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Call for consultation
Department of Education and Skills
Statement of Strategy 2016-2018

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5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

School based after-school care

1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources ?

School Based Speech and Language Therapists to Focus on Multiple Levels of Intervention

Ensuring the Important Commitment in the Programme for Government on School Based Speech and Language Therapists Focuses on Multipronged Levels of Intervention, including with Parents and Classroom and Support Teachers – rather than simply being with individual children

The Commitment in the Programme for Government on School Based Speech and Language Therapists is a vital one, long overdue and one which makes obvious sense to facilitate children's and parents' attendance at sessions in a location more familiar to them than clinic based settings. This commitment builds on the earlier examples of school based speech and language therapists established in Familiscope, Ballyfermot (Downes 2011, p.28-29) and subsequently evaluated in more detail in the CDI Tallaght model (Hayes et al. 2012). Both of these models share a multilevelled focus of intervention which includes support and feedback for parents as well as teaching staff, combined with individual intensive work. There is real opportunity for interprofessional collaboration between speech and language therapists and teaching staff, including also HSCL, SNAs, Learning Support, Resource teachers, regarding children's language development – based on supporting specific strategies, approaches in concrete situations of children's needs.

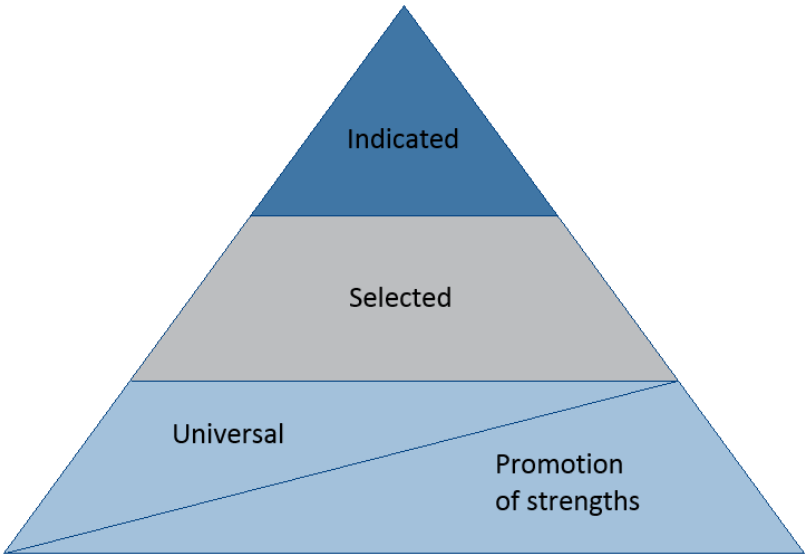
It is extremely important that this vital opportunity for a multipronged systemic approach to speech and language therapists' role is not reduced solely to individual work with children in school.

This multipronged approach does not require additional resources beyond the Programme for Government commitment to funding the vital service of school based speech and language therapists. There is also strong scope for integrating these speech and language therapists work with the work of the National Behavioural Support Service (which operates predominantly but not exclusively in DEIS postprimary schools), given the strong link between aggression and language difficulties (see appendix A).

Need for an Integrated Outreach Strategy to support Marginalised Families

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme needs clearer strategic focus on the level of need of the families it is engaging with. It is suitable for families at moderate risk at the selected prevention level as well as for universal prevention and promotion levels in DEIS schools. It is ill-suited to families with chronic and complex needs at the indicated prevention level.

FIGURE 1. Differentiated Levels of Need for Prevention (Downes 2014)



These different levels of need and strategic intervention are well recognised in health psychology but need firmer strategic recognition in education (Downes 2014, 2014a). Parental engagement and family support approaches need to be integrated in strategic fashion for a new DEIS strategy, overcoming traditional boundaries between education and health (Downes 2008, 2014).

There is a clear opportunity to do this through an integrated outreach team, where HSCL is part of a multidisciplinary team approach, together with the promised social care workers being employed by Tusla. The social care outreach workers need to engage with the families at the level of indicated prevention, i.e., chronic and complex need in intensive individual work with families (see example, of Familiscope [now Familibase], Ballyfermot, Downes 2011 on attendance gains through home outreach of social care workers as part of a multidisciplinary team). Chronic need here for families includes intergenerational drug use, mental health problems, domestic violence issues, chronic school absenteeism. Home School Liaison teachers need to have a strong selected prevention involving *groups of parents* on parent peer support approaches more than individual intensive indicated prevention work. The role of HSCL also needs CPD to focus their universal prevention and promotion work on educational issues, on lifelong learning classes for parents based on their needs and interests,

on facilitating change to school climates and cultures to open spaces for parents, including for policy making issues (Mulkerrins 2007) and health promotion issues such as being on school health promotion committees to address for example, bullying.

Most of this integrated team for an integrated family outreach strategy for engagement and support requires simply a restructuring of roles without existing resources, beyond the proposed social care workers and some CPD for HSCL's.

A further vital layer to the integrated outreach strategy is for families in need from birth through home visits (see Northside Partnership's Preparing for Life Home Visiting Programme, Doyle et al. 2016).

2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

Need for Emotional Counselling supports in school - for early school leaving prevention and beyond

A key issue for early school leaving prevention, highlighted in EU Council and Commission documents, is that of emotional supports for students at risk of early school leaving as a protective factor in a system that meets their needs. This issue is one that tends to be neglected as it requires bridges between health and education domains (Downes 2010); international research recognises that poverty is an additional risk factor for mental health problems (Leslie et al., 2004; Dore, 2005; Acheson 1998; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009).

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving, signed up to by every EU member State with the exception of the UK, acknowledges the need for:

> Targeted individual support, which integrates social, financial, educational and psychological support for young people in difficulties. It is especially important for young people in situations of serious social or emotional distress which hinders them from continuing education or training.

The Commission Communication (2011) on early school leaving recognises that 'Education and training systems often do not provide sufficient targeted support for pupils to cope with emotional, social or educational difficulties'.

The Commission Thematic Working Group (2013) on early school leaving explicitly reiterate the importance of emotional supports, against the backdrop of a relational environment:

> those who face personal, social or emotional challenges often have too little contact with education staff or other adults to support them. They need easy access to teachers and other professionals supporting their educational and personal development.

It is to be emphasised that a major gap in the DEIS strategy (2005) is with regard to emotional and mental health supports (Downes 2008, Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Early School Leaving 2010). The current system of school based emotional support services at postprimary level is termed the pastoral care team, consisting of the school chaplain, year head, principal and career guidance teacher (School Matters 2006). While well intentioned, frankly it is not an adequate or appropriate response with regard to emotional and mental health supports for students experiencing not only a range of traumas and stresses, but also other mental health related stressors associated with the burden of poverty. Though with specific limited exceptions of individuals who have taken additional qualifications, none of this group (Chaplain, Year Head, Principal, Career Guidance) are specifically qualified in emotional counselling or therapeutic work to undertake emotional counselling work with students on a range of frequently highly complex issues. Moreover, a majority of students in DEIS schools across a range of Dublin contexts consistently reiterate that they would not trust or open up to teaching members of staff on personal, as distinct from academic or career related, matters (Downes 2004, Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006, Downes & Maunsell 2007). This is especially so for those alienated from school to the extent that they want to leave earlier. They are very reluctant to confide in a teacher. No one expects an employee to confide highly private personal details of their lives with their bosses; while a teacher-student relation is hopefully a warm and strongly relational one, it is a system level problem to expect students to confide highly private personal details of their lives with their teachers, even teachers in designated roles.

The National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) responds to critical incidents, such as the aftermath of a suicide. However, they are not a substitute for in-school emotional counsellors as a resource for supporting students across a range of problems, stresses and traumas. Moreover, the focus of their training is as educational psychologists and not as therapists or emotional counsellors. While the expansion of NEPS psychologists in the Programme for Government is welcome, this is not to serve as a substitute for provision of emotional counselling supports for students in schools, and especially in DEIS schools.

The teacher-support service (formerly teacher-counsellor service) at primary level again places teachers in the role of being emotional counsellors, though this is not their background or qualification to engage with the complex and sensitive emotional needs of children. This is a poor substitute for qualified emotional counsellors, play therapists, drama therapists etc in schools. It is to be noted that some local School Completion Programmes employ such emotional counsellors, play therapists, drama therapists etc in DEIS schools. However, it is an indictment of current approaches that these vital services depend on local voices rather than national systemic strategy. Moreover, contracts for these services are frequently short-term and relationships of trust that need time and continuity for young children and counsellors/therapists become broken through high staff turnover.

It is to be noted that the increased recent emphasis on wellbeing in schools must not overlook the distinction between universal curricular approaches to developing resources for individual wellbeing through coping strategies etc, and *targeted* emotional counselling services. It is of real concern that while this area of mental health and social and emotional

wellbeing gains further attention at national strategic level in education, that targeted emotional counselling services in schools remains the elephant in the room; this has already occurred for the current bullying strategy which does not address the issue of targeted emotional counselling services in schools. There is a deafening silence in the current Programme for Government on emotional counselling services in schools that quite simply must be addressed for a credible strategic response in this area.

This lack of adequate emotional counselling services in schools is a systemic gap that needs firm addressing, especially for DEIS schools but by no means only for these students (see also section 3 on commonality of system supports, including emotional counselling for both bullying and early school leaving prevention, Downes & Cefai 2016). It is unacceptable that emotional counselling services are routinely available for students in all Irish third level campuses and routinely unavailable for a younger and arguably more vulnerable age cohort in postprimary and also primary schools.

Need for a Comprehensive Strategy on the Arts in Education as a Key Resource for DEIS Schools and Other Schools More Generally

The current *Arts in Education Charter* is a highly limited document which does neither full justice to the key role of the arts in education nor offer any strategic vision for poverty and social inclusion in relation to the arts. This contrasts strongly with the earlier vision of *Breaking the Cycle* which recognised the central importance of access to cultural education for socio-economically marginalised communities.

Key potential benefits of the arts in education for contexts of poverty and social inclusion include as follows:

- Challenges fear of failure due to opportunities for expression that are not reducible to right or wrong answers
- Fosters social and emotional awareness
- Fosters active citizenship and local community awareness
- Promotes innovation and leadership
- Invites team work and cooperative learning
- Helps pupils' motivation and confidence
- Offers avenues for greater recognition of multiple intelligences, beyond simply cognitive skills which also benefiting cognitive skills, as well as concentration
- Promotes diverse cultural identities and self-expression
- Recognises centrality of students' voices which is particularly important in areas of socio-economic exclusion
- Provides opportunities for parental involvement and greater bridges between schools and local communities which may be traditionally alienated from the school system.

Three key opportunities for the arts in education need to be grasped in the context of the new Programme for Government

1. A core strand of every local School Completion Programme (SCP) needs to encompass a commitment to arts-based projects. The well-recognised examples of music for pupils in St. Ultan's Ballyfermot and St. Agnes' Crumlin illustrate the potential of this area for engaging wide groups of children and also for developing a positive school climate. However, it needs to go beyond reliance on individuals to being a systemic strategic focus available to all schools and especially for DEIS schools through the SCP.
2. The arts can play a central role in the new proposed afterschool care settings in schools
3. The real concern needs to be addressed about the squeezing of the arts in the primary school curriculum due to the accentuation of focus on literacy and numeracy (O'Breachain & O'Toole 2013, Burns 2015). The key NESF report (2009) on *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion* which preceded and informed the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy gave recognition to the issue of integrating literacy concerns across the curriculum. Indeed the first draft of the literacy and numeracy strategy proposed to integrate drama and literacy but this was withdrawn in the final version. While there is a need to firmly state and support the integrity of all arts subjects and areas as ends of themselves, they can also be a key part of integrated approaches with literacy, for example, regarding oral language, as well as for emotional literacy. A much wider integrated curriculum is needed for literacy that embraces a wider range of areas, including but by no means restricted to the arts (see also Pike 2016 on Geography and oral language). More resources are needed for teachers to not only integrate the arts with areas such as literacy but also to help make the arts more culturally meaningful for DEIS schools (see Hefferon 2007, 2011 on drama resources for DEIS schools).

3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

Teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness for early school leaving prevention

There is a clear and growing consensus internationally and especially, at EU level, of the role of authoritarian teaching (i.e., ruling by a fear and anger based school and classroom climate) in alienating students from education and pushing students towards early school leaving (Hodgson 2007, Cefai & Cooper 2010, Downes 2011a, 2013, 2013a, 2014a). While this may be a small minority of teachers, it has a real effects on students' educational and personal wellbeing and mental health, especially for those already vulnerable and at risk of early school leaving. Authoritarian teaching is an international problem but also an Irish problem, especially, but by no means exclusively, at postprimary level (Fingleton 2004; Downes 2004; Downes et al. 2006, 2007; Byrne & Smith 2010).

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2012) propose the following developments of school institutional culture with regard to student wellbeing:
• establishing a caring atmosphere that promotes autonomy;
• providing positive feedback;
• not publicly humiliating students who perform poorly;
• identifying and promoting young people's special interests and skills to acknowledge that schools value the diversity they bring. Elamé's (2013) European study describes 'discriminatory bullying' by teachers, impacting also on pupils' subsequent peer bullying (see also Downes & Cefai 2016).

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving proposes the following actions:

> Supporting and empowering teachers in their work with pupils at risk, which is a pre-requisite for successful measures at school level. Initial teacher education and continuous professional development for teachers and school leaders help them to deal with diversity in the classroom, to support pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and to solve difficult teaching situations.

The Commission Communication (2011) on early school leaving incorporates a whole school focus on this issue, referring to the need for 'Whole school measures aim at improving the school climate and the creation of supportive learning environments'.

The European Commission's Thematic Working Group report (2013) on early school leaving develops this point:

> Teachers should be capable of identifying different learning styles and pupils' needs and be equipped with the skills to adopt inclusive and student-focused methods, including conflict resolution skills to promote a positive classroom climate. Teachers should be supported in dealing with diversity in terms of the social and ethnic background of pupils as well as supporting individuals with special learning needs

> and/or learning disabilities. They need to understand ESL, its different triggers and early warning signs and be highly aware of their role in preventing it.

CPD in DEIS has tended to focus on subject specific supports rather than wider school and classroom climate supports. Moreover, often it is those teachers who most require change in approaches that are more resistant to engaging in CPD on their classroom and communicative strategies, including conflict resolution skills for authoritative rather than authoritarian (or merely permissive) teaching. Progressive approaches to communication such as restorative practice have been developed in an Irish context of Tallaght through CDI (Fives et al. 2013) and internationally (Holtham 2009). There has been a surge of interest also in mindfulness in Irish schools, which can also influence not only positive school climate but also offers an important resource for pupils in contexts of poverty and social exclusion (Costello & Lawler 2014).

The Irish Teaching Council is now a member of the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC). Following on from its Lithuanian EU Presidency Conference on Early School Leaving in November 2013, the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC) has issued an agreed position statement on early school leaving. Key aspects of this EUNEC statement include:

> 'The statement considers early school leaving from a holistic perspective... recognizing the need to 'improve school climate, class climate' and to 'support pupils to deal with social problems, emotional and mental health'. It acknowledges the need for 'a warm and supportive relationship between teachers and pupils', as well as 'collaboration' between schools and 'family and social services' which recognize the respective boundaries between each'.

This is not an issue of blaming teachers but rather offering system supports (Hyland 2002) for what is recognised as an international problem. A distinction must, however, also be made between the professional obligation of a teacher not to harm the mental health of their students through authoritarian teaching styles (characterised by Elamé 2013 as discriminatory bullying) and the onus on a teacher as a member of a caring profession in a system of care in education. While technically it is possible for teachers to be disciplined for authoritarian teaching approaches inducing negative and destructive class and school climates, further system measures are needed to ensure that principals and others are assisted in ensuring such teachers do not remain in schools, if they perpetuate embedded patterns of destructive authoritarian teaching. Such embedded patterns of authoritarian teaching are a child protection and child welfare issue, given what is now known about the long-term effects of bullying in school on children's physical and mental health, as well as educational outcomes (Downes & Cefai 2016, forthcoming).

The promotion of conflict resolution skills, restorative practice approaches, diversity awareness and progressive authoritative social, emotional and communicative classroom management approaches is also an issue for preservice teacher education requiring firmer monitoring from the Teaching Council across preservice education providers in order to ensure it is given sufficient emphasis and intensity, especially at postprimary level but also primary, as well as sufficient resources (see also Appendix B).

Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion through Multidisciplinary Teams in and around Schools

The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primaryschools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010), with figures in June 2012 (NEWB) giving 1,051 suspensions in primary schools 2009/10 and 14,162 in postprimary. Many of these students, including those manifesting violent and aggressive behaviour, require mental health/emotional supports through more structured engagements with multidisciplinary teams in and around schools. Some pupils and students displaying consistently high levels of aggression and bullying are reacting to deep trauma in their lives that requires therapeutic supports.

There are only two EU2020 *headline* targets for education and none for health. One of these headline targets pertains directly to early school leaving reduction across the EU to 10%, with Ireland adopting a target of 8%. Against this backdrop of the major strategic priority of early school leaving prevention and in recognition of all the resources invested by the State in keeping children and young people in school, it is quite simply a systemic absurdity to then adopt a policy of such a scale of suspensions and expulsions. Multidisciplinary teams in and around schools are needed to address the complexity of students' needs who are engaged in behaviour placing them at risk of suspension and expulsion (Downes 2011; Edwards and Downes 2013).

A key issue here is not necessarily to prevent withdrawal of a disruptive student from the classroom but to recognise that this does not equate to the disproportionate and flawed strategy of excluding them from the school. In Sweden, for example, schools are not permitted to suspend or expel students. A related concern here is the practice of sending students home early as a partial suspension, occurring also at primary level; this is a deferral of a problem, a displacement that serves little strategic purpose beyond further alienating students from not only the education system but also wider society.

Acceleration of focus on Social and Emotional Learning/Education (including Emotional Literacy) at Both Primary and Postprimary Levels

A study of more than 213 programmes found that if a school implements a quality Social and Emotional Education/Learning (SEL) curriculum, they can expect better student behaviour and an 11-point increase in test scores (Durlak et al., 2011). The gains that schools see in achievement come from a variety of factors — students feel safer and more connected to school and academic learning, SEL programmes build work habits in addition to social skills, and children and teachers build strong relationships. The Durlak et al. (2011) review found most success for those SEL approaches that incorporated four key combined SAFE features: sequenced step-by-step training, active forms of learning, focus sufficient time on skill development and explicit learning goals. Another key finding, echoed also by another meta-analysis by Sklad et al. (2012), was that classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted SEL programmes so these can be incorporated into routine educational activities and do not require outside personnel. A limitation acknowledged in Durlak et al. (2011) is that nearly one third of the studies contained no information on student ethnicity or socioeconomic status. A total of 56 % of evaluated SEL programmes were delivered to primary school students, 31 % to middle school students. A further limitation is that most of the reviewed studies took place in a US context and may not directly transfer to European contexts. Nevertheless, Sklad et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis which includes more European studies (11 out of 75 studies, i.e. 14.7 %) found no significant variation between the US studies and other parts of the world in effect size for social skills (though there was only one non-US study for anti-social behaviour).

It is notable also that the majority of studies examined for Durlak at al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of SEL curricular approaches were from primary schools (56 %) that exhibited success across six outcomes. Durlak et al. (2011) highlight SEL benefits for outcomes on SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behaviour, conduct problems, emotional distress and academic performance. Sklad et al. (2012) found that SEL programmes showed statistically significant effects on social skills, anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement and prosocial behaviour. Programs had moderate immediate effects on positive self-image, pro-social behaviour, academic achievement and anti-social behaviour, improving each by nearly one half a standard deviation. See also appendix C for a promising focus on emotional literacy.

Common systems of *holistic supports* for both bullying and early school-leaving

A forthcoming report for the European Commission on school bullying and violence in Europe (Downes & Cefai 2016) concludes that, 'There is a striking commonality of interests with regard to strategic approaches for bullying prevention in schools and early school-leaving prevention'. It recommends that:

'Common systems of *holistic supports* for both bullying and early school-leaving need to include:

- a transition focus to post-primary;
- multiprofessional teams for complex needs[1];
- language support issues, including speech and language therapy;
- family support and education issues regarding parenting communication and supportive discipline approaches;
- family outreach supports;
- academic difficulties;
- social and emotional learning curriculum;
- systems to promote active voices of marginalised students.

Both bullying and early school-leaving prevention require teacher professional development and pre-service preparation focusing on:

- relational issues for a positive school and classroom climate, including conflict resolution and diversity awareness competences;
- early warning/support systems.

This conclusion of a commonality of system-level response for both bullying and early school-leaving prevention is not to state that the same individuals are necessarily at risk for both, though they may share a number of common risk factors' (Downes & Cefai 2016) .

The report recommends that EU Member States *establish an Integrated Prevention Strategy for Bullying and Early School Leaving to Promote Inclusive Systems in and around schools*, based on the common holistic supported identified above.

[1] See also the recent Irish National Disability Authority report (2015) which recommends multidisciplinary teams in and around schools for addressing the differentiated needs of those with SEND who experience bullying as either victims, perpetrators or as bully-victims.

4. 'Tackling Disadvantaged'

4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Hunger Prevention in Schools: Issues of Strategy, Coordination and Fragmentation

Despite government investment in this area of €42m, real problems remain regarding hunger of students in school. The recent HBSC data highlights this where one in five children go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food in the home; One in six children attends school without having breakfast. These figures echo earlier national HBSC and other local studies from previous years. On this issue there is a need for a focused national and local strategy, improved coordination for implementation, and less fragmentation between government departments. This does require additional resources but also significant improvements can be made through reorganisation of existing resources at different system levels.

It is simply unacceptable in the Ireland of 2016 that so many children go to bed hungry or are hungry in school. Hunger in school affects concentration, motivation, performance, peer relations, aggression and behaviour in class, as well as health issues – all aspects relevant to early school leaving prevention.

Hunger in school is a hidden issue. Children and families may be ashamed to admit their needs in this area. Schools do not always know the hidden realities of families' lives.

The problems to be overcome through *a focused national and local strategy* on this issue include:

- SCP treats hunger as a 'core' element of their programme; however, this does not mean that all local SCP programmes address this issue or that all pupils in need in DEIS schools receive adequate food in school. Language and reality do not correspond and children are falling through the gaps to be hungry in school.
- Given the national figures on experience of hunger in school, it must be assumed that many pupils and students outside DEIS schools are also frequently experiencing hunger in school
- The need for school principals to apply to the School Meals Scheme is not a child-centred strategic approach and places an administrative burden onto school principals
- The current major investment in school buildings does not have an explicit focus on funds for school kitchens and needs to do so
- The national Growing up in Ireland (GUI) study does not ask any question on hunger in school so this issue is neglected for Department strategies relying on GUI data
- Neither the DES nor the DCYA are committed to strategic involvement in the area of hunger prevention in school through the School Meals Programme and DEIS schools,

in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* strategy; it is the sole preserve of the Department of Social Protection (see 1.3, p.133).

- Ireland had the highest acceleration of child poverty increases in all of Europe. The AROPE indicator is defined as the share of the population in at least one of the following three conditions: 1) at risk of poverty, meaning below the poverty threshold, 2) in a situation of severe material deprivation, 3) living in a household with a very low work intensity. From 2008 to 2011, the AROPE for children rose in 21 EU Member States (Eurostat 2015): The largest increases in the AROPE since 2008 were in Ireland (+11.0 percentage points (pp) up to 2010) and Latvia (+10.4pp). They were closely followed by Bulgaria (+7.6pp), Hungary (+6.2pp) and Estonia (+5.4pp).

All of the above amounts to strategic failures at national level on this issue and children in need are still suffering the consequences of this.

Improved coordination for implementation

- Very often the School Meals Programme is administered through SCP local coordinators. However, their role runs across many schools and they are not typically the concrete link person every day in school who coordinates the implementation of breakfast clubs or food in schools. Often at a school level, the coordinating person is a volunteer.
- Models of efficient use of time for providing hot meals for children during school lunch breaks are available, whereby children can both eat hot food and have exercise during a half hour lunch break (see e.g., St. Ultan's, Ballyfermot which provides this)
- Little systematic feedback is asked for from children about the provision of food in schools
- Some schools report wastage of food, at times due to lack of communication on children's needs between the school and the food supplier
- A voucher system for hot meals could be inclusive of those who can pay and those who cannot

As highlighted by the IPPN (2015), Schools face significant challenges in terms of engaging with School Meals Provision. These include
• Lack of information and clear procedures.
• Lack of Personnel– e.g. secretarial / admin staff, volunteers etc.
• Absence of In-school Management structures coupled with increasing demands on schools and school personnel.
• Inadequate space and facilities – storage, distribution, dishes, washing etc.
• Work-load and administrative burden for principals and school staff.
• Volunteer management.
• Concerns around 'food waste' – bin charges, food in bins etc…
• No dedicated funding for infrastructure, funding is provided for food only. Recommending using the Minor Works ignores the pressure on School Budgets.
• Concerns around stigmatisation of 'poor' kids in the absence of providing for all children.

Less fragmentation between government departments

- The fragmented approach to school food provision is as follows: DSP- funding for Schools' Meals; DES-school infrastructure and links with curriculum; DAFM -EU School Milk Scheme & Food Dudes; DCYA – SCP; DH – Healthy Eating Guidelines
- One Government Department needs to be responsible for developing hunger prevention in schools strategy, including implementation and monitoring of this national strategy, preferably either the DES or DCYA.
- A specific civil servant needs to have responsibility for this issue for the primary school age group (5-12)

Prevention of hunger in school is a children's rights issue requiring much more strategic attention. We need to move on this issue beyond local, ad hoc, piecemeal solutions and towards provision of adequate kitchen and hot meal facilities in schools as a routinely provided across a wide range of European contexts. This requires a government commitment to phased building of kitchens in schools prioritising DEIS schools and new schools.

- A specific and trained person in each school is needed to coordinate the local implementation of hot meals and breakfast clubs, including facilitation of improved dialogue with food suppliers and awareness of children's feedback and individual needs.
- This issue of hunger prevention in school is more suited to a mainstream national commitment to hot meals in school rather than simply local SCP cluster decisions about whether to prioritise this issue.
- Suppliers who prepare food off site can be combined as a complementary approach to the phased implementation of kitchen facilities in schools. Lunches being provided can be monitored in terms of health and nutritional values.
- Investment in kitchens in schools and hot meals is a further strategic necessity building on the Programme for Government commitment to open schools for aftercare services after school hours
- Establishment of a Food Forum to address the issue of hunger in schools

Key Principles regarding the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools that need to be recognised for the 2016-18 strategy

- 1a) A fundamental principle that current pupil-teacher ratios in existing DEIS schools be maintained and extended with a view to improvement, and with no increase in the 15:1 ratio for schools with so-called legacy posts in recognition of the key need *not to punish any DEIS schools for their gains/successes*
- 1b) The key principle of *progressive realisation*. Put simply, all DEIS schools are expected to be doing better in five years time in terms of both resources and outcomes than what they are doing today. This means no cuts in pupil-teacher ratio in any DEIS school, only extra resources. It is essential to avoid the divisiveness of pitting DEIS schools against each other regarding availability of resources, through a kind of robbing Peter to pay Paul principle between schools. Against the backdrop of the real successes of DEIS schools against the backdrop of the soaring of child poverty during the economic crash, it is to be recognized that DEIS and other schools have served as a major protective factor helping to glue Irish society together against social unrest.

- 2) *Sustainability* and *legitimate expectations* principles
  The morale of a school that is key to a positive school climate that affects many desirable outcomes for marginalised children and young people would clearly be affected by increases in pupil-teacher ratios. This morale issue pertains not only to teachers but also to parents whose children are attending a school and their view of the school. Another aspect of these principles are the need for *continuity, clarity and certainty* about the sustainability of resources. Schools have a legitimate expectation of continuity and of at the very least not a worsening of supports. This is especially the case given its successes against the backdrop of the highest increases of child poverty in Europe in Ireland between 2008 and 2011 (Eurostat)

- 3) A principle of *priority strategic focus on the indicated prevention level of chronic need* – to target those most in need

- 4a) Recognition of the *empirically proven success of DEIS schools, including the DEIS schools with legacy posts*. This has been through the critical mass of supports, a pivotal feature of which is the 15:1 ratio. Given the proven track record of success of DEIS schools, including DEIS schools with legacy posts, it is *vital not to unravel an organic system of interconnected supports*.

The language of DEIS is one of opportunity. For the 2018 strategy, it is important to recognize the move away from a negative, deficit language of 'disadvantage' (Spring 2007, Derman Sparks 2007, Gilligan 2007) towards ones of inclusive systems for working class communities. Individuals do not like describing themselves with such negative essentialising labels as being 'disadvantaged', likewise schools and communities. Within a lifelong learning framework, we are all learning throughout our life.

4 (b) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

In a European context, there are three areas pertaining broadly to poverty and social inclusion in education that Ireland falls behind many of our European counterparts. These need to be addressed in the 2016-2018 strategy. These areas are:

- emotional counsellors/therapists in schools (see section 2)
- kitchens for hot meals in schools (see section 4)
- multidisciplinary teams in and around schools (Edwards & Downes 2013; European Commission TWG report 2013) recognizing that multifaceted problems need multifaceted approaches as solutions

Priority Actions

1. **Establish multidisciplinary teams in and around schools:**
- **A) Need for an Integrated Outreach Strategy to support Marginalised Families**
- **B) Emotional counselling supports**
- **C) School Based Speech and Language Therapists to Focus on Multipronged Levels of Intervention, including with Parents and Classroom and Support Teachers – rather than simply being with individual children**
- **D) Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion**

2. **A national strategy for hunger prevention in schools**
3. **Teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness for early school leaving prevention**
4. **Recognise Key Principles regarding the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools for the 2016-18 strategy**
5. **A Comprehensive Strategy on the Arts in Education as a Key Resource for DEIS Schools and Other Schools More Generally**
6. **Establish *common systems* of holistic supports for both bullying and early school-leaving**
7. **Acceleration of focus on Social and Emotional Learning/Education (including Emotional Literacy) at Both Primary and Postprimary Levels**

Priority Outcomes for Multidisciplinary Teams in and around Schools for Inclusive Systems in Education

Outcome indicators as part of a strategic direction for multi/interdisciplinary teams in and around schools can include (Downes 2011):

a) at an individual level
- gains in attendance at school
- improved behaviour in class

 decrease in bullying in class and school
 decreased anxiety and depression and improved mental health, including academic self-efficacy and global self-esteem
 increased academic motivation and performance
 increased language development

at a family level

 increased engagement of previously marginalised families with support services
 increased engagement of previously marginalised families with the school
 improved communication between child and parents

b) at the school system level

 decreased use of suspensions
 increased use of alternatives to suspension
 improved school and classroom climate
 decrease in bullying in class and school

A key outcome indicator is attendance at third level for students from DEIS schools, including from those areas of highest exclusion from third level education. The recent HEA access plan (2015) highlights the need for improved outcomes of access to higher education in DEIS schools, including to professions. This needs to inform the DEIS review.

5. **Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities**

5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

School based after-school care

The Programme for Government proposal to open schools after school hours for after-school care services resonates strongly with the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage's (2005) injunction to make the school a focal point of community education. Schools need to become community lifelong learning centres, fostering personal and social fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship (see also European Council Conclusions 2009 on these lifelong learning goals more generally). A proposal for school based after-school or out-of-school services builds on many current practices in Ireland, such as the OSCAILT project in Limerick, which opens a wide number of schools for such services, after school hours. Similarly, the School Completion Programme has offered school based after school projects in a range of schools that combine opportunities for food, with homework and an enrichment activity of play. St. Ultan's Ballyfermot offer another important model of an extended school.

The OSCAILT report (2009) found that the scheme had a major impact on the quality of life and learning for children, parents and adult learners and positively influenced the school culture and built community. The main benefits of the scheme to parents and adult learners included academic skill development; opportunities for personal development; opportunities for accreditation (including State Exams) and it was found to have built aspirations and confidence. The benefits to children included the enhancement of positive attitudes to lifelong learning; development of positive relationships between children and children and also between children and adults; personal development for children in terms of social skills and personal responsibility; opportunities to engage in a wide variety of activities; development of a sense of belonging; opportunities to socialise in a safe, nurturing, stimulating environment; opportunities to promote health and fitness, and opportunities to have fun and build aspirations

These examples among others illustrate that typical administrative objections to opening schools for such projects, namely, insurance, the need for a school caretaker after hours, as well as concerns with territory over space, can all be overcome in many school environments. A common systemic strategic purpose is needed for this to happen.

The next range of typical and important concerns are more substantive. These concerns are that afterschool care becomes simply more school. This can be addressed by emphasising the key role of play, including unstructured play, as well as infrastructure investment in schools to ensure different play spaces, quiet rooms, multisensory rooms, soft areas (with beanbags etc), with an emphasis on relaxation. Put simply, some schools have buildings and a school culture that can easily facilitate these areas with investment – others do not. Some schools already have these spaces in place, many do not. So this option of school based afterschool services must closely scrutinise which school physical and relational environments are or are

not best suited to the play and relaxation needs of afterschool services. This is an opportunity also for the afterschool sector and environment to have a helpfully transformative effect on the institutional culture and climates of at least some schools.

Children's opportunities for play may also be reduced by excessive involvement in and reliance on electronic technology/screen-based entertainment and games (Levin, 2013); a decline in independent mobility (O'Keeffe & O'Byrne, 2015); a lack of resilience and increased risk-aversion (Jackson & Scott, 1999); and an increase in age-based segregation of children (Brown & Patte, 2013). These are all pertinent concerns for any model which places children in afterschool settings every day after school, as distinct from some days.

A related concern here is that younger children especially will be too tired to engage in afterschool sessions. Opportunities and spaces for children to rest, switch off and have quiet time needs to be centrally embedded in such school facilities. This issue of children being too tired is an issue already observed for contexts of socioeconomic exclusion, due to lack of sleep either through stress, hunger, or irregular sleep patterns (Downes & Maunsell 2007); again this is an issue somewhat off the radar of current national policy, given the neglect of such a question on sleep for school going children in the GUI national study and the lack of policy focus on the issue of sleep in the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* national strategy for children and young people. It is notable that the evaluation of Doodle Den afterschool programme in CDI Tallaght (Biggart et al. 2012) observed concerns that a number of pupils were too tired and were falling asleep before the end of the extra hour and a half beyond school (e.g., pp.43-44). A central commitment to play, rest and relaxation for afterschool care services must be enshrined to ensure this school based approach does not become simply an academic hot-housing, that may be stressful for children and even alienating some from the school system. It is notable that the extremely long extended school based day in France is associated with dramatically higher alienation of students from school; in PISA (OECD 2012) French students from socioeconomically excluded backgrounds were strikingly 50% below the OECD average in terms of a sense of belonging in school and not feeling like an outsider. Only 38% of socioeconomically excluded students in France agree that they feel like they belong at school (PISA 2012). While this may be due to a wider range of factors than simply the length of the school and afterschool day, nevertheless it is an important cautionary note against an extremely long day in school, stretching for example to 5 or 6pm. The abiding concern here is that after school care needs to be child-centred in reality and not system centred, in other words, children's needs must not be reduced to adults' workplace needs. Initial establishment of school based afterschool care needs to be for a limited period of time in a day, subject to a further review based on a range of children and young people's voices and perspectives.

An interconnected issue with tiredness and spaces and opportunities for rest and sleep after school is that of hunger. A coherent strategy for delivering hot meals for children and young people in school based after school settings needs to be established (see also section of this submission). A specific named person with a role in coordinating food delivery at individual

school setting level needs to be established, both during school hours and for afterschool services.

It is to be noted that children have a right to play and leisure time under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Article 31
1 States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2 States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

At least some concerns of the sector regarding school based after-school care around play, relaxation and leisure time would be addressed by:

- A specific fund to develop play and relaxation spaces in school settings, including outdoor spaces
- Commitment that the Children and Youth Affairs Ministry would have a central role in implementation and development of this strategy to ensure that there is not a 'schoolification of childhood' with the pressure on the school curriculum and national and international literacy and numeracy indicators.
- Establishment of External Regulation of these afterschool services, including a national framework of not only safety but also quality for this sector
- Flexibility of models and options, so that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to out of school services, both in school, early years and community locations
- Centrally involving children and young people's voices and feedback on their experiences, including differentiated feedback to include different kinds of children
- Limiting the amount of time in the day for afterschool services, especially for younger children, in dialogue with children and young people

A number of other issues need to be addressed building on the themes of the QDOSS (Quality Development of Out of School Services) national network's Agenda for Development document (Downes 2006):

Continuity of Staff and Career/Professional Development of Staff in Out-of-School Services

Relations of trust between staff and children and young people are vital to psychological wellbeing. Nurturing positive relationships serve as a key protective factor for youth at risk of early school leaving. As staff continuity is essential in order for these relations of trust to form the following issues arise:
— The development and implementation of staff retention and recruitment strategies
— The facilitation of a national strategy for staff development and progression examining training and accreditation, employment opportunities and defined career progression in the Out-of-School Service sector
External inspections of school based premises and afterschool relational environments is an obvious need for this proposal. The lessons of the early years settings regarding poor safety,

quality and relational environments in a number of settings need to be also heeded for this sector.

Continuity of Services throughout the Year

Out-of-School services need to be consistently available throughout the Summer and other holiday times to provide a point of stability during a time of changing experiences for children and young people. It is important to develop a national and local strategy for funding holiday time projects in socio-economically excluded areas

Out-of-School Services as Part of a Holistic Approach to Prevention of and Intervention in Bullying in School

It is vital to recognise the detrimental impact bullying can have on a pupil/student's self-esteem, psychological wellbeing and school attendance. With the school based afterschool care services, collaboration between schools, after-school projects and other local services are needed to target bullying. There is a need for integration of a variety of perspectives and approaches to bullying to ensure continuity of approaches across contexts, and sharing good practice so that the child experiences a caring, nurturing, learning, social environment within school time and in afterschool school time. Schools and after-school services, in developing and revisiting anti-bullying policies, need to consider the institutional and organisational features of schools and out-of-school projects themselves that can contribute to bullying in the first instance. Again the issue of developing spaces for relaxation and play in the environment of many schools needs to be addressed through a strategic and financial commitment.

Children and Young People's Voices in Afterschool Environments

Developing a sense of involvement and ownership for children and young people applies to the physical environment of the afterschool project. Building on current work in the DCYA, there is a need for children and young people to be consulted and given opportunity to express their opinion on how the environment (of school as an afterschool location) meets their needs, and on how it could be changed and decorated to reflect their needs and voices. The centrality of the arts as a core component of after school provision, as well as nature (community gardens) and sport, all offer opportunities for children and young people's voices and leadership, as part of a democratic environment that recognises and celebrates individual differences and needs. Funding needs to be provided for After-School programmes which recognise the vital role the Visual and Creative Arts can play for personal development, conflict resolution skills and in developing English language skills.

Appendix A. Disruptive behaviour and aggression as a language development issue

The need for speech and language therapists onsite in schools to engage in targeted intervention for language development emerges from international research regarding language impairment as a risk factor for correlates of early school leaving, such as engagement in disruptive behaviour. Eigsti and Cicchetti (2004) found that preschool aged children who had experienced maltreatment prior to age 2 exhibited language delays in vocabulary and language complexity. The mothers of these maltreated children directed fewer utterances to their children and produced a smaller number of overall utterances compared to mothers of nonmaltreated children, with a significant association between maternal utterances and child language variables. Rates of language impairment reach 24% to 65% in samples of children identified as exhibiting disruptive behaviors (Benasich, Curtiss, & Tallal, 1993),and 59% to 80% of preschool- and school-age children identified as exhibiting disruptive behaviors also exhibit language delays (Beitchman, Nair, Clegg, Ferguson, & Patel, 1996; Brinton & Fujiki, 1993; Stevenson, Richman, & Graham, 1985).

Appendix B. Teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness for early school leaving prevention

In the EU Commission public consultation 'Schools for the 21st century', classroom management strategies were raised as an issue needing to be better addressed by teacher initial education (see also Commission staff working document 2008). Teacher consultation across participating TALIS countries raised the following priorities:

> The aspect of their work for which teachers most frequently say they require professional development is 'Teaching special learning needs students', followed by 'ICT teaching skills' and 'Student discipline and behaviour' (p.48). Student discipline issues is raised by 21% of teacher responses (OECD 2009, p.61).

It is notable also that professional development of teachers regarding student discipline and special needs students are both, in particular, central to early school leaving prevention. The OECD (2009) recognises that:

> Classroom discipline, aggregated to the school level, is a core element of instructional quality. In PISA, it is positively related to the school's mean student achievement in many participating countries (Klieme and Rakoczy, 2003). Also, it has been shown that – unlike other features of classroom instruction – there is a high level of agreement about this indicator among teachers, students and observers (Clausen, 2002) (p. 91).

Key results observed in TALIS (OECD 2009) include that:

> One teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of the lesson time, and some lose more than half, in disruptions and administrative tasks – and this is closely associated with classroom disciplinary climate, which varies more among individual teachers than among schools (p. 122).

> Several studies have shown that the classroom disciplinary climate affects student learning and achievement. TALIS supports this view by showing that disciplinary issues in the classroom limit the amount of students' learning opportunities. The classroom climate is also associated with individual teachers' job satisfaction. Thus a positive learning environment is not only important for students, as is often emphasised, but also for teachers. Across all participating countries it therefore seems advisable to work on enhancing teachers' classroom management techniques. The results suggest that in most schools at least some teachers need extra support, through interventions that consider teachers' individual characteristics and competences and the features of individual classes (OECD 2009, p.122-123).

This wider vision for professional development than simply classroom or behavioural management is given expression through the OECD's (2009) recognition that school climate of positive relation is also a key dimension:

> In addition to the environment at the classroom level, *school climate* is used as an indicator for the school environment. Here, school climate is defined as the quality of social relations between students and teachers (including the quality of support teachers give to students), which is known to have a direct influence on motivational factors, such as student commitment to school, learning motivation and student satisfaction, and perhaps a more indirect influence on student achievement (see Cohen, 2006, for a review of related research) (OECD 2009: 91).

The EU Commission Staff Working Paper on early school leaving (2011) echoes this theme of the need for development of teachers' relational and diversity approaches:

> School-wide strategies focus on improving the overall school climate and making schools places where young people feel comfortable, respected and responsible…While these schools usually rely on a handful of dedicated and committed teachers who choose to stay despite the difficulties, it is essential that teacher education prepares future teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom, with pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds and with difficult teaching situations. It is also essential to improve school climate and working conditions - especially in disadvantaged areas - in order to have a more stable teaching force (p. 23).

A particular need existing at postprimary level for school climate and teacher conflict resolution skills emerges from a survey (Downes *et al*., 2006) of students in 4 primary (n=230) and 2 secondary schools (n=162) in Blanchardstown, Dublin which contrasted students' experiences in the last year of primary (6th class) and 1st year secondary in the same area. Approximately 74% of pupils at primary level (6th class) and 55% at secondary level (first year) stated that they were treated fairly by teachers in school. Approximately 15% of pupils at primary level (6th class) stated that they were not treated fairly by teachers in school, whereas 25% of students at secondary level (first year) stated that they were not treated fairly by teachers in school. These differences between 6th class primary and 1st year secondary are statistically significant.

Moreover, in this study there was a sharp increase, after only one term, in 1st year secondary compared to 6th class primary responses in those students who were not willing or were not sure if they would tell a teacher about an academic problem — from 8% (Primary) to more than 20% (Secondary). Moreover, there was a sharp decrease in 1st year compared to 6th class responses in those students who are willing to tell a teacher about an academic problem — from approximately 91% (Primary) to 75% (Secondary). Again, these differences between primary and secondary level are statistically significant ones to illustrate the jolt in climate between primary and secondary school in these Irish contexts (see also Downes & Maunsell 2007; Downes 2013). The issue of system mismatch in communicative cultures between primary and postprimary is a neglected feature of transition issues, a transition issue that the Commission Communication (2011) recognises as central to early school leaving prevention, 'Transitions between schools and between different educational levels are particularly difficult for pupils at risk of dropping out'.

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) explicitly refers to ethnic dimensions associated with higher risks of early school leaving, such as 'migrant or Roma background'. Conflict resolution skills as part of a communicative classroom and whole school climate strategy, allied with diversity awareness, are part of what can be characterised as 'cultural competence' (Moule 2012) of teachers. As Moule (2012) highlights, most efforts to promote cultural competence in teachers requires development of self-awareness in the teacher. The Commission's TWG report (2013) recommends the need to 'Promote a better understanding of ESL in initial education and continuous professional development for all school staff, especially teachers'.

Appendix C. Emotional Literacy

Universal Curricular Approach Including Target Population of Children at Risk of Trauma and Lower Language Skills: New York 4Rs – Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution

A notable universal prevention approach, including a curricular approach with selected prevention goals, is the New York 4Rs Program, Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution 2009-2011 (Aber et al., 2011). Though not focused directly on bullying, this intervention treats conflict and aggression as a problem of communication and emotional literacy. The 4Rs Programme is a universal, school-based intervention that integrates SEL into the language arts curriculum for kindergarten through Grade 5. The 4Rs uses high-quality children's literature as a springboard for helping students gain skills and understanding in several areas including handling anger, listening, cooperation, assertiveness, and negotiation. The 4Rs program has two primary components: (a) a comprehensive seven-unit, 21-lesson literacy based curriculum in conflict resolution and social-emotional learning for Kindergarten to Grade 5 and (b) intensive professional development and training in 4Rs for teachers.

The target population is universal though with a focus on children at risk of trauma, lower social competence and externalizing problems, and with lower language and literacy skills. Eighteen New York City public schools were paired according to key school-level demographic characteristics. One school from each pair was randomly assigned to receive schoolwide intervention in the 4Rs over 3 consecutive school years and the other school to a 'business as usual control' group. After 2 years of exposure to 4Rs, in addition to continued positive

changes in children‘s self-reported hostile attributional biases and depression, positive changes were also found in children‘s reports of aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies, and teacher reports of children‘s attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), social competence, and aggressive behaviour. The 4Rs Program has led to modest positive impacts on both classrooms and children after 1 year that appear to cascade to more impacts in other domains of children‘s development after 2 years.

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