	DEIS Post-Primary Schools
<p>Enhanced pupil teacher ratio (Class size of 20:1 at junior classes; 24:1 in senior classes)</p> <p>Allocation of Administrative Principal on lower enrolment and staffing figures (116 pupils on roll in Band 1 schools)</p> <p>Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage</p> <p>Enhanced funding under School Books Grant Scheme</p> <p>Access to Home School Community Liaison Scheme</p> <p>Priority access to School Meals Programme</p> <p>Access to supports under the School Completion Programme</p> <p>Access to literacy/numeracy supports for implementation of specific literacy and numeracy initiatives</p> <p>Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership</p> <p>Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools</p> <p>Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme</p> <p>Priority access to a range of professional development supports</p>	<p>Allocation of Administrative Principal on lower enrolment and staffing figures (144 on rolls in Band 2)</p> <p>Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage</p> <p>Enhanced funding under School Books Grant Scheme</p> <p>Access to Home School Community Liaison Scheme</p> <p>Priority access to School Meals Programme</p> <p>Access to supports under the School Completion Programme</p> <p>Access to literacy/numeracy supports for implementation of specific literacy and numeracy initiatives</p> <p>Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership</p> <p>Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools</p> <p>Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme</p> <p>Priority access to a range of professional development supports</p>	<p>Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage</p> <p>Enhanced funding under School Books Grant Scheme</p> <p>Priority access to School Meals Programme</p> <p>Access to supports under the School Completion Programme</p> <p>Access to literacy/numeracy supports for implementation of specific literacy and numeracy initiatives</p> <p>Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership</p> <p>Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools</p> <p>Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme</p> <p>Priority access to a range of professional development supports</p>	<p>Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage</p> <p>Enhanced guidance allocation of 1:25 of the Pupil Teacher ratio</p> <p>Enhanced funding under School Books Grant Scheme</p> <p>Access to Home School Community Liaison Scheme</p> <p>Priority access to School Meals Programme</p> <p>Access to supports under the School Completion Programme</p> <p>Access to Junior Certificate Schools Programme</p> <p>Access to Leaving Certificate Applied Programme</p> <p>Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership</p> <p>Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools</p> <p>Roll out of the NEPS Friends Programme</p> <p>Priority access to a range of professional development supports</p> <p>*A number of post-primary schools have an ex-quota 22 hours Behaviour for Learning teaching post</p>

Source: DES (2017). DEIS Action Plan 2017 (pages 56 – 57)

## Appendix B: Evaluation activities undertaken by inspectors during a DEIS evaluation and the quality continuum

### (a) The evaluation activities undertaken by inspectors during a DEIS evaluation include the following:

- Interview with principal and relevant staff
- Examination of school's current action plans for improvement
- Observation of DEIS-related activities and interventions
- Pupil/Student focus-group interview
- Parent focus-group interview
- Analysis of parent and pupil/student surveys
- Observation of teaching and learning
- Examination of pupils'/students' work
- Interaction with pupils/students
- Feedback to principal and relevant staff

### (b) The quality continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <b>outstanding</b> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	<b>Very good</b> ; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding: exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	<b>Good</b> ; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning	<b>Satisfactory</b> ; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas

	experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	<b>Fair</b> , evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	<b>Weak</b> ; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;



**Appendix C**

**The number of inspectorate SSE advisory visits to DEIS primary and post primary schools during the period 2017 and 2020**

<b>DEIS/SSE advisory visits</b>	<b>DEIS Primary</b>	<b>DEIS Post-primary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2017 -2018</b>	84	121	205
<b>2018 -2019</b>	112	46	158
<b>2019-2020</b>	104	44	148
<b>Totals</b>	300	211	511

## Appendix D

### Support provided to principals, deputy principals and middle leaders in DEIS schools 2017 – 2020 by the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers)

Leadership Programmes 2017 – 2020	No of Participants from DEIS schools			Total No of Participants on programme		
	2017-2019	2018-2020	2019-2021	2017-2018	2018-2020	2019-2021
Primary Misneach for newly appointed principals	49	61	57	201	276	274
<b>Total</b>	167			751		

Primary Forbairt for principals (experienced school leaders)	No of Participants from DEIS schools			Total number of participants		
<b>1358</b>	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
	41	32	41	198	180	229
<b>Total</b>	114			607		
<b>TOTAL Primary Leadership</b>	<b>317</b>			<b>1358</b>		

	No of Participants from DEIS schools		Total No of Participants on programme	
Cross Sectoral Leadership Programme for Middle Leaders in Primary and Post-Primary Schools	2018-2019	2019-2020	2018-2019	2019-2020-2021
	34	82	130	333
<b>Total</b>	116		463	

**Supports for schools leaders of DEIS post-primary schools provided by PDST 2017-2020**

Leadership Programmes 2017 – 2020	No of Participants from DEIS schools			Total No of Participants on programme		
	2017-2019	2018-2020	2019-2021	2017-2018	2018-2020	2019-2021
Post-Primary Misneach modules for DEIS newly appointed principals	19	19	22	56	65	74
<b>Total</b>	60			195		

Post-Primary Forbairt (experienced school leaders)	No of Participants from DEIS schools			Total No of Participants on programme		
	2017-2019	2018-2020	2019-2021	2017-2018	2018-2020	2019-2021
	35	24	35	154	159	134
<b>Total</b>	94			447		

Post-Primary Tánaiste (for newly appointed deputy principals)	No of Participants from DEIS schools			Total No of Participants on programme		
	2017-2019	2018-2020	2019-2021	2017-2018	2018-2020	2019-2021
	35	25	27	239	85	103
<b>Total</b>	87			427		
<b>Total Post-Primary Leadership</b>	241			1069		

## Appendix E

### Continuing Professional Development delivered to Post Primary Teachers and Whole-School Staffs by NCSE 2017-2020

External Seminars	Attendance
2-day TEACCH	158
3 Rs To Bullying Prevention	21
4-day Introduction To Autism	48
5-day TEACCH	22
ABLLS & VB MAPP	22
Accessing The Curriculum For Students With Autism, Post Primary	40
Accessing The Curriculum For Students With Autism Through Literacy	36
Accessing The Curriculum For Students With Autism, Primary	1
Accessing The Curriculum Through Numeracy For Students With Autism	46
Alert, Post Primary	20
An Introduction To Autism	47
An Introduction To Dir Floortime	3
An Introduction To Inclusive Physical Education	4
An Introduction To Teaching Children With Down Syndrome	7
Assessment & Individual Planning For Students With Sen, Post Primary, Day 2	417
Assessment For Teaching & Learning In The Mainstream Pp School, Post Primary	40
Assistive Technology Dyslexia	19
Assistive Technology Voice Recognition	50
Assistive Technology	9
Assistive Technology For Students With Dyslexia - Freeware For Windows	7
Assistive Technology For Students With Dyslexia, Texthelp Read Write Gold	23
Autism & Co-Occurring Additional Needs	52
Autism A Sensory Perspective	58
Autism, Mental Health & Anxiety	179
Behaviour For Learning Training	26
CABA	98
Challenging Behaviour & Social Skills	35
Co- Teaching For Students With Sen, Post Primary	89
Communities Of Practice	48
Co-Teaching For Students With Sen	209
Deafness An Introduction	42
Developing Language & Communication	11
Differentiation	45
Early Communication For Students With Autism, Day 2	3

Getting It Together	27
Inclusive Teaching & Learning For Primary School Teachers	4
Individual Education Planning For Students With Sen	170
Individualised Planning For Students With Autism	185
Intensive Interaction	11
Intro To Down Syndrome	3
Introduction To Autism	56
Lámh	37
Language & Communication For Students With Autism In The Mainstream Classroom	25
Language & Communication For Students With Sen	3
Leading The Inclusive School, Principals Primary	5
Leading The Inclusive School, Teachers Post Primary	140
Leading The Inclusive School, Primary Teachers Seminar	1
Leading The Inclusive School, Principals Post Primary	30
Literacy, Numeracy & Autism, Post Primary	15
Literacy, Numeracy & Autism, Primary	2
Newly Appointed Teachers To Existing Autism Classes	14
Parents Plus Adolescence Programme	18
Pathways To Prevention	18
People Skills	13
People Skills/Getting It Together Cluster	9
Pep 3	3
Primary Language Curriculum	16
Principal Set Allocation Model	33
Principals Of Schools With A New Autism Class	27
Principals Of Schools With An Existing Autism Class	34
Promoting Positive Behaviour For Learning	32
Puberty, Relationships, Sexuality & Autism	61
Sensory Processing & Motor Skills	35
Social Drama For Children & Young People With Autism	8
Social Skills For Students With Autism	83
Social Stories	60
Speech, Language And Communication Needs In Adolescence	210
Student Behaviour Planning	31
Supporting Students With Autism As They Transition Through Education, Post Primary	46
Supporting Students With Autism Through The Use Of Apps	20
Supporting Students With Dyslexia & Literacy Difficulties Post Primary	308
Supporting Students With Dyslexia Through The Use Of Apps	2
Supporting Students With Mild/Moderate GLD	185
Teaching Children With An Acquired Brain Injury	4

Teaching Students With Dyslexia & Literacy Difficulties	110
Teaching Students With Language & Communication Difficulties , Post Primary	99
Teaching Students With Mild Or Moderate GLD In The Mainstream Post Primary School	5
Teaching Young Children With ASD	10
Teaching Young Children With Dyslexia	1
Team Teaching, Post Primary	61
The Continuum Of Support & The Set Allocation Model, Post Primary Principals	52
The Continuum Of Support & The Set Allocation Model, Post Primary Teachers	224
Transition From Primary To Post Primary For Students With Sen	103
T-Tap	70
Using AFLS	78
Why Try	29
Working Things Out	30
<b>Whole School Seminars (WSS)</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
SET/Dyslexia	17
Differentiation	1810
An Introduction To Autism	1701
ASD Workshop	17
Assessment	14
Assessment Team Teaching Differentiation	50
Challenging Behaviour	9
Continuum Of Support	27
Continuum Of Support And Individual Planning	30
Co-Teaching	2479
Differentiation & Co-Teaching	196
Differentiation & SET Model	129
Differentiation/Inclusion	60
Dyslexia	86
Dyspraxia	92
EBD/Check & Connect,	13
Exceptional Closure	81
Inclusion In Mainstream Post-primary School	180
Inclusion/Differentiation	117
SET & Assessment	33
SET & Co-Teaching	64
SET Allocation Model & Co-Teaching	15
SET Model	145
Supporting Students Who Are Exceptionally Able	14
Team & Co-Teaching	65

Teaching Students With ADD/ADHD	40
Teaching Students With Mild/General Learning Difficulties New Model Allocation	26
Teaching Young Students With Mild GLD	29
Understanding & Managing Escalating Behaviour	5
Using ICT to Support Children With Sen	6
<b>Total Post Primary Teachers/Principals (External And Whole School Seminars)</b>	<b>12341</b>

