



**DRAFT QDOSS Submission to the Department of Education and Skills Draft
National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools**

The Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS) network welcomes the opportunity to submit its views on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools. The network previously made a submission to the NESF Child Literacy and Social Inclusion committee and welcomes the Department's prioritisation of literacy and numeracy development in children's lives. This emphasis within the Department is particularly important in light of the most recent findings of the PISA study 2009.

The 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 the 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 and young people, contributing to a supportive school climate, and the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum as a key resource to enhancing children and young people's literacy and social and emotional education.

Acknowledging that out-of-school services play a key role in overcoming both educational and social disadvantage, QDOSS is calling for the following ten issues to be addressed in the Plan:

1. A broader emphasis within the Plan that takes into account the role of the out-of-school sector in the holistic development of children, including significant developments in the sphere of literacy and numeracy. The Plan in its current form acknowledges the role of the community in supporting the development of children's literacy and numeracy needs. QDOSS suggests that the Plan would benefit from a particular strategy around the capacities and capabilities of the out-of-school sector in this regard.
2. The out-of-school sector provides a wide range of supports to meet the needs of children. The strategy for the out-of-school sector within the Plan should not attempt to 'schoolify' the sector by focusing solely on literacy and numeracy supports and programmes. The wider range of supports provided out-of-school (for example, visual and creative arts, social and personal development programmes, cookery skills and sporting activities) indirectly support the academic achievements of children and directly improve their social and emotional capabilities (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Miller, 2003, Zaff, J., Moore, K., Papillo, A.R., & S. Williams, 2003; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). Miller (2003: 66) specifically documents that "Current research provides particularly strong evidence of a positive transfer from arts experiences to academic skills in three areas: music listening, music instruction and spatial reasoning and drama and verbal skills".
3. Funding should be provided within the Plan for school and out-of-school programmes which recognise the fundamental role that visual and creative arts can play for personal development, conflict resolution skills and in developing English language and literacy skills.

4. The ring-fencing of funding to support the development and long-term maintenance of inclusive literacy initiatives should be incorporated into the Plan. The cutting back of resources to particularly vulnerable groups in recent budgets e.g. removing Resource Teachers for Travellers at primary level, Rural Co-ordinators in the HSCL scheme, newcomer students losing Language Support Teachers etc. will only increase the level of inequality in education and potentially lead to social exclusion.
5. As part of the strategy for the out-of-school sector, there needs to be a plan in place for the professionalisation of the school aged childcare sector. Links with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs are significant in this regard.
6. There are significant learning opportunities for the out-of-school sector to learn from the literacy and numeracy practices within schools, and for teachers and other professionals within the school sector to learn from the holistic professional practices within the out-of-school sector. Miller (2003:61) notes that “Program strategies (experiential learning, project-based learning, adventure education, service learning, mentoring and tutoring, arts education): such experiences can provide students with opportunities to practise what they have learned in school, develop new skills, test themselves as leaders, broaden their horizons and increase their expectations for their future. If experiential education is expected to have an effect on academic outcomes, it should be explicitly tied to desired academic results through integration across the curriculum. It should also include communication with regular school teachers”. Findings from a study of after school provision for Traveller students in Churchtown, Dundrum and Balally (O’Connor, 2000) found that: “Children receive help with their homework from trained teachers who work in the club and from the classroom assistant. The fact that this classroom assistant is a Traveller has had a very positive influence on the way Traveller children perceive the club”.
7. An issue of concern for QDOSS is the impact of summer slide in literacy and numeracy, particularly for children in lower socio-economic status

communities (Borman, G., & Dowling, N.M., 2006). QDOSS is concerned that the level and intensity of provision in relation to summer programming is insufficient to support the needs of young people in lower socio-economic communities in Ireland and that a more cohesive approach to the area of provision is required.

8. There needs to be a specific allocation of a dedicated family literacy budget to support parental involvement in enhancing children and young people's literacy.
9. The Plan would be strengthened by implementing particular strategies at key transition points in a child's life. Specifically pre-school to primary school and between primary and post-primary.
10. There is a value in examining the findings of evaluative studies of community-based literacy and numeracy initiatives in order to inform future developments within the out-of-school sector.

QDOSS is a coalition of partners working to develop strategic national out-of-school services for children and young people in Ireland. Members include: Barnardos, Border Counties Childcare Committee (BCCN), Children's Research Centre (Trinity College Dublin), Crann Support Group, Educational Disadvantage Centre (St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra), Foróige, National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, PLANET, The Partnerships Network, Representatives from the City & County Childcare Committees BMW and S&E, School Completion Programme Support Service, TED: Targeting Educational Disadvantage (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick), Youth Work Ireland.

References

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