

A New Post-Pandemic Social Contract between Health and Education in Ireland: Key Issues for DEIS Schools and Wider Contexts

Children's Futures National Webinar Keynote Presentation,
Educational Disadvantage and Inequalities
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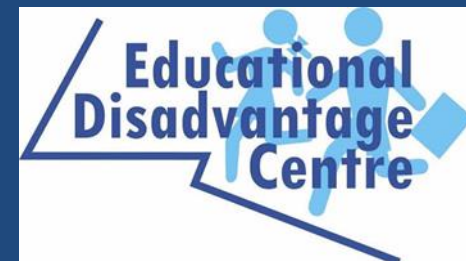
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The Joint Oireachtas Education Committee report in response to Covid (2021) gives these key recommendations :

- ‘Emotional counselling and therapeutic supports should be provided in all primary and secondary schools as an urgent priority’.

‘The provision of hot meals to vulnerable students should be expanded to cover periods of school closures and holidays and a Hot Meals Programme should be rolled out nationally to all schools on a phased basis’. (p.12)

These offer key foundations for a new post-pandemic social contract between health and education in Irish schools.



Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. *School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health* August 2021

Key Recommendation:

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be reconstituted and expanded urgently as the National Educational Psychological and Counselling Service (NEPCS) and mandated to provide specialist Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports, on site, in all primary and secondary schools. The Service should be adequately resourced and funded to ensure it can deliver on its mandate



Extract from 23/6/21 appendix letter to: Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Re: School Bullying and Mental Health. From Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon

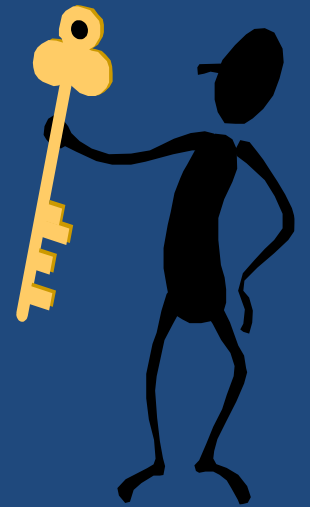
Recommendation 2



Consider a pilot across the whole country but in a smaller number of schools. This will cover both Primary and Post Primary and will involve the hiring of permanent therapists, akin to those working within the National Counselling Service (NCS). With permanent staff you will get added value of consistent presence around the school and a resource for staff and students alike to discuss issues on a more informal basis thereby acting earlier and reducing problems quickly.

Extract from 23/6/21 appendix letter to: Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science From Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon

TO PREDICT AND BUDGET Rural N = 100 (25 Counties with 2 Primary and 2 Post Primary)
Urban N = 60 (3 Cities with 10 Primary and 10 Post Primary) Attempt to have one third of all the schools from DEIS (to approximately replicate the larger demographics) Cost = Mid point on NCS Scale Counsellor Therapist Scale for full time employee – €61,386 x 160 = **€9,821,760 per year** The pilot should again be for two academic years but with a plan to roll it out across the country as soon as possible after the evaluation period.



Extract from 23/6/21 appendix letter to: Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science From Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon

there is a national school counselling strategy in second-level schools in both Wales and Northern Ireland – where statutory access is granted to all children in second level schools. They further highlighted that over 60% of secondary schools in England also have this access and in 2020, for the first time, the Scottish Government pledged to invest £80 million over the next four years in the provision of counselling in education, including the use of £60 million to provide counsellors to all second-level schools in Scotland.



PostPandemic Priority Areas for Development

1. Early School Leaving Prevention: Emotional Counsellors/Therapists in and around Schools for trauma and adverse childhood experiences
 2. Address Child Poverty
 - Hot Meals for Children in Schools and Families through ABC Projects
- “Continue to review and expand the roll-out of the new Hot School Meals initiative.” Programme for Govt2020
3. National Arts and Social Inclusion in Education Strategy – Addressing social isolation from pandemic lockdowns
 4. Alternatives to Suspension/Expulsion/Reduced Timetables: Emotional Counselling/Therapeutic Supports, Multidisciplinary Teams
 5. Sleep Awareness
 6. A New Post-Pandemic Social Contract between Health and Education in Ireland



1. Early School Leaving: Emotional Counsellors/Therapists

Trauma and adversity impacting on mental health of pupils are exacerbated in this pandemic, including the additional emotional and financial strain of lockdown on so many families. Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) take many different forms:

- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse in family
- Emotional and/or physical neglect
- Mental illness in family
- Loss of parent through divorce, death or abandonment
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Incarcerated family member
- Consistent Poverty
- Experience of suicide
- Childhood homelessness
- Bullying in School
- Placed in State Care



1. Early School Leaving: Emotional Counsellors/Therapists

Research from a range of different countries shows that poverty is linked to increased risk of mental disorders and suicide (UNICEF 2016; OECD 2018)

Even apart from poverty related depression, emotional distress contributes to early school leaving:

Quiroga et al. (2013) 493 high-risk French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal

*depression symptoms at the beginning of secondary school are related to higher dropout mainly by being associated with pessimistic views about the likelihood to reach desired school outcomes; student negative self-beliefs are in turn related to lower self-reported academic performance and predict a higher risk of dropping out.



Esch, P., Bocquet, V., Pull, C., Couffignal, S., Lehnert, T., Graas, M., Fond-Harmant, L & Anseau, M. The downward spiral of mental disorders and educational attainment: a systematic review on early school leaving. *BMC Psychiatry* 2014 14:237



When adjusted for socio-demographic factors, mood disorders (e.g. depression) were significantly related to school dropout

Among anxiety disorders, after controlling for potentially confounding factors, social phobia was a strong predictor of poor educational outcomes

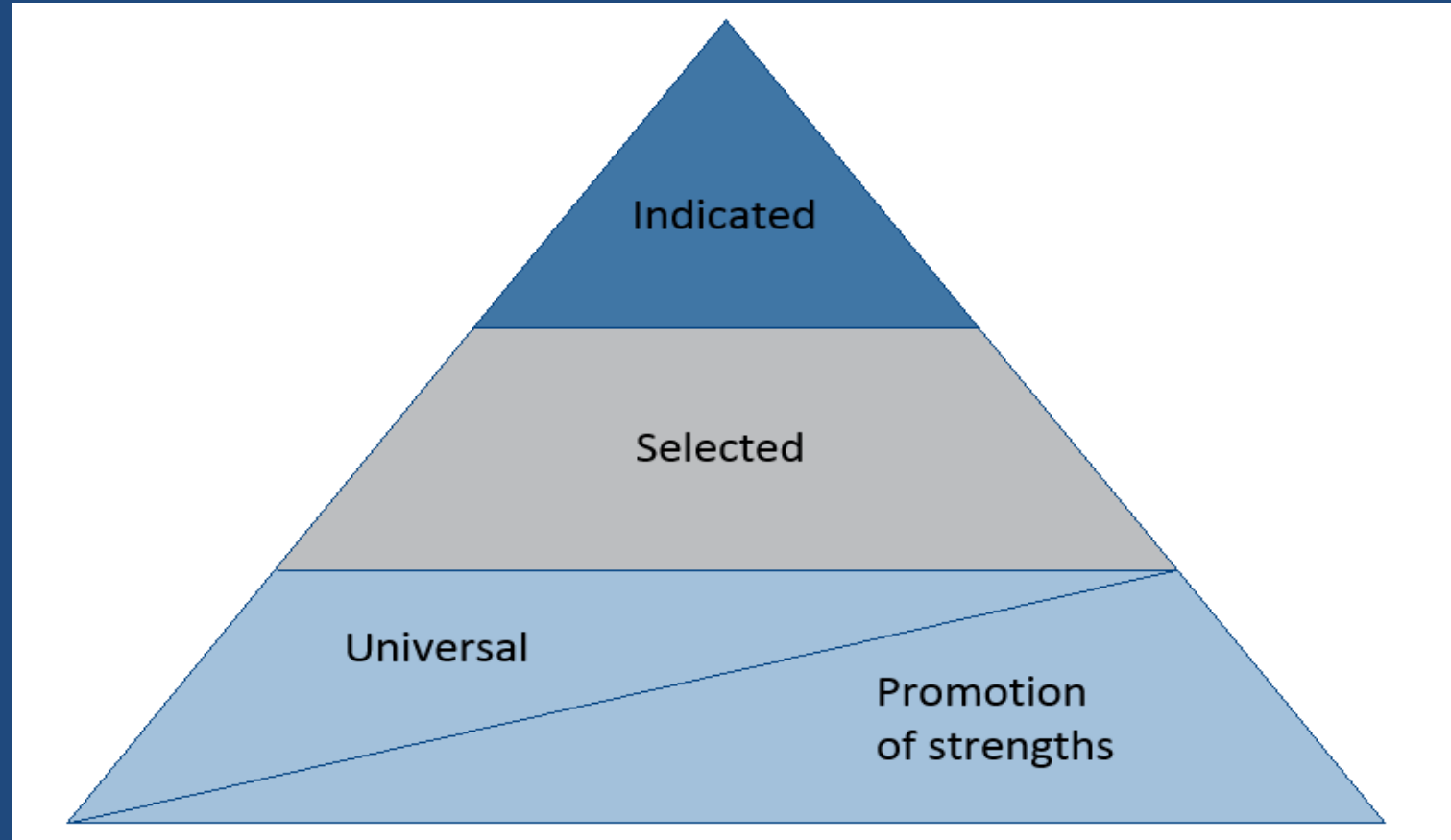
...as indicated by early school leavers themselves, were feeling too nervous in class and being anxious to speak in public, both representing symptoms of social phobia

Differentiated Strategies in Place - for Meeting Individual Needs at Different Levels of Need/Risk – Beyond Universal Prepackaged Programmes on Wellbeing, Trauma-Informed Schools

Universal – *All*

Selected – *Some, Groups, Moderate Risk*

Indicated – *Individual, Intensive, Chronic Need*



Ireland is playing catch-up in this area with many European countries and internationally.

*The need to meet the complexity of emotional needs is not addressed by NEPS or generic pre-packaged wellbeing programmes, as neither provide or are suitable to provide ongoing individual therapeutic supports for trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

*The National Wellbeing in Schools Policy 2018 of a teacher as '*One good adult*' is no substitute for qualified emotional counsellors/therapists.

****NEPS cannot and do not provide sustained 1 to 1 emotional counselling support***

****Career Guidance Counsellors' remit is not for trauma and adverse childhood experience***

****Universal prepackaged programmes on wellbeing, trauma-informed schools are at the universal level and are no substitute for indicated prevention level of one to one counselling***

*A teacher can offer support as mental health promotion and stress prevention, but is not a therapist.

TRAUMA FOCUS Donlevy Day Andriescu & Downes(2019)

‘Emotional counselling and support is provided in a range of countries in order to help those suffering from serious emotional distress, including the Czech Republic, Belgium and Germany’.

‘ In France, all pupils have access to the Psychologist of Education to for psychological support and career guidance. Emotional counselling is also available in Sweden, where all students have access to a school doctor, school nurse, psychologist and school welfare officer at no cost and in Slovenia’.



Donlevy et al (2019)

‘In some countries, emotional counselling is expressly backed by legislation. In Poland, legislation mandates for the existence of a system of support to students who are having significant difficulties at school, in the form of one-to-one academic tutoring and psychological support where required’.

‘In Denmark, legislation states that school leaders can choose to recommend a student for pedagogical-psychological assessment, the results of which may initiate a process where the student may receive psychological support. Croatia and Bulgaria also have legislation in place that provides for emotional counselling and psychological support’.



2. Address Child Poverty

– Hot Meals for Children in Schools and Families through ABC Projects

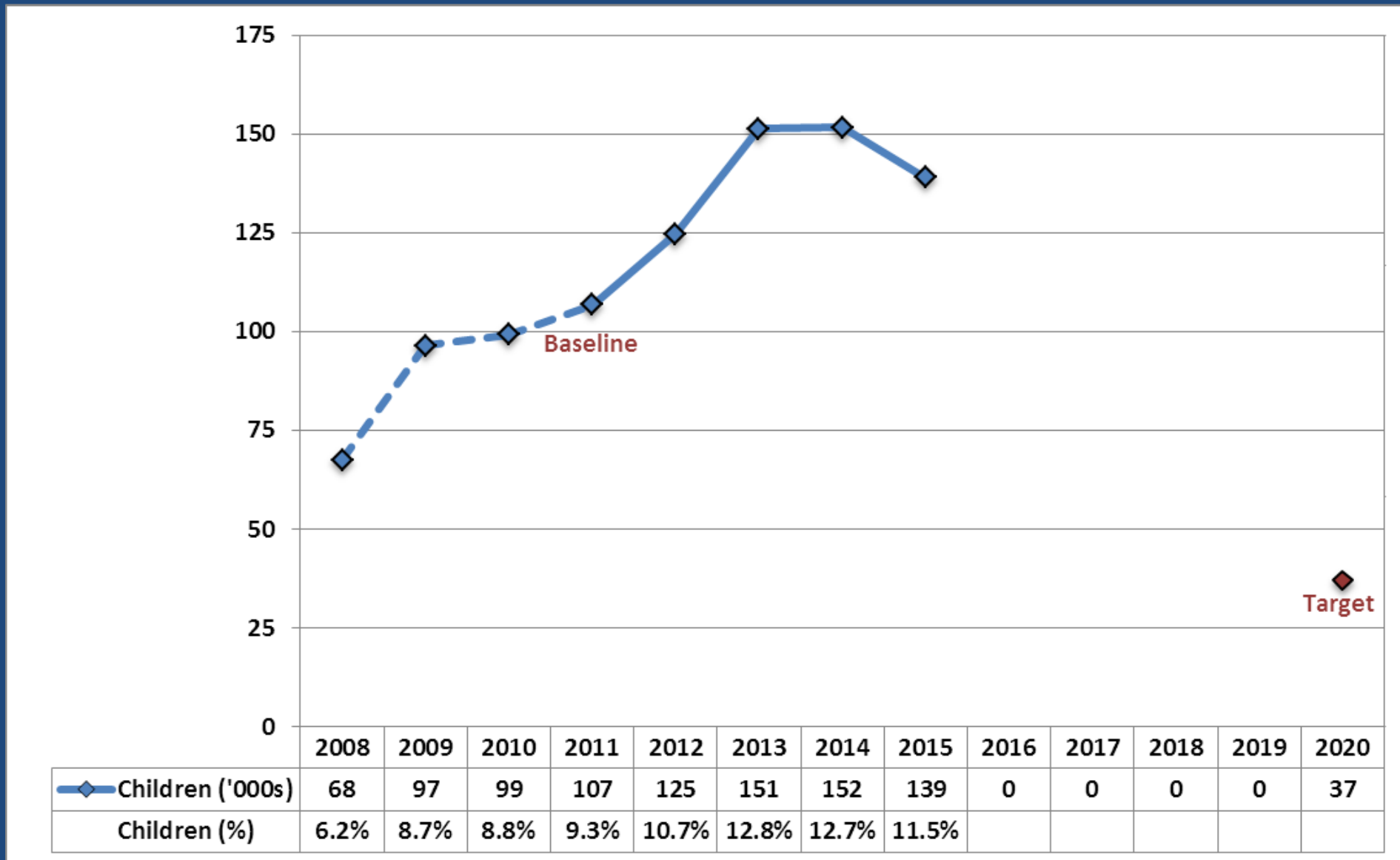
A major concern is the impact on child poverty of the economic crisis generated by Covid-19 and the series of lockdowns.

109,401 children age 6-11 experienced poverty calculated at 70% of the national median income, 72,649 at 60% of the national median income, and 28,632 6-11 year olds experienced so-called *deep poverty*, at 50% of the national median income.

These official Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, Youth 2020 child poverty figures based on 2018 analysis are a massive current underestimation of need and are outdated in light of the pandemic impacts affecting Irish children and families.

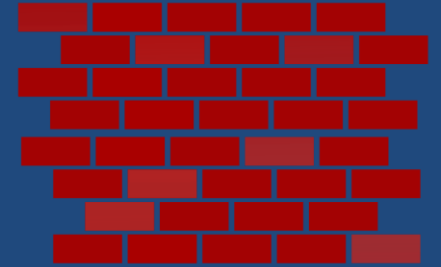
Child Poverty Target (Department of Social Protection figures)

Diagram 1: Progress on the child-specific social target 2017)



Backdrop of increased poverty rates for children

- 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: 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).



The explicit commitment in the Programme for Government 2020 is to 'Continue to review and expand the roll-out of the new Hot School Meals initiative'. This vital initiative received an October 2020 budget commitment of an additional €5.5 million for hot meals in schools for 35,000 more children nationally.

However, there is need for a much more substantial financial commitment to expand this across DEIS and other schools nationally so it is not simply a hit and miss approach depending on which schools can or cannot avail of this national scheme.

3.National Arts and Social Inclusion in Education Strategy – Addressing social isolation from pandemic lockdowns

The heightened experiences of social isolation and reduction in social interactions (Smith et al 2020) due to the pandemic lockdowns and increasing recognition in Europe of the social isolation of at least some groups of migrants (Janta & Harte, 2016)

A Norwegian sample of 2,045 students, aged 16, loneliness has emerged as a major risk factor for early school leaving, being as significant a risk factor as poor educational attainment (Frostad et al. 2015)



Need for a National Strategy for the Arts and Social Inclusion in Education

Arts Council received a €70 million budget increase 2021 to €150 million - **What is the dividend from this for socioeconomically marginalised children and young people ??**

The right of every person to participate in the cultural life of the community was established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is articulated in Article 15 of the International Covenant on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in Article 31 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other treaties:

Article 31 UN CRC 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.**

The DES (2019) Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023, revised October 2019 **makes no mention of the Arts**. A national strategic response to the Arts and social inclusion requires a **sustained, whole school and whole community arts initiative across a diversity of domains of the Arts, involving afterschool and summer projects**.

The Creative Ireland/Schools initiative is **insufficient in range and scope** to meet these needs across all DEIS schools. There needs to be less emphasis on paperwork and reflective exercises for the school staff, and more emphasis on taking action and engaging the children. The Creative Ireland programme offers funding of €2-4,000 per school and is not a sustained whole school approach to the Arts.

Although the Arts in Education Charter (DAHG, 2013) does focus on forging partnerships between outside art agencies and schools, it does not specifically address the issue of unequal access within the document itself – or emphasise the distinctive importance of the Arts for engaging marginalised communities.

The Arts are only mentioned once in the current DEIS Plan (DES, 2017) and DEIS schools that are currently providing afterschool arts activities are mainly funding them through the School Completion Programme (Smyth, 2015).

The School Completion Programme has itself experienced a concerning retreat in recent years from commitment to the Arts for early school leaving prevention. Recent restructuring of the methods of targeting measures would need to be reviewed by School Completion Programme in order to ensure equality of access to quality arts education and afterschool provision.



Students engaged in quality arts education have been shown to develop significantly in terms of: emotional awareness, self-confidence, effort, adjustment, motivation, imagination, creativity, concentration, collaboration, self-regulation, reflection, empathy, and communication (Theodotou, 2019; Ros-Morente et al., 2019; Borovica, 2020; Mellor, 2013; Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2009).



Research highlights the multiple and intersecting benefits of the arts in education:

- Overcoming fear of failure going beyond 'one right answer'
- Promoting students' voices and personal and social expression
- Fostering empathy and perspective taking capacities
- Offering a diversity of opportunities to build on strengths and capacities
- Promoting active learning and meaning making
- Supporting students' motivation to engage in education and prevent early school leaving
- Building bridges between different groups to celebrate diversity
- Promoting a positive school climate



4. Alternatives to Suspension, expulsion, reduced timetables

Murphy, McKenna & Downes 2019



- 51 males : 29.6% of those in temporary/emergency accommodation in McVerry Trust
- 24.5% of homeless men in McVerry Trust Accomodation said that they had been temporarily excluded in the form of suspensions; 12.2% had experienced multiple or 'rolling' suspensions
- 18.4% reported having been permanently excluded or expelled from school
- 65.5% of permanent exclusions were due to non-violent behaviour; 37.9% were due to difficult relationships with teachers; 27.6% were due to poor attendance
- 34 of 51 questionnaire participants indicated that they had experienced 'traumatic childhood events'

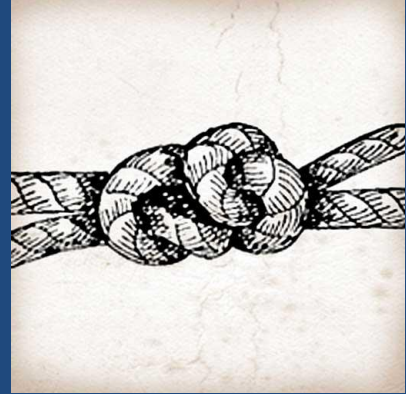
The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primary schools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010).

13,169 students suspended 3.8% ERC/Tusla 2016-17

167 expulsions nationally in 2016-2017, 0.048% of the population. 35 expulsions nationally in primary school in 2016-2017, up from 19 in 2014-2015 (Millar, 2018)

Murphy, McKenna, Downes 2019: 18% of the questionnaire sample having resided as a child either in residential/foster care or with extended family, children in care are clearly overrepresented in the population of homeless men in Dublin.

* the current lack of DES/DCYA strategy for meeting the holistic educational needs of children in care.

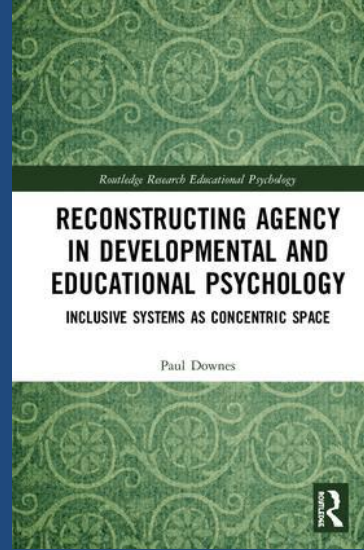


— *Beyond diametric structures of exclusion (Downes 2020):
Alternatives to Strategies of Suspension/Expulsion through
Multidisciplinary Teams*

American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement (2013):

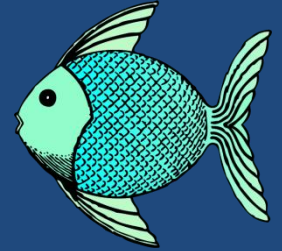
‘the adverse effects of out-of-school suspension and expulsion can be profound’

Such students are as much as 10 times more likely to leave school early, are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system and ‘there may be no one at home during the day to supervise the student’s activity if the parents are working.



Beyond Diametric Splits between Education and Health (Downes 2020)

5. Promoting Adequate Sleep for Students



- Most children need at least 9 hours of restful sleep each night (Taras and Potts-Datema, 2005).
- Impact on the wide spectrum of cognitive functioning, including **attention, reasoning and memory**, moreover during prolonged periods of sleep restriction, the negative effects accumulate (de Bruin et al, 2016).
- Sleep deficiency is interwoven in complex ways with **substance abuse** (Loureiro et al., 2014), **aggressive behaviours** (Lemola et al., 2012)

Sleep Loss – Invisible issue in BOBF

Quick win

Hargadon & Downes 2019: Curricular intervention, 6th class DEIS Band 2 primary school – 24 pupils

- awareness-raising through reflective diaries by children on their sleep patterns, as well as information, dialogue sessions for parents on the importance of sleep.
- Changes were achieved even on a brief five-week classroom active learning programme, with just one hour in class per week.
- Before intervention 75% going to bed before 23:00, post-intervention bedtime before 23:00 rose to 95.8%.
- Before intervention, over half (63%) reported 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' going to school feeling that they needed more sleep. Post-intervention, this figure was reduced to 32%.



6. A New Post-Pandemic Social Contract between Health and Education in Ireland

Global School Health statement for the Integration of Health and Education by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the International School Health Network (ISHN) recognises that:

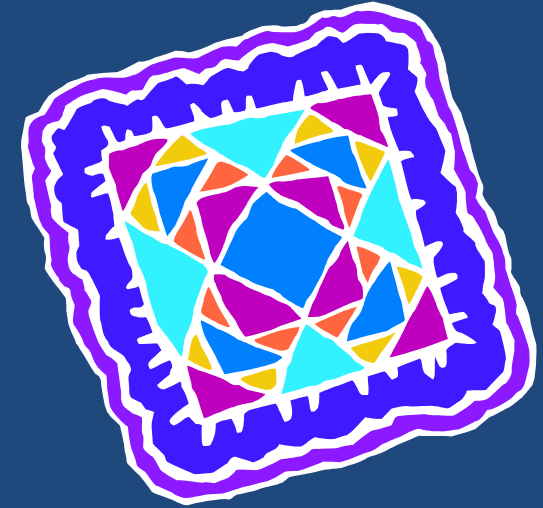
“The health sector needs to seek integration within the education system—not education's adoption of health priorities. The health sector must find its cultural anchor within education and integrate its processes and outcomes.”



A New Post-Pandemic Social Contract between Health and Education in Ireland

The UNESCO Gem report 2020 on inclusion highlights a range of country examples of these spatial reconfigurations of school between health and education.

- It highlights South Africa's integrated School Health Policy, initiated in 2012, provides a package of basic health services at all schools.
- It recognises that in the United States, school-based health centres offer co-located, multidisciplinary support to primary and secondary school students through case management.
- The GEM report 2020 notes that in Nordic countries, health, mental health and social support are available to all learners in compulsory education



A New Post-Pandemic Social Contract between Health and Education in Ireland



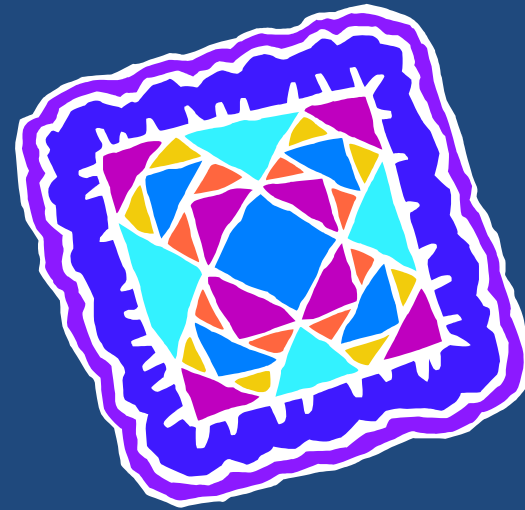
Other key steps in this proposed post-pandemic social contract between health and education are the successive Programme for Government commitments to speech and language therapists and occupational therapists onsite in schools (recommended in Educational Disadvantage Centre/CDI Tallaght briefing papers in 2016) that need to be expanded beyond pilot projects across DEIS schools.

Even with this reconfiguration of educationally relevant health services for Irish schools, Ireland still lags far behind the standards of, for example, Denmark, which provides a multidisciplinary team for every school.

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