

QDOSS Submission to NESF Child Literacy and Social Inclusion

Submission Due Date: 30th January, 2009

The Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS) network seeks to promote the development of a national strategy for the provision of out of school services for those children and young people most at risk of educational disadvantage – a strategy which while national remains necessarily sensitive to the needs of local communities. In their publication an Agenda for Development (Downes, 2006), the QDOSS network identified a number of key priority areas for inclusion in such a national strategic plan, including bridging the health and education needs of children/young people, contributing to a supportive school climate and, in the specific context of this submission, the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum as a key resource to enhancing children and young people's literacy and social and emotional education.

Linked to the priority areas referred to in this call for submission, and in acknowledging that out-of-school services play a key role in overcoming both educational and social disadvantage, QDOSS supports a call for:

- The development of a national strategy addressing children and young people's literacy which remains cognisant of and responsive to the needs of children and adults in their local communities.
- The ring-fencing of funding to support the development and long-term maintenance of inclusive literacy initiatives developed under such a strategic plan. The cutting back of resources to particularly vulnerable groups e.g. newcomer students losing Language Support teachers, Travellers losing capitation grants, cutbacks to DEIS school book scheme, reduction in LCA, LCVP and transition year funding etc. will only increase the level of inequality in education and potentially lead to social exclusion.
- Schools to work reciprocally with out-of-school services to strengthen the continuity of positive educational/literacy experiences for marginalized children and youth.
- Improved mechanisms to track and assess the literacy / numeracy improvements in young people identified in need of additional support.
- The development of an integrated, holistic approach to enhancing children and young people's literacy skills through the visual and creative arts including drama and other artistic media.
- Funding to be provided for school and out-of-school programmes which recognise the fundamental role that the visual and creative arts can play for personal development, conflict resolution skills and in developing English language and literacy skills.
- Information technology IT provision is also a very effective way to improve literacy in young people. Strategies in this area should be developed, particularly at primary level.

- Funding to be made available for school libraries to be developed as resources within communities and specifically, to enhance community-based literacy schemes.
- The strategy should also focus on oracy and numeracy skills as failure rates for Foundation / Ordinary level mathematics indicate that a cohort of students have poor numeracy skills. Strategies to improve literacy skills and numeracy skills need to go hand in hand.
- Continuing professional development/Inservice training through the Primary Professional Support Service (or equivalent body) should be delivered to all practitioners involved in delivering and supporting literacy / numeracy services. Transference of knowledge between formal, non-formal, childcare sectors is also key to ensure consistent approach.
- While the main focus on the NESF call for submissions is on the primary education sector, it is important that attention is given to literacy at post-primary and adult education levels also. Poor literacy and numeracy skills are early warning signs of potential early school leaving. Ensuring that students have access to JCSP, LCA, Resource hours, special needs assistants etc. is key.
- Ongoing development and support of adult and community education in the context research findings on family literacy.
- Specific allocation of a dedicated family literacy budget to support parental involvement in enhancing children and young people's literacy.
- The need to strategically develop educational/literacy programmes which empower parents whose first language is not English or Irish so as to enable and further their involvement in their children's education/literacy skill development.

Exemplars of Good Practice:

The following is a brief selection of child literacy initiatives which QDOSS members are directly involved with:

Wizards of Words (WoW) (Organisation: Barnardos)

The Wizard of Words initiative operates in 4 schools and sees students from 1st and 2nd class who are nominated by classroom teachers for extra reading support being paired with an appropriate older volunteer (55years+). The trained volunteers meet with their child/ren at least twice weekly for 30-40 minute sessions during school hours to provide individualised reading instruction and support. The programme has already shown benefits including increased reading ability; improved attitudes to reading and greater confidence in the classroom.

School Completion Programme

SCP projects deliver a range of homework clubs after school (both primary and post-primary) with a number of positive outcomes in terms of homework completion, relationship building, additional attention to weaker students etc.

SCP projects also deliver after school clubs with a focus on homework completion, activity (as focus must also be on the whole child) and nutrition (important that nutrition needs of young people are met as hunger can lead to loss of concentration and poor behaviour in class). While a small number of SCP projects provide intensive study support / tuition to students, particularly those in Junior Cert and Leaving Cert classes.

Summer/Easter holiday periods are also viewed by the SCP as an optimal time to offer intensive services that focus on literacy. Exemplars include:

Summer programme focusing on literacy / phonics (Caritas College SCP)
Literacy through the Arts Programme (funded by the DES) (Greenhills College SCP)
Developing literacy through activity primary school - (Westside Galway SCP)

Who/What is QDOSS:

Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS) is a network, established in 2005, that comprises a range of stakeholders who share different perspectives, expertise and a common aim. The principal aim of QDOSS is to enhance and develop the field of out-of-school services so as to influence and enable positive educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage. Out-of-school services refer to a range of structured programmes, clubs and activities for school-age children and young people (4-18) which take place within supervised environments during the times that they are not in school. As such, out-of-school activities can take place before school, after school, at weekends, during lunch hours, and during school holidays. Out-of-school services therefore can be offered in a variety of schools, attached to school and non-school environments, including community centres, child-care centres, places of worship, libraries, parks etc. Out-of-school services are sponsored by *inter alia*, statutory and non-governmental agencies, schools, community-based groups, faith-based organisations, and other voluntary sector groups.

QDOSS Member Organisations:

*Barnardos,
Border Counties Childcare Committee,
Children's Research Centre, TCD,
Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College Drumcondra,
Foróige,
Limerick City Childcare Committee,
National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative,
PLANET Partnerships Network,
School Completion Programme,
Sligo Childcare Committee,
Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick,
Youth Work Ireland*

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The information included in this submission is drawn in the main from the QDOSS publication: *An Agenda for Development* (2006) compiled by Dr. Paul Downes.