

Educational Disadvantage:
“Understanding the Misunderstood”2010



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Foreword

Welcome to Labour Youth's policy document on Educational Disadvantage.

We all know that the education system is a life-changing experience, whether good, bad or indifferent. Often pupils who have educational difficulties are overlooked and overshadowed by their peers and teachers simply cannot keep up with the Irish education system which places undue emphasis on the acquisition of a 'good Leaving Cert'. The pupils who are left behind and those who subsequently give up on their education have been failed the most by the Irish education system. According to recent reports, these pupils are mainly males (*Joint Committee on Education & Skills Report May 2010, PISA 2003 & 2006, Aine Cregan 2008, UK ICAN Report 2007, and Bercow Report 2007*). Comparatively, Irish Government policy in the area of Education Disadvantage is less progressive than our EU counterparts.

One of the objectives of the Government's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2013* is to reduce the proportion of pupils with 'serious' literacy difficulties from the current 27-30 per cent to less than 15 per cent by 2016. Labour Youth believes this is an unrealistic target given:

- The Government's stringent unsystematic structural approach to Educational Disadvantage
- The lack of a co-ordinated dual departmental effort across the education sector (between the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health and Children)
- The lack of special education provision to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose needs have not been met by the education system (within secondary schools, Youthreach and other Government programmes) and a lack of strategic benchmarking
- The lack of acknowledgement in Government policy, provision and a co-ordinated response to the socio-linguistic and mental health difficulties prevalent in young people from disadvantaged areas

To address the educational needs of those who slip through the net in education, in the following document Labour Youth cites with case studies, the recommendations of contributors, theory and policy:

- Early intervention with parental involvement
- A 'Transformational Management' approach towards the education of pupils
- A multi-disciplinary approach towards provision with teaching practices incorporating speech and language therapy under the remit of special education and social inclusion
- An emphasis on creativity and 'systemic leadership' for the holistic development of pupils
- Effective restorative justice practices
- Regulation of frequent teacher evaluation (both internally and externally)
- Further specialist teacher training in special education

This policy document aims to shed light on educational disadvantage in Ireland. We hope it serves its purpose to critique, analyse, explore educational disadvantage and in the process, to identify and determine progressive social policies to address the failures in current Government policy. It also strives to raise awareness to the plight of those who are left behind by our education system and to ensure that they are not misunderstood or forgotten about.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to Educational Disadvantage

“Educational Disadvantage: the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.”

– The Education Act 1998

“Students with special educational needs, travellers, and students experiencing mental health/emotional difficulties/trauma have higher rates of early school leaving than other sub-groups of the population.” (Joint Committee Education & Skills Report May 2010) ¹

*“One in ten children in Ireland leaves primary school unable to write properly; **this figure rises to one in three in disadvantaged areas**. Despite this obvious problem Ireland has no national-level literacy policy.” (Children’s Rights Alliance 2010)*

The Joint Committee Education & Skills report in May 2010 acknowledged that students with ‘special educational needs’ and/or ‘mental health/emotional difficulties/trauma’ (aside from travellers) have the highest rates of early school leaving in Ireland, the logical approach would be to invest in special education and mental health/psychological services to provide the relevant resources to address the root cause of early school leaving. The eight Social Inclusion schemes in Ireland under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools), following on from this logic, would ideally provide mental health, psychological and special educational needs provision. None of the social inclusion schemes have adopted this strategy (see Chapter three ‘Social Inclusion Schemes’) and the Government has currently adopted a piecemeal approach towards mental health/psychological and special education provision, particularly in the area of educational disadvantage.

In the recent May 2010 report ‘*Staying in Education: A New Way Forward*’, the ‘systemic’ problem of early school leaving (Vs the ‘individual’) was outlined and the recommendation to conduct a further investigation was made. Given the spate of Irish reports under the remit of Educational Disadvantage in recent years², the ‘systemic’ nature of Educational Disadvantage has yet to be identified, defined and addressed in Irish Government policy in line with the policies of progressive governments in Europe (Finland). (See 2.6)

Currently in Ireland there is no national literacy strategy, there is no national mental health strategy incorporated in the education system and there is no Educational Disadvantage strategy that addresses the ‘systemic’ problem of why educational disadvantage affects more males in Ireland than females.

However, linguistic difficulties present an additional dimension to problem-solving educational disadvantage. The Bercow Review carried out by the British Government in 2008 highlighted that more than half of children in deprived areas have poor language skills and impoverished language, therefore placing them at an educational disadvantage before entering schools. Being talked to, read to and having exposure to language is fundamental in the development of a child’s language and subsequent literacy skills in a child’s formative years (0-3years). Since there is a higher level of illiteracy amongst adults (parents) in disadvantaged areas, the incidence of difficulties with language is notably higher. Due to environmental factors such as, when a child

¹ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/austinevan/1225274637/sizes/z/in/photostream/>

² The Educational Disadvantage Committee’s 2005 Report ‘*Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage*’; The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice 2007 ‘*Working Notes*’; Combat Poverty Agency 2008 ‘*Action on Poverty Today*’; NESF 2009 ‘*Child Literacy and Social Inclusion*’; ESRI 2009 ‘*Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage*’; ESRI 2010 ‘*No Way Back?: The Dynamics of Early School Leaving*’; and DES 2010 ‘*From Policy to Practice: The Oral Language Challenge for Teachers*’

suffers neglect, abandonment or is simply ignored and not spoken to, the child is more pre-disposed to acquire 'language delays' (i.e. a development of language that is below the average of their peers) and/or communication/language difficulties.

Following on from the Bercow Review, the British Government published '*Better Communication: An Action Plan to Improve Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*' on 17 December 2008. The report acknowledged the importance of speech and language intervention in education, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

- The NCSE Implementation Report (2006) estimated that 17.7 % of children aged 0-17yrs had a special educational need, i.e. a disability or other condition, as defined in the EPSEN Act 2004.
- **About 6% of children have a specific learning disability. Of this 6%, 80% are boys (NCSE 2006).**

The Irish Government's Social Inclusion report of 2007-2008 finds that 27-30% of children from disadvantaged areas have literacy difficulties, but the Social Inclusion report does not cite Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) nor does it cite any SLCN or literacy difficulties in secondary schools and how to address them.

A survey of 200 young people in an inner city in the UK found that 75% of them had Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) that affected behaviour, relationships and their learning capacity.

*"Males are three times more likely to have SLCN than females and incidentally there are more male young offenders than female."*³

"An estimated 60% of the 7,000 children and young people aged under 18 who pass through young offender institutions have difficulties with speech, language and communication", was one of the findings from the Bercow Review carried out by the UK government in 2008.⁴ In Ireland there are no Government reports, statistics, circulars or legislation that identifies the correlation between Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and educational disadvantage.

"I have to admit that in all the years I have been looking at prisons and the treatment of offenders, I have never found anything so capable of doing so much for so many people at so little cost as the work that speech and language therapists carry out." - Lord Ramsbotham, Former UK Chief Inspector of Prisons 2006 ⁵

The Scottish Government acknowledged the need for Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) for young offenders from disadvantaged areas who have communication, speech and language difficulties and provide SLT to young offenders in Polmont Prison, Scotland as an isolated response.

Noting that '*there are no systematic surveys of the UK prison population*', Bryan conducted a survey (the Polmont Interview Schedule) of 10% of the young offenders in one young offenders institution after three months detention. The survey of prisoners revealed that *"two-thirds of prisoners had difficulties reading prison information, which rose to four-fifths for prisoners with possible learning disabilities"*. *"High levels"* of speech, language and communication difficulties were identified.⁶

One of the recommendations from the survey is the assessment of prisoners' educational needs (learning disabilities and learning difficulties) at the instance of arrest and where possible, a diversion to *"health services"* as a first port-of-call.⁷

³ 'Language and Social Inclusion' ICAN 2007

⁴ Bercow Report 2008

⁵ Speech in Commons 27 October 2006

⁶ 'Preliminary study of the prevalence of speech and language difficulties in young offenders' Byran, K 2004

⁷ 'No One Knows' UK Penal Reform Trust 2008

In the recent report of the Independent Commission on Youthcrime and Anti-Social Behaviour 'Sure Start', a cost-benefit analysis of James' experience of the Justice system was carried out in the UK. James, a young offender with communication, speech and language and emotional/behavioural difficulties, committed an arson attack, criminal damage, assault, theft and breached his custodial sentence.

- The Commission estimates that the cost to the State by the time James was 15 years, was £173,000.
- The Commission estimates that had a 'restorative' integrative Government response been administered (i.e. Speech and Language Therapy, special education, alternative family support and psychological support), the cost to the State would be £47,500: **less than one third of the actual cost.** The Commission recommends for a restorative, integrative and rehabilitative response to young offenders.⁸

1.1 Background – The facts – Missed Government targets

According to the ESRI: "Ireland is some distance from its target of a retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 90% for the 20-24-year-old population of Ireland by 2013".⁹

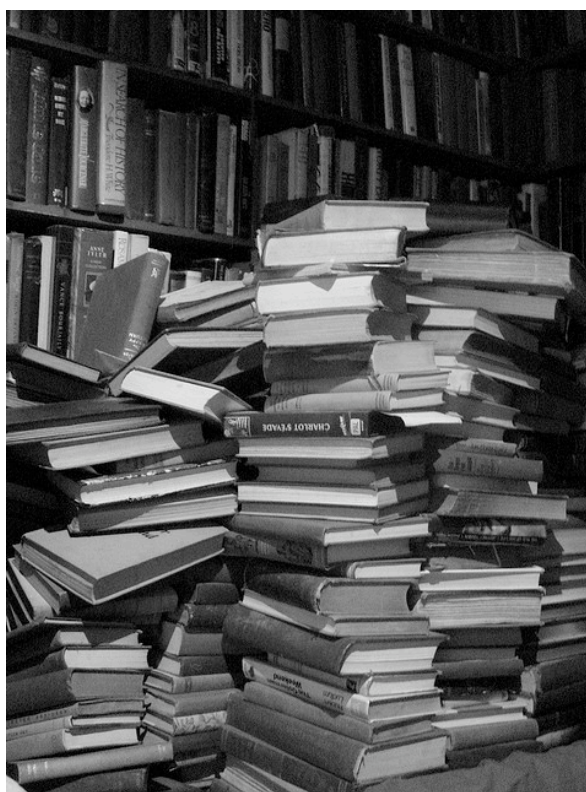
In 2008, the OECD reported that 14% of students do not complete secondary school in Ireland although over twice as many is males (19%) than females (7%). Ireland is ranked 15th in the EU and is behind the UK (12%) and Finland (7%).¹⁰

The 2003 PISA Report (Programme for International Student Assessment) finds that 10% of 15-year-olds were incapable of carrying out "basic reading tasks".

In the 2004 NESC 'Early School Leavers' report of the 'Fourth National Survey on Access to Third Level':

77% of students from Dublin 4 go to college

- 70% of students from Dublin 6 go to college
- 9% of students from Dublin 1 go to college
- 8% of students from Dublin 12 go to college
- The "key target" of the Combat Poverty Report in 2001 was "to reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85% by 2003 and 90% by 2006".
- In 2001, the completion rate of the leaving certificate was 81%. **This target was missed.**
- In the National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997, retention targets of 90% to complete the Leaving Certificate by 2000 and 98% by 2007 were set. **This target was missed.**
- Under the Lisbon Treaty (2005) enacted in Ireland in 2009, a target of 10% of early school leaving by 2010 was agreed (Commission of the European Communities 2005). **This target was missed.**



According to the Department of Education and Skills (DES), 81.3% of students sat the leaving certificate in 2009. Therefore, 19% did not sit the leaving certificate. The above targets were missed.

⁸ 'Fresh Start' The Independent Commission on Youthcrime and Anti-Social Behaviour 2010

⁹ 'No Way Back?: The Dynamics of Early School Leaving' ESRI 2010

¹⁰ 'Education At A Glance' OECD 2008

"Recent cuts in educational expenditure were seen by DEIS principals as short-sighted given the long term implications for society in general."(ESRI 2010)

Kellaghan (2001), as cited in the Joint Committee on Education and Skills report (May 2010) entitled '*Staying in Education: A New Way Forward*', identified the vague nature of the legislative definition of Educational Disadvantage outlined in the Education Act 1998. Kellaghan notes that the definition signified "*little guidance for educational intervention*" and that "*no attempt is made to identify the 'impediments' that might be regarded as constituting the case of disadvantage*". However in the recent Education (Amendment) Bill 2010, the definition of what constitutes educational disadvantage was re-defined, bearing in mind the above recommendation.

CHAPTER TWO

Early Intervention

Ireland spends “relatively little on young children”.

“Any short-term savings on spending on children’s education and health would have major long-term costs for society,” OECD Secretary-General, Angel Gurría, 2009.

According to Irish and international research, early intervention is a crucial determinant to ensure that children from disadvantaged areas do not slip through the nets in education.

Since all research indicates that males are mainly affected by educational disadvantage, the linguistic advantage of females in early years learning is pertinent to address the ‘systemic’ problem of educational disadvantage.

“Girls on average acquire language skills at an earlier age than boys and studies have consistently found a female advantage in reading/literacy skills.” (Eivers et al., 2005, 2008 – Joint Committee on Education & Skills 2010)

Until very recently Ireland had no ‘free’ national early intervention strategy. From January 2010, the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) was rolled out nationally for children aged between the ages of 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months. Under this Government scheme three hours per day is paid for directly to preschool service providers. Given the short length of time since its inception and lack of Government analysis, it is too early to determine the efficacy of the ECCE as part of a coherent educational disadvantage strategy. The Early Start Programme covers only a “very small proportion (around two per cent)” of children entering junior infant classes.¹¹

However, there are numerous early intervention pilot programs in disadvantaged areas with speech and language therapy administered to children in a group setting in preschools. Holy Child preschool (Dublin) is an example of where a speech and language therapist comes in once a week to teach children, parents and teachers oral language skills to enable the children to read outside the classroom. This approach, while proven to be successful (according to feedback from the Principal and teachers) is targeted; and not part of a wider strategic national approach in social inclusion, early intervention or as part of a literacy strategy.

Case Study 2.1

Martin * 16 years, came from a broken home in a disadvantaged area in Ireland where he suffered neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse. His mother, an alcoholic, neglected him since he was a child, while his father physically abused him. He began school with a *speech delay*, his vocabulary limited, *limited oral language* skills (since his parents did not read to him at home to increase his language capacity) and low self-esteem.

Since his *speech delay* went untreated, it persisted to a *specific language impairment*. With no pre-school, a language deficit and no experience of nursery rhymes, Martin began primary school at an educational disadvantage to his peers. He was quiet in nature starting primary school and maintained that nature in a secondary school not under the DEIS Scheme.

By that time, he hated English class, loved art class (demonstrating an exceptional visual brain) and felt misunderstood. Secondary school to Martin was mainly a ‘waste of time’ since he was streamed into the bottom class from first year and he felt perceived as ‘stupid’, despite portraying his intelligence in other activities i.e. sports, art class, woodwork and geography. Taking drugs (speed, ecstasy and hash) he ‘kept his head down’ and his educational difficulties hidden, expressing his frustration in occasional outbursts at teachers.

He left secondary school in 2004 before completing his Leaving Cert. There was no Youthreach programme in his catchment area. **Note: Martin* is not his real name.**

¹¹ ESRI 2010 ‘No Way Back?: The Dynamics of Early School Leaving’

From case study 2.1¹², the recent profile of an early school leaver's experience of the education system is traced. In comparison to case study 5.2 (See Chap 5), the following opportune points for early intervention policy are:

- Development of oral language skills in pre-school/early years
- Speech and language therapy provision

To acquire good oral language skills is the ability to verbally communicate and express oneself using language. Not to be confused with literacy skills, oral language skills is the ability to retell what you have understood, literacy is the expression in written form incorporating the mechanics of reading.

According to recent Irish research, there needs to be a stronger emphasis and prioritisation of oral language skills both in teaching as part of the daily teaching schedule and in the curriculum¹³.

*"At the start of Junior infants... You come in with a language deficit by virtue of the fact that you're not really exposed to books and educational toys."*¹⁴ – ESRI 2010

Language acquisition is a fundamental skill in acquiring literacy and comprehending the mechanics of reading. Exposure to nursery rhymes, being talked to constantly and exposure to books is paramount in early years (0-3years) learning, to gain the necessary skills to acquire language and following on from that, good literacy skills. Furthermore, the implications of language variation (depending on geographic location, accent and exposure to culture) must be taken into account given that *"teachers are not taking on responsibility where children experience difficulty"* linguistically. The importance and prioritisation of oral language as a recognised medium and an independent teaching module in the classroom at pre-school and primary-level is identified in an Irish context.¹⁵

Evidence from the UK (See 2.4 & 5.1) suggests that there is a higher incidence of 'speech delays' and impoverished language/speech deficit prevalent in areas of disadvantage. In some cases, 80% of children in disadvantaged areas begin school without a basic foundation in language and speech skills.¹⁶ A longitudinal study found that children with "persistent language disorders" who were identified and treated in their early years before the age of five and a half were "more likely" to develop good literacy skills.¹⁷ There is a lack of evidence systemically in Ireland (apart from targeted projects – See 2.2).

***Bearing in mind case study 2.1 and given the national roll-out of the ECCE, to prioritise oral language skills and provision in early years learning;
Labour Youth calls for formalised allocated time for oral language skills to be taught in primary schools.***

2.2 Speech and Language Therapy group interventionist model

Only 55% of the educational needs of the children in the 54 language classes in 45 Irish schools are being met¹⁸. "There is a *serious backlog* of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) provision".¹⁹ Currently speech and language therapy is *"almost impossible to get"* in our education system (ESRI 2010). With the HSE embargo on the appointment of speech and language therapists, there is limited provision with the systemic cap on investment.

¹² Note: Case studies were taken from a random sampling of early school leavers. They fit the classic profile according to international research (Yale 2009, ICAN 2007), and Irish research (*'Count Us In'*, Downes, P & Maunsell, C; 2007)

¹³ 'Talking Posh' Cregan, A (2008) Combat Poverty Agency

¹⁴ DEIS Principal, ESRI 2010

¹⁵ 'Talking Posh' Cregan, A (2008) Combat Poverty Agency

¹⁶ 'The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication' ICAN 2006

¹⁷ Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 1990

¹⁸ 'Special Classes for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorders' DES 2005

¹⁹ 'Count Us In', Downes, P & Maunsell, C; 2007

Despite the scarcity of and recognition of speech and language therapy in DES, there are projects with effective results.

Endorsed by Barnardos, parental involvement with speech and language therapists in early intervention was a key finding of the Blanchardstown project. In the 1990s Britain began the practice of teaching parents language techniques to teach their children. Similarly parents' adopting the role of 'co-therapist' is a key recommendation from the Blanchardstown project (like Holy Child pre-school).²⁰

Similarly in Familiscope based in Ballyfermot, Dublin, one of the aims of the recommended model is "targeting at risk children in early years of primary school for speech and language support" with parental involvement identified as crucial. The educational model proposed by Familiscope identified a targeted response to speech and language difficulties and ADHD amongst early school leavers given the high incidence. Additionally, the support model proposed incorporates liaising with NEPs, support workers and community groups.²¹ This model is an example of educational best practice in Ireland.

"Educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school – it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning." (OECD, 1997)

Founded by Ashoka fellow Tara Cunningham, RELEASE is an Irish organisation, which provides speech and language therapy using a group interventionist model at a fraction of standardised speech and language therapy costs.²² This cost-effective provision has scope to be implemented nationally as a model of good practice.

Currently these models are not consolidated strategically in a national strategy as part of a social inclusion scheme, literacy scheme or an early intervention scheme. To address this management inconsistency;

Labour Youth calls for a comprehensive review of Speech and Language Therapy provision under the Department of Education and Skills and a cost-benefit analysis of early intervention via a group interventionist model involving parents for those in pre-school.

Labour Youth calls for speech and language provision to be provided in primary and secondary school.

2.3 Free pre-school in an International context

With the rolling out of the ECCE program nationally recently, it is relatively soon to determine its efficacy, as cited above. However, the investment in early intervention provision is a welcome step and a long overdue measure.

According to US research of early intervention programs, investment in early intervention is the most 'cost-effective' means of addressing educational inequality. The UK Government adopted the Sure Start program, which is an educational program structured to prevent 'social exclusion' providing disadvantaged areas with free early-years (3-4 year olds) education. Similarly in North America, a Head Start program has been adopted to address the problem.²³

"The support to DEIS schools to date has been concentrated on the implementation of First Steps rather than on a broader integrated research-based approach to literacy." - NESF

In Europe, pre-school and early years' intervention at times coincides with a national research-based scheme, which adopts a different but complementary and supportive approach to existing provision-based schemes. In the UK the National Literacy Strategy is updated frequently since its inception and as recently as 2006.

²⁰ 'A Holistic Approach to Early School Leaving and School Retention in Blanchardstown', Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006

²¹ 'Psychological Support Services for Ballyfermot: Present & Future', Downes 2004.

²² www.release.ie

²³ 'Language and Social Exclusion' ICAN 2007

In the UK and Northern Ireland, the correlation between social disadvantage and special educational needs is identified and portrayed in the Education and Skills Committee report; specialist provision for those with speech and language difficulties is recognised for those at an educational disadvantage;²⁴ and the “nature” of early intervention provision is deemed the most important determinant for an effective and appropriate response.²⁵ In the US, ‘intense reading recovery’ programs are designed to address educational disadvantage with a more specific approach adopted than the standardised Head Start scheme.

UK research estimates that “75% of children with persistent communication disability at pre-school age are likely to be in need of special education”. - ICAN 2006

Projects such as: ‘Talk to Me’ by the Basic Skills Agency, which aims to encourage parents and teachers to communicate better and work together; ‘Talk To Your Baby’ by the National Literacy Trust, encourages parents to be the primary educator; and a local project ‘Talkabout’ in Wales, is aimed at couples who are planning to have children teaching them about literacy.²⁶

Recent Irish and international research identifies a multi-disciplinary approach as a model of excellence to address the multi-faceted factors that contribute to educational disadvantage. This holistic approach remains opportune for policy development in Irish early intervention and social inclusion schemes.

Labour Youth calls for: An integrative Government response to early intervention combining multi-disciplinary supports as part of a national early intervention strategy in disadvantaged areas in Ireland. Specifically, Labour Youth calls for free pre-school education for all children from 3years – 5years and for additional funding to be allocated to DEIS schools and children from disadvantaged backgrounds (this funding is not DEIS school specific but inclusive of all pupils from areas of disadvantage).

2.4 Finland – An educational model of best practice – ‘Systemic leadership’

In the Joint Committee on Education & Skills May 2010 report entitled ‘Staying in Education’ and according to the OECD²⁷, Finland is identified as a model of best educational practice.

‘Systemic leadership’ is a phrase used by the OECD in reference to Finland’s educational model of best practice. The teaching profession is “highly competitive” since teaching is held in very high regard culturally.

“Helsinki, for example, is setting a new vision for 2012 (with benchmarks after three years) with every school discussing what the vision along with desired objectives might mean for them: emphasising the principle of vision being developed in a participatory rather than imposed way.”²⁸

Effective frequent benchmarking is a key characteristic of the Finnish education system. In addition to “moral leadership”, the commitment to good social principles, the “insistent pattern” of teacher team meeting three times a week to discuss how to help pupils (early intervention) and the compulsory requirement of a Masters in education for teachers in their training, the Finnish model is distinctive internationally. Social exclusion is not tolerated and there is “an authentic emphasis on leaving no child behind” inherent in the culture of co-operation, trust and responsibility from pupil to teacher to the ‘Ministry of Education’. Collective problem-solving and a lack of an authoritarian approach in school management remain key features of the educational model to be emulated.²⁹

Labour Youth calls for the recognition of the achievements of the Finnish education system to be a benchmark for Irish educational practice.

²⁴ ‘Special Educational Needs: Third Report of Session 2005-6’ House of Commons 2006

²⁵ ‘Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland’: Department of Education 2006.

²⁶ ‘Language and Social Inclusion’ ICAN 2007

²⁷ Case study: Finland ‘systemic leadership’ OECD 2007

²⁸ Case study: Finland ‘systemic leadership’ OECD 2007

²⁹ Case study: Finland ‘systemic leadership’ OECD 2007

CHAPTER THREE

Social Inclusion Schemes

“No systematic research has been conducted which considers the potential impact of the sum total of educational expenditure across the system on social differentiation in educational outcomes.” - (ESRI 2010)

“Government cutbacks have impacted strongly on the social inclusion agenda in Ireland and have led to outcry by civil society groups.” – Council of Europe 2009

There are currently eight Social Inclusion programmes in Ireland under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

- Home School Community Liaison Scheme (co-ordinators who liaise with teachers and parents)
- School Completion Programme (provides meals, homework club, attendance trackers)
- Support Teachers Project (a support teacher – not a medical professional – provide arts/crafts activities)
- Early Start Pre-School Scheme (provide grants and in-service training to pre-school teachers)
- **Giving Children an Even Break** (provide additional teachers and grants to schools in DEIS)
- **Breaking the Cycle** (provides additional funding for materials/local initiatives)
- Disadvantaged Area Scheme (provides supplementary capitation for running costs, building grant etc)
- Literacy and Numeracy Schemes (library scheme, maths recovery [in-training for maths teachers], Reading Recovery [no speech and language therapy], First Steps [training of teachers as tutors])

Primarily the aim of each social inclusion scheme is the dispersion of additional resources or ‘top-ups’ to curtail educational disadvantage in classified DEIS schools via a ‘targeted approach’ and the provision of additional training for teachers (see chapter four on teacher training).

3.1 Framework

The eight social inclusion schemes redistribute Government finances to projects in DEIS schools i.e. ‘*Breaking the Cycle*’ and ‘*Giving Children an Even Break*’. DEIS provides necessary additional resources to schools in areas of disadvantage, which is welcome. However, the provision-targeted Social Inclusion schemes do not adopt a strategic benchmarking approach and do not provide a model of best practice or approach for schools and communities to strive to attain in addressing social exclusion.

The social inclusion schemes are effectively making up for the resourced based inadequacies in the education system and are not individual strategies with specific targets, specific *approaches* and objectives to curtail Social Inclusion (and similarly educational disadvantage).

“Unlike similar programmes in the US and UK, no specific approaches to teaching literacy were referred to in these initiatives (social inclusion schemes). However, as Cross (2004, cited in Neuman & Celano 2006) points out, initiatives that target funding and resources are based on the premise that lack of resources is what is at the heart of the problem and that equalising resources should equalise opportunity.”

– ESRI 2010

‘A comparison of 1998 data with 2004 data shows no change in national reading standards, despite the reduction in class sizes and an increase in the number of learning support teachers available.’ -Barnardos

This premise, which the social inclusion schemes are based on, does not address the root cause of educational disadvantage/social inclusion.

ESRI: “a significant proportion of the potential target group do not fall within the remit of the DEIS second-level scheme. There has been allowance for such ‘dispersed disadvantage’ at primary level but not for second-level schools.”

Principals, administrators and those involved in school management acknowledge the lack of provision at second-level and the inconsistencies in the DEIS strategy and Youthreach respectively.

Director of the IVEA, Michael Moriarty has “a particular issue with the government’s pulling of supports for disadvantaged students in schools not designated as “DEIS schools”. While it is important to focus supports in DEIS schools, and I fully support that, it is lunacy to assume there are no children from disadvantaged backgrounds in non-DEIS schools.”³⁰

A “tapered approach” to allocating additional resources to all schools (DEIS and non-DEIS) has some merit.³¹

To adopt the current approach of “equalised resources” which equates to “equalised opportunity” is not a feasible long-term strategy to address social inclusion strategically.

Additionally, the notable lack of a ‘national tracking system’ consisting of education data of pupils making the transition from primary-level to second-level (and following on from that, to Youthreach) is a major concern for educators.³² The lack of traceability of students needs to be addressed to ensure consistency in provision and in long-term lifelong learning.

“In the most disadvantaged schools (Breaking the Cycle, 1996) there is evidence to suggest that the gap has widened since the inception of that initiative with children’s achievement declining as they progress through the primary classes (Weir, 2003). Weir found that on average, 38% of 6th class pupils were performing below the 10th percentile. In fact, Weir speculated that this figure was a conservative estimate and that the true figure was closer to 50%.”³³

Financial support for social inclusion schemes is currently contingent on the performance of our economy. Social inclusion schemes primed to address ‘disadvantage’ fail to address the ‘root cause’ and instead “operate according to a ‘cultural deficit’ model”.³⁴ This model is unsustainable strategically to address social inclusion as defined as:

“Social exclusion may take a combination of forms – economic, social, cultural, and legal – with multiple effects. The term exclusion has connotations of process, focusing on the forces by which particular categories of people are closed off from the rights, benefits and opportunities of modern society. Social exclusion is not just about lack of money, but may be about isolation, lack of work, lack of educational opportunities, even discrimination.”³⁵

Given the ‘cultural deficit’ model of Irish social inclusion schemes and the lack of quantitative and qualitative analysis;

Labour Youth calls for a systemic Government analysis of social inclusion schemes to address the ‘root cause’ of educational disadvantage. In particular, Labour youth calls for a review of the School Completion Programme (since there is currently no analytic review).

Labour calls for a national social inclusion scheme (with a specific strategy) to provide mental health provision (NEPS, Counselling) via a restorative, integrative approach in primary and secondary schools with priority to DEIS schools but inclusive of all schools on a needs-basis.

³⁰ Moriarty, M IVEA 2009

³¹ ‘Investing in Education’, ESRI 2009

³² Joint Committee on Education & Skills May 2010

³³ ‘Ideological Challenges to the Social Inclusion agenda in the Republic of Ireland’ O’Brien & O’Fathaigh 2005

³⁴ ‘Ideological Challenges to the Social Inclusion agenda in the Republic of Ireland’ O’Brien & O’Fathaigh 2005

³⁵ Harvey, ‘Combating Exclusion’ 1994 – O’Brien & O’Fathaigh UCC 2005

Additionally, Labour Youth calls for a national social inclusion scheme (with a specific strategy) to provide arts (art therapy, music, drama) in primary and secondary schools with a creative arts therapist/drama teacher/music teachers replacing the ‘support teacher’ and the ‘Support Teachers Project’ scheme. Labour Youth calls for a national social inclusion scheme (with a specific strategy) to address the speech, language and communication needs of those from disadvantaged areas using speech and language therapy provision in primary and secondary schools. Labour Youth calls for the amalgamation of the Breaking the Cycle scheme and the Giving Children and Even Break Scheme to ensure a co-ordinated strategy for the allocation of additional funding and resources.

3.2 Youthreach

Youthreach in Ireland caters for early school leavers mainly from disadvantaged areas. It is widely perceived to be a constructive and positive influence³⁶ and a “structural” response to curtail educational disadvantage.³⁷ However, recently “discontinuities” in provision/educational supports from second-level to Youthreach were identified.³⁸

Currently the special educational needs of early school leavers in Youthreach are not met. There is ‘limited linkage’ for provision from the service providers of NEPs, NEWB, SENs, NCSE, speech and language therapy and the treatment of ADHD since they are not under the remit of Youthreach.³⁹ (See 5.2) Furthermore the recent Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI) undertaken by Youthreach and the Value for Money review of 2008 recommends the ‘provision of guidance, counselling and psychological services to be reviewed’ and for Youthreach to avail of the services of NEPs, NEWB, SENs, NCSE, NCTE etc. The ‘Value for Money’ review also recommends for a tracking system to be in place since Youthreach do not have access to information on the history of educational needs for Youthreach participants.

Currently there are 3690 places in Youthreach in the education sector and 2000 in the FAS sector. In these recessionary times the programs “only scratch at the surface of the early school leaver/unemployed youth problem with such limited numbers”. Only 20 Youthreach centres out of 110 centres have access to SEN, which is not sufficient to address the special educational needs of the participants and to address educational disadvantage strategically.⁴⁰

Labour Youth recommends for special educational provision and supports to be provided in Youthreach as recommended by the SEN Initiative.

Labour Youth calls for mental health provision, speech and language therapy provision to be incorporated in Youthreach and for the recommendations of the Value for Money report to be implemented.

Additionally Labour Youth calls for an evaluation and assessment of the educational needs of participants in Youthreach with the intention of adopting a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to address educational disadvantage.

Labour Youth calls for a national tracking system to be in place (not solely in Youthreach) whereby the educational records of students throughout their experience of the education system (from pre-school to secondary school) be made available to teachers.

³⁶ School Matters – report on the Task force on student behaviour at Second Level Schools (2006)

³⁷ ESRI 2010

³⁸ ‘Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage’ 2005

³⁹ Joint Committee on Education and Skills Report May 2010

⁴⁰ ‘Value for Money Review’ Youthreach 2008

CHAPTER FOUR

Teacher Training, Teacher Evaluation & Management

“The teaching force in Ireland is of high calibre and highly motivated in international comparisons.”
– OECD, 2009

*“Two aspects of school organisation and process emerge as key influences on early school leaving: **ability grouping (streaming), and school climate**. This study clearly indicates that the use of streaming (that is, allocating students to a base class according to their academic ‘ability’) has negative consequences for those allocated to lower stream classes, with the resulting climate of low expectations and negative teacher/student interaction often prompting early school leaving.”* – ESRI 2010

According to the ESRI, the school climate is a contributing factor to pupil retention. Most of the young people acknowledged *“negative interaction with their teachers, feeling that they were not listened to, did not receive the help and support they needed, and were negatively labelled as ‘weak’ or ‘troublesome’ by their teachers. In some instances, young people reported feeling rejected by the school, with disciplinary procedures culminating in suspension or expulsion from school”*.⁴¹

Internationally smaller classes of less than 17pupils (Tennessee Star project), has proven that pupils are six months ahead academically than class sizes of 22-25pupils.

*“Downes and Maunsell’s study indicate that students were being suspended for relatively minor misbehaviours. Furthermore, being given out to frequently is associated with negative attitudes to school, both of which in turn were more commonplace among boys.”*⁴²

4.1 Teaching practices

In recent years, different teaching practices have been reviewed in Ireland both in assessment (via ESRI) and others being piloted (Letterkenny Restorative Justice teaching practices 2004-2005). In the Letterkenny project, restorative justice teaching practices aimed at improving teacher-pupil relationships by adopting a diplomatic and open communicative approach have proven to be effective in addressing educational disadvantage. With a low retention figure of 47.5% at Leaving Certificate level, teachers of Letterkenny completed a half-day’s training in restorative practices as part of the pilot program. According to teachers who implemented restorative teaching practices:

*“I would say RJ has worked for about 99% of cases I have been involved in this year.”*⁴³

Evaluation of the pilot program identified instances where restorative practices were successful i.e. verbal abuse with 87% improvement/success and teacher/student conflict with 68% improvement.

There is also a *“strong preference for teaching styles associated with non-mainstream education settings such as Youthreach”*.⁴⁴

Labour Youth acknowledges the positive intervention of restorative teaching practices, particularly in areas of educational disadvantage. Labour Youth calls for all teachers (priority to teachers in DEIS) to complete training in Restorative Justice teaching practices in addition to further training in special education.

⁴¹ ESRI 2010

⁴² Smyth et al., 2004, 2006

⁴³ ‘Interim Evaluation Report on the use and impact of Restorative Practices in Letterkenny Vocational School’ HSE 2004-2005

⁴⁴ Joint Education and Skills report May 2010

4.2 Teacher training

Currently in Ireland there is no ‘specialist’ training for special education teachers: it is not imperative for special education teachers to complete additional training. Special education teachers are not trained to identify speech, language and communication difficulties that exist in students. Looking at the Finnish education system in chapter two, a culture of educational training of four to six years is prevalent and is indicative of their low rate of early school leaving.

Labour Youth recommends compulsory ‘specialist’ training for special education teachers i.e. a Masters in Education, similar to the Finnish education system, which places a high emphasis on the acquisition of a Masters in Education for all teachers. Labour Youth calls for teaching standards by the Teaching Council to incorporate the mandatory obligation for special education teachers to have further training i.e. a Masters in Education.

4.3 Teacher evaluation not Teacher inspections

According to the OECD (2009), Ireland has one of the lowest teacher evaluation records in the EU (See below chart). In Finland the common practice of ‘self-evaluation’ and internal teaching evaluation is mainstreamed in the teaching profession. This culture of frequent constructive criticism in the Finnish education system is not cultivated systemically or nationally in Ireland. In most cases it largely depends on the Principal’s management style from a ‘top-down’ management approach versus a ‘bottom-top’ evaluation system incorporated into their management style. This in turn is determined by their training.

“We just don’t do it [evaluation]; we don’t have a culture here. We have a fear of it in some ways ... if you did it, as a way of setting policy and forming policy, some of the vested interests might feel threatened by it because it would disempower them somewhat. ... It’s in the interest of everybody concerned that we do have independent evaluations so that we can all learn.”- (Stakeholder) ESRI 2010

This fear of disempowerment in the Irish psyche has to be addressed if our education system is to become more socially inclusive. In analysing Finland’s education model of ‘best practice’, which incorporates ‘systemic leadership’ (See 2.6);

Labour Youth calls for a culture of self-evaluation to be encouraged, prioritised and cultivated as part of a national teaching standards strategy prevalent in all schools.

Labour Youth calls for The Teaching Council to oversee, supervise, review and regulate the teaching profession in our education system.

Labour Youth calls for the remit of the Teaching Council to be expanded to include effective powers of suspension and/or dismissal of teachers should the complaints received warrant the intervention in the worst case scenario. The Teaching Council will primarily act as an advisory/teaching consultancy agency (in the execution of best practice management and leadership practices) at primary-level and second-level.

4.4 Education ‘streaming’

“The ‘streaming’ of pupils was identified as ‘problematic’, whereby students in the ‘bottom’ stream disengage and have their educational potential curtailed; such students are more commonly boys, Travellers, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Joint Education and Skills May 2010

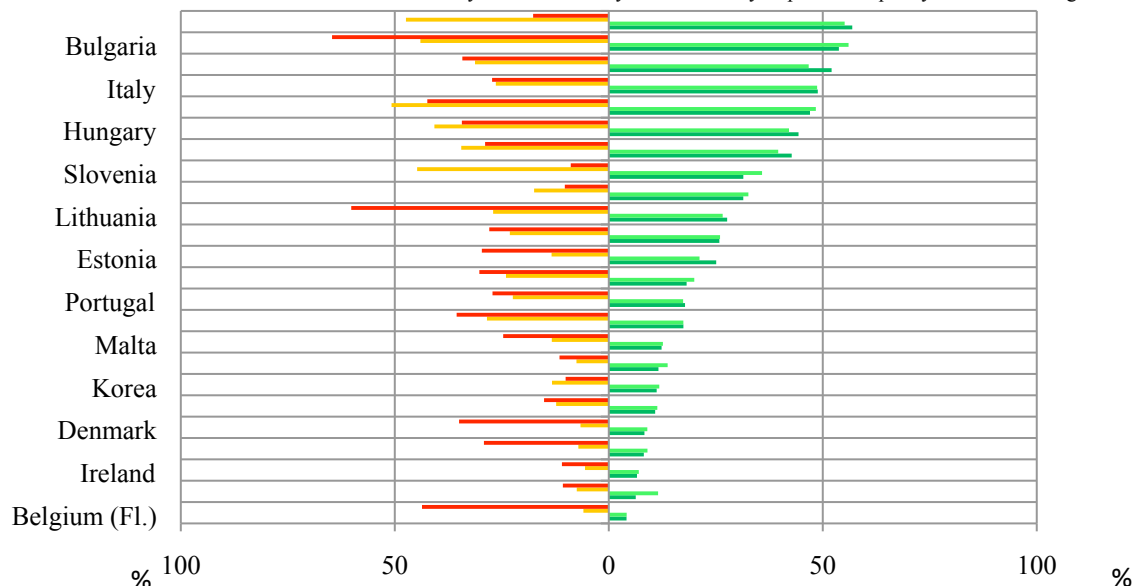
On a macro-level, the framework of the Finnish education system streams young people according to skills and not primarily based on literacy capabilities (or in the Irish case *'the points race'*). In the Finnish binary education system, the primary ethos and educational climate cultivated is one based on encouraging students to play to their strengths in the understanding that intelligence is multi-faceted and not linear (solely academic). This shift of emphasis in the framework of the education system allows those with more visual brains (See chap 7) to develop their skills in a more understanding and nurturing education system.

"A study on early school leaving in Youthreach participants (Stokes, 2003) found that being in the 'bottom' stream tended to increase participants' pessimism about living with and overcoming learning difficulties, which were widespread in this group."

Labour Youth calls for more effective streaming to be implemented in secondary schools via a skills assessment-model similar to the Finnish education system.

Chart 5.2. Perception of teachers of the appraisal and feedback and its impact in their school (2007-08)

- Teachers will be dismissed because of sustained poor performance
- Teachers whose school principal takes steps to alter the monetary rewards of a persistently underperforming teacher
- Teachers who would receive increased monetary or non-monetary rewards if they are more innovative in their teaching
- Teachers who would receive increased monetary or non-monetary rewards if they improve the quality of their teaching



Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers reporting to receive increased monetary or non-monetary rewards for an improvement in the quality of their teaching.

Source: OECD. Table D5.5. and TALIS Database (2009).

CHAPTER FIVE

Restorative Justice – Addressing ADHD, Emotional/behavioural and mental health difficulties in Early school leavers and young offenders

“92.6% of Irish prisoners surveyed had left school before the age of 16. And over 50% were functionally illiterate.” – 2003 Prison Adult Literacy Survey on behalf of the Irish Prison Service

While the central focus of this document is on educational disadvantage and the alleviation of educational disadvantage more specifically, in any problem-solving discussion on this topic the role of the justice system must be tended to. The quote taken from the 2003 Prison Adult Literacy Survey (above) shows this link undeniably. Before putting our views forward on what can be implemented in prisons and in the broader field of the youth justice system, the situation as it currently stands must be presented. One proviso must be outlined before analysing the present situation; No amount of educational and life skills training that can be given to prisoners while they are in prison can ever be a substitute for the social benefits of a more economically and socially equitable society. Ivana Bacik (1998) found that if you're from a deprived area in Dublin you are twenty five times more likely to end up in front of a district judge than if you are from a wealthy area in Dublin (Bacik et al., 1998); the links between poverty, crime and educational disadvantage are abundantly clear.

The prison population in Ireland is primarily young, male, working class, drug dependent and uneducated. Combined with this our justice system is primarily geared towards the more punitive end of the scale (Kilcommins et al., 2004). By punitive, we mean that in sentencing and during the course of the sentence served, the emphasis is on punishment and 'just desserts' for the crime committed. It is not geared towards guiding the inmate towards rehabilitation and towards them gaining the skills necessary to lead a law abiding life.

O'Mahony (1997, quoted in McCullagh, 2002) showed that 94% of the prison population in Mountjoy prison were either unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, i.e. blue collar, and only 39% grew up in a home with a history of continuous, regular employment.

In 2009, 37.6% of prison inmates were under 25 years of age. 132 of these were under 18 years of age. (Irish Prison Service, 2009) O'Mahony's study⁴⁶ found that almost two thirds of Mountjoy's male and female inmates had significant histories of heroin abuse.

Education is central to any rehabilitative effort, as many committed are seriously educationally disadvantaged. 50% of inmates in Mountjoy in 1996 had left school before the age of 15, 80% by the age of 16 years of age (McCullagh, 2002).

Without an education these young men are effectively ineffective to employers and will most likely be confined to poverty and crime for the rest of their lives unless they can become educated while within the confines of the justice system. The IPRT has also shown that of the 520 inmates who enrolled in the prison education system in Mountjoy in 2008, 20% of them could not even read nor write (www.iprt.ie/prison-facts-2, [accessed 20/10/2009]).

This has led to a number of systemic problems that cannot be overcome within the limits of this logic. Amongst these include an enormously high imprisonment rate, a highly recidivist prison population, an

⁴⁶ It should be noted that this survey is one of the few sources available on the socio-economic make-up of our prison system population.

overcrowded prison infrastructure that is proving costly in the extreme to fund, and indeed a growth in the prison population which is disconnected from the levels of recorded crime.

Ireland in 2008 had a committal rate of 308 per 100,000. This is the number of people sentenced to prison over the course of the year, as against the number in prison on any given day. This figure is more accurate in showing our levels of use of imprisonment, which is and has been (O'Mahony 1993), extraordinarily high.

A quarter of all prisoners reoffend within a year, half within 4 years (Liz Kiely).

The Irish Penal Reform Trust reported that on the 29th of July 2010, the prisoner population stood at 4,491. The bed capacity is 4,236 (<http://www.iprt.ie/contents/1769>, [accessed 13/09/2010]). It has been noted previously, that this kind of over-population has made provision of training courses and education very difficult, even in the Training Unit in Mountjoy (Vaughan, 2001).

In 2008, it cost the state €92,717 to house an inmate for 12 months. In 2009, this figure dropped to €77,222, but this was due not to any real rise in effectiveness or value, but rather a rise in numbers of inmates and a drop in staff pay.

The Irish youth justice system is only marginally ahead of the adult system in terms of rehabilitative efforts. The recent announcement that the proposed Oberstown detention centre is to be shelved in light of the inadequacies with St Patrick's Institution for young offenders due to a 'lack of resources' is indicative of the Government's lack of commitment.

The Irish Youth Justice system primarily relies upon Gardai resources to address youth crime and the associated problems which surround it, in contrast to more appropriate agencies such as youth work agencies or the Probation Service. Despite recent government policy and legislation such as the Children's Act 2001, Irish services in relation to youth crime are still severely underfunded. As such, the progressive and rehabilitative philosophy contained within this piece of legislation especially, has failed to make an impact on the ground. The governments of the 2000's have failed to follow up on their stated aims in relation to this area e.g. despite the proliferation of committees and agencies associated with youth work, most of the funding is received via the surplus of the National Lottery Fund. Additionally the majority of pilot schemes established during this era have not received full status or been extended countrywide. Government ministers have ignored and ignore international and Irish policy solutions of best practice (social policy, government policy and criminology) and follow an entirely different logic of justice in rhetoric and policy.

Having identified that we have systemic flaws within our systems of justice and in dealing with crime, what can be done? The crux of the problem is the immanent focus upon punishment rather than rehabilitation, and our overuse of the prison as symptomatic of this illogical approach. Labour Youth believes a paradigm shift in attitudes towards criminal justice, moving from a punitive approach towards a rehabilitative and restorative approach is the best solution. Here, we outline our proposals for what can be implemented in terms of reducing educational disadvantage both for those at risk of imprisonment in future (i.e. early school leavers), and those currently within the prison system (young offenders).

5.1 The prevalence of Speech and Language difficulties in early school leavers: Learning from the UK

As cited in the introduction, the higher incidence of and prevalence of speech and language difficulties in disadvantaged areas is caused due to a language deficient environment, with children from disadvantage areas beginning school at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers.

As cited in the 'Moving beyond Educational Disadvantage' report (2002-2005), there is a greater need for 'joined-up' policy across government departments regarding children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds". "A new style of integrated services to address educational disadvantage" is necessary.⁴⁷

SESS Circular 005 2009

The Government's 0005 2009 Circular on Special Education Support Service states that in educational provision: "*children with speech and language delays and difficulties should not be considered in this category*". In other words, those who do fall behind in school, because of a communication or language difficulty have to pay for outside educational support from Speech and Language Therapists. This includes those from poorer backgrounds with a higher risk of attaining a language difficulty (as demonstrated in 5.1) with those in the two percentile receiving Speech and Language Therapy (look up circular).

Despite legislatively obliged under the Education Act 2008:

(a) To give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or who have other special educational needs, as they relate to education;

(b) To provide that, as far as is practicable and having regard to the resources available, there is made available to people resident in the State a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of those people;

Labour Youth calls for speech and language therapy to be provided to pupils in pre-school, primary school and secondary school with "speech and language delays and difficulties" specifically to those from disadvantaged areas with a higher incidence of attaining speech and language difficulties due to their cultural, linguistic and socio-economic environment (disparate to the SESS 0005 2009 Circular).

Labour Youth calls for the dual recognition of speech and language therapy (similar to the UK) in the Departments of Education and Skills and under the Department of Health.

Additionally Labour Youth calls for the repeal of the SESS 0005 2009 Circular and to lift the Department of Health embargo on the appointment of Speech and Language Therapists.

⁴⁷ Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage, Ed Disadvantage Committee 2002-2005 Report

Case Study 5.2

Brian*, 15 years, came from a poor family where it was a struggle to afford doctor's bills, let alone any school materials. Within his family in a disadvantaged area in Ireland, he had symptoms of ADHD from as young as 8 years old. He described himself as 'a wild child, free spirited' and was boisterous, citing adults as 'not able to control' him. He was a disruptive pupil with teachers 'driven demented' in primary school. With his **ADHD undiagnosed** and not treated, by the time he reached secondary school, he was looking to other adrenaline highs to feed his ADHD i.e. drugs, joy-riding, assault and theft. Frequently outside the Principal's office, Brian's constant restlessness, irritability, impulsive nature, inability to concentrate for long periods of time and with no educational supports/provision available for him, he opted to leave secondary school shortly after completing his Junior Cert. He was in court numerous times for 'petty crime' and was sent to a detention centre for a period of time in Ireland.

Note: Brian* is not his real name.

5.2 The prevalence of ADHD in early school leavers

From studying case study 5.2 in comparison to case study 2.1 undiagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a prevailing condition of the young offender cited. The impact that undiagnosed and untreated ADHD had on his life-path is recognised in international research and policy.

There are two sub-types of ADHD: inattentive (lack of concentration) and hyperactive (impulsive). A survey of Irish young offenders in detention centres found that:

"68% met diagnostic criteria for external disruptive and conduct disorders like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)". Eight out of ten young offenders in detention centres were also identified as having psychiatric illnesses.⁴⁸

Dr Hayes added: *"In addition to reducing the debilitating effects that mental health problems have on a child's functioning and development, treatment will lead to a significant reduction in offending behaviour and criminality and therefore, has significant cost benefits for society, the legal system and the Irish State".*⁴⁹

International research has identified the direct correlation of 'petty crime', antisocial behaviour, admissions to detention centres and illegal drug possession to be *"positively related to ADHD"*. From ages 5-12 years of age, young people with ADHD symptoms (hyperactivity, inattentive or combined subtype); are *"far more likely"* to commit criminal activities than any other individuals. This pattern prevails even when other relative characteristics such as socio-economic, ethnicity, family income, gender etc are taken into account.⁵⁰

*"ADHD is more likely to occur in males; children in families with low socioeconomic status; and children with parents who have a high school diploma or GED. Prevalence of ADHD is much higher among close relatives than in the general population, suggesting a genetic tie."*⁵¹

Data is not available on the prevalence of ADHD among Youthreach participants. However anecdotal evidence suggests that it is high. When asked about this for this policy document, National Coordinator, Dermot Stokes conceded that it *'is probably the case'*.⁵²

In analysing the Familiscope project in Ballyfermot, one of the recommendations outlined to address the social problem of educational disadvantage is provision for ADHD, since it was recognised as a fundamental

⁴⁸ 'Emotional Intelligence, Mental Health and Juvenile Delinquency' Hayes & O'Reilly 2007

⁴⁹ 'Most young offenders suffer psychiatric problem, says study' Breaking News May 18 2007

⁵⁰ 'Long-term consequences of Childhood ADHD on Criminal Activities' Fletcher & Wolfe, Yale 2009

⁵¹ 'Long-term consequences of Childhood ADHD on Criminal Activities' Fletcher & Wolfe, Yale 2009

⁵² Interview with Director of Youthreach, Dermot Stokes 2010

need of young people in the community. The lack of NEPs provision and in the treatment of ADHD is noted in the Blanchardstown project.⁵³

Labour Youth calls on the Government for a systemic approach to address ADHD as part of a cost-benefit analysis and restorative justice approach to rehabilitate early school leavers.

Additionally Labour Youth calls for special education provision (includes NEPs, SLT, ADHD treatment) to be provided for in Youthreach programmes.

5.3 The prevalence of emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties in early school leavers

“There is a direct correlation between mental ill-health and indicators of social exclusion such as unemployment, low educational attainment, low income and drug-taking.” (DHC, 2009; Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2009; NESF, 2007)

“Moderate to severe mental health difficulties present in 8% of children and two-thirds of this group are male.”⁵⁴

Ireland has one of the highest suicide rates in the EU with a significantly high proportion identified as young males (15-34years). In the last 12 months, our nation witnessed and experienced a 25% increase in suicides.⁵⁵ The National Suicide Research Foundation’s recent study *‘Suicide and Employment Status during Ireland’s Celtic Tiger Economy’* carried out between 1996 and 2006, found a two to three-fold increased risk of suicide in men and a four to six-fold increased risk of suicide in women because of unemployment even at the low levels and shrinking unemployment rate of the 1990s.⁵⁶

Since young men are less expressive than females (as identified in Chap 2), symptoms of mental illness are kept hidden, therefore mental health problems are not addressed in young men as frequently as females. This innate nature to disguise emotions can lead to a mental health illness spiralling resultant in the 25% increase in suicides this year. To address this, mental health advisors propose medication as a last resort, the first step being to ‘talk to someone’. The Jigsaw program run by the organisation Headstrong, works in Irish communities to address the mental health problems of young people. This mental health initiative remains part of a piecemeal approach since there is no mental health provision integrated in the education system or as part of an educational disadvantage strategy in social inclusion schemes, Youthreach or in any statutory agency primed to address the “root cause” of educational disadvantage.

The Jigsaw programme is currently in Youngballymun (Dublin), Galway, Roscommon, Kerry, Clondalkin (Dublin), Middleton (Cork) and Meath. The fourth report in June 2010 by the Independent Monitoring Group overseeing the implementation of ‘*A Vision For Change*’ – the Government programme to address mental health difficulties, reported that “the HSE has not followed through on the implementation”. There is “significant criticism” noted on the quality of the 2009 HSE Implementation Plan with “a lack of clarity around specific objectives, timelines for achievement and costings for the actions”. The HSE indicated that ‘*A Vision For Change*’ must be implemented over a “longer time-frame”. There has been “little or no progress in the completion of the HSE’s implementation targets of 2009”.⁵⁷

“We don’t grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather we get educated out of it...“Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.”

⁵³ ‘*A Holistic Approach to Early School Leaving*’ Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006

⁵⁴ NCSE 2006

⁵⁵ Dr. J Lucey, RTE’s ‘*Today with Pat Kenny*’ 28 September 2010

⁵⁶ Irish Examiner, 7th June 2010

⁵⁷ ‘*A Vision for Change*’ – Fourth report by the Independent Monitoring Group, June 2010

- Creativity Expert, former Advisor to the UK Department of Education, PhD Sir Ken Robinson 2006, TED Talks

In recent years, the arts and the role of creativity more specifically, gained international credibility as a viable and appropriate response to address educational disadvantage; and as a therapy form to address mental illness. It is well established that we all think differently. Some of us think via pictures/images in our minds (opti-coders) and others via words in our minds (lexi-coders). Opti-coders are predominantly right-brained thinkers: artists, architects, entrepreneurs, comedians and politicians to name a few. While lexi-coders are predominantly left-brained thinkers: lawyers, accountants, psychologists and teachers etc. This predisposition impinges upon the way a person learns and necessitates for a differentiation in teaching styles and teaching practices. This is pertinent to address educational disadvantage via a holistic approach.

In 1998, Ken Robinson PhD led a national commission on creativity, education and the economy for the UK Government.

'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education' (The Robinson Report 1999) outlined the fundamental need for creating the right synergy and balance in education incorporating the dynamic relationship of cultural education and creative education. Robinson identifies embracing and engaging the 'creative energies' of young people as one of the 'most effective solutions' to address pupils who become 'disaffected' with school, lack motivation and drop-out.⁵⁸

The narrow scope of the 2008 Art Council report *'Points of Alignment'* does not address educational disadvantage in a community setting or in youth-based projects. In compiling the report *'most focus group meetings opened with expressions of regret by key informants about the circumscribed nature of the terms of reference'*.⁵⁹ However *'arts-in-education practices'* at second-level have effective results.

In St Agnes School in Crumlin, Dublin, which featured on RTE, Principal Sweeney and her staff funded a music programme whereby the initiative gave free violins and violin lessons to their pupils. Funded partly by the 'Breaking the Cycle' scheme and private donations, more than 400 children have weekly violin lessons free due to Sister Bernadette's vision. Her vision is one that encourages her pupils to discover their "own inner creativity". Sr Bernadette Sweeney emphasises the potentiality of the arts (music) to address social inclusion citing that "research from round the world has shown that cognitive development, literacy and numeracy skills and above all: attention focus, benefit enormously from learning a musical instrument at a young age".

Labour Youth calls on the Government: For a full costing of young offenders' experience of the Irish Criminal/Youth Justice system as part of a cost-benefit analysis and a 'Value for Money' evaluation of current provision to rehabilitate young offenders to reduce recidivism.

Additionally Labour Youth calls for a full assessment (psychological/speech and language) of young offenders upon entry in prison and an assessment of the current educational, speech, language and communication needs of young offenders.

Labour Youth calls for a restorative approach to the treatment of early school leavers and young offenders by the State, which includes a multi-faceted approach.

As cited in Chapter three, Labour Youth calls for a national social inclusion scheme (strategy) to provide mental health provision (NEPS, counselling) via a restorative, integrative approach.

⁵⁸ Robinson report 1999

⁵⁹ *'Points of Alignment'* Art Council 2008

Conclusion

Feasibility of Labour Youth's recommendations:

Living in one of the worst European economic depression's, there is no denying the Government's tenacious hold on our national finances. However, the national think-tank TASC amongst other agencies identified alternative sources of income and the need to invest in education, mental health and social inclusion to prevent the '*long-term costs to society*' that the OECD's Secretary General, Angel Gurría forewarned in 2009.

With a cap of €34billion to-date on the bailing out of Anglo Irish Bank, in these recessionary times you cannot help but wonder what better '*human capital*' and '*social democratic*' investment that money could be put to. Especially considering the total national education budget in 1995 was £2billion it puts the worst recession in the history of our State in perspective.

What lies at the heart of the educational disadvantage quandary is not simply '*equalising resources*' to equate to '*equalised opportunity*' via social inclusion schemes (ESRI). It is a lack of coherent specific national strategies incorporating a systemic approach; lack of evaluation of the current social inclusion schemes; lack of creative long-term vision; lack of strategic benchmarking; lack of special education provision in educational disadvantage; lack of investment; a lack of specialist teacher training; and a lack of commitment/political will to adhere to the target of reducing early school leaving to 10% by 2013. As cited in the ESRI report (2010), a culture and climate of '*self-evaluation*' is not encouraged or cultivated within the teaching profession. This alone coupled with one of the highest pupil to teacher ratios in Europe, leaves an uphill battle at best to attain a socially inclusive and socially equitable education system in Ireland.

The glimmers of hope in educational disadvantage projects scattered around the country remain fragments of foundations to build upon. How we treat those less fortunate in society and those at a disadvantage is indicative of the societal values we retain and the principles that guide policy and our State. Restorative justice principles and values remain mitigating factors to address the root cause of educational disadvantage and social inclusion. With the inequality gap increasing and with one of the highest suicide rates in the EU, in our nation's broken spirit we cannot forget those who are economically born at a disadvantage, those who cannot express themselves and those who are misunderstood in our society.

Labour Youth believes that we should not be differential or indifferent to people who are economically poor and to those who are misunderstood in our education system and in society. Understanding is the best route to equality and a good place to start, particularly in these times we live in.

- Labour Youth 2010