

REPORT FOR THE ONE FOUNDATION

EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE in Ireland

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1. Introduction

The term educational disadvantage, as we use it in this document, is based on the definition contained in The Education Act, 1998 where it is defined as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”¹. ‘Appropriate benefit’, in this context, is generally understood to mean the opportunity for each person to achieve their full potential². In other words, educational disadvantage hinders people from achieving their full potential by virtue of the fact that they come from families, schools and neighbourhoods where there is a higher risk of poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment, all characteristics which may have persisted over many generations³. Thus educational disadvantage refers to those educational outcomes which are shaped by socio-economic influences rather than by individual aptitudes.

Educational disadvantage is a symptom of broader inequalities in society but is also a reflection of the limited impact of the educational system in reducing these inequalities. Indeed there is a remarkable similarity between countries with very different educational systems in the persistence of educational disadvantage among different social classes precisely because of the powerful influence exercised by the unequal distribution of material and cultural resources⁴. The only countries which have experienced significant reductions in educational disadvantage are Sweden and to a lesser extent the Netherlands precisely because educational reform has been matched by diminishing class differences in income and living conditions⁵. In other words, the challenge of addressing educational disadvantage requires measures not only within the education system but in other aspects of society as well to ensure a more equal distribution of life chances.

¹ Ireland, 1998, The Education Act, Dublin: Stationery Office, Section 32, Sub-Section 9.

² Haran, N., 2004, Equality in Education: An Examination of Community-based Youth Initiatives Under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, Dublin: Area Development Management Limited.

³ Kellaghan, T., 2002, “Approaches to Problems of Educational Disadvantage”, in Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum, 1-5 July, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.

⁴ Smyth, E., and Hannan, DF., 2000, “Education and Inequality”, in Nolan, B., O’Connell, PJ., and Whelan, CT., (Editors), Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

⁵ Erikson, R., 1996, “Explaining Change in Educational Inequality – Economic Security and Schools Reform” in Erikson, R., and Jonson, JO., (Editors), Can Education be Equalised? The Swedish Case in Comparative Perspective, Boulder: Westview Press.

Educational disadvantage is an important concern of Government in most developed countries for two main reasons. First, the failure of individuals to reach their full potential represents a loss of economic benefits in terms of their creative contribution through productive work. Indeed it may also represent a cost burden on the State in terms of unemployment as well as the increased risk of personal and social problems such as involvement in crime, drugs, prison, etc. Second, educational disadvantage is seen as unethical and unfair since it treats equal citizens in quite unequal ways. The most striking illustration of this is the much higher per capita expenditure by the State on third level education compared to first and second level which results in those who are educationally disadvantaged receiving significantly less benefits from the State than others.

Education represents one of the most significant resources for individuals and society. For example, it has been estimated that persons with a Leaving Certificate tend to earn about 40% more than those without it, while those with a degree tend to earn over 80% more than those without one⁶. These returns are consistent with the per capita cost of education in 1999 when per capita expenditure by the State at primary level was €2,412, at secondary level it was €3,682 and at third level it was €5,079⁷. In addition, those without any educational qualifications are much more likely to experience sustained periods of unemployment⁸. Thus educational disadvantage has serious consequences in terms of employment and earnings which, in turn, impact on personal and family life, giving rise to considerable costs for both individuals and society. In addition, educational disadvantage underlines how those who most need State support for education receive least while those more advantaged receive most.

Public policy in Ireland is explicitly committed to addressing social exclusion which includes educational disadvantage as one of its main causes. For example, the National Development Plan (2000-2006) states: “Creating a more inclusive society by alleviating social exclusion, poverty and deprivation is one of the major challenges facing Irish society over the course of

⁶ Barrett, A., Fitz Gerald, J., and Nolan, B., 2000, “Earnings Inequality, Returns to Education and Low Pay”, in Nolan, B., O’Connell, P.J., and Whelan, C.T., (Editors), *Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

⁷ Archer, P., 2001, “Public Spending on Education, Inequality and Poverty”, in Cantillon, S., Corrigan, C., Kirby, P., and O’Flynn, J., (Editors), *Rich and Poor: Perspectives on Tackling Inequality in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press, pp.197-234.

⁸ Hannan, D.F., McCabe, B., and McCoy, S., 1998, *Trading Qualifications for Jobs: Over-Education and the Irish Youth Labour Market*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

the National Development Plan”⁹. The current programme for government, published in June 2002, is committed to addressing educational disadvantage by reducing absenteeism and early-school leaving, assisting schools in disadvantaged areas to recruit and retain teachers, developing a scheme of school meals in disadvantaged areas, expanding adult literacy services, and improving access to third level education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds¹⁰.

In this document we outline what is known about educational disadvantage, its consequences and how the problem might be addressed. In preparing the document we consulted a broad range of people with an expertise in this area and these are listed in Appendix One. We also reviewed some of the growing body of literature in the field of educational disadvantage and these are annotated in footnotes throughout the document.

The document comprises four sections. Following this introduction, we set the context by outlining the key dimensions of educational disadvantage and how services have responded to them, drawing particularly on developments within Ireland (Section 2). In the light of this overview, we identify some of the key challenges in this area by identifying some gaps in services and some opportunities which these offer (Section 3). Finally, we make some concluding comments (Section 4).

⁹ National Development Plan, 2000-2006, (1999), November, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.187.

¹⁰ Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats, 2002, An Agreed Programme for Government between Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats, June, pp.23-24.

2. The Context: Needs and Responses

The extent of educational disadvantage depends on how it is measured. For example, it can be measured by the qualifications of students when they leave school. Using this definition, the latest evidence suggests that:

- 3% of children leave school with no qualification
- 15% of children leave school with a Junior Certificate only
- 82% of children leave school with a Leaving Certificate qualification¹¹.

The nature of educational disadvantage is underlined by the fact that those who leave school early or without qualifications are drawn disproportionately from lower socio-economic groups. Travellers are particularly at risk of educational disadvantage because the majority do not continue after primary school and most of those who go on to second-level schools leave within the first two years. As the report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community observed: “only a small minority of Traveller children have transferred successfully to second-level school and very few of these have completed a full second-level education”¹².

Another measure of educational disadvantage is the proportion of students who progress to third level education. Data on this indicator consistently show that, while nearly half of all school leavers proceed to third level education, the chances of doing so vary considerably according to the social class background of the student¹³. This is illustrated most dramatically in the case of Dublin where the admission rates to third level vary dramatically according to postal districts which themselves are strongly associated with social class: Dublin 18 (77% third level), Dublin 6 (70% third level) compared to Dublin 10 (7% third level), Dublin 17 (8% third level) or Dublin 1 (9% third level)¹⁴. These findings have led the National Economic and Social Council to observe that: “Despite over two decades during which social class inequalities in educational participation have been of concern, the evidence is that relative inequalities have declined little, and that stark contrasts which used to

¹¹ National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, Early School Leavers, Report Number 24, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

¹² Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995, Report, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.184.

¹³ Clancy, P., 2001, College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education: Dublin: Higher Education Authority, p.125; see also Fleming, T., and Gallagher, A., Power, Privilege and Points: The Choices and Challenges of Third Level Access in Dublin, Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact.

¹⁴ Clancy, P., 2001, College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education: Dublin: Higher Education Authority, p.125; see also Fleming, T., and Gallagher, A., Power, Privilege and Points: The Choices and Challenges of Third Level Access in Dublin, Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact.

characterise participation at secondary level have moved on to characterise third level participation and performance”¹⁵.

Yet another measure of educational disadvantage is the absolute level of literacy and numeracy skills and their relative level as measured by the gap between the lowest scores and the average scores. A recent report based on literacy and numeracy tests carried out with 15 year olds in 24 affluent OECD countries found that Ireland was ranked eighth on the absolute scale and thirteenth on the relative scale thus indicating that, while Ireland compared reasonably well to many other affluent countries, there is still significant room for improvement¹⁶.

The precise way in which educational disadvantage is measured also influences the type of targets set to address it. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has set three key targets in the area of educational disadvantage:

- (i) to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006
- (ii) to reduce the proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy to below 10-20% by 2007
- (iii) to increase the percentage of pupils who complete second level education to 85% by 2003 and to 90% by 2006¹⁷.

These targets have been the subject of a good deal of comment and criticism. One expert has observed that these targets are not specifically aimed at educational disadvantage since, for example, the target of halving the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006 could be achieved without having much impact on disadvantaged children given that many pupils with low literacy scores do not come from families that are socio-economically disadvantaged; similar considerations apply to the targets of completing secondary school and adult literacy¹⁸. Others have questioned whether the objective of increasing the percentage of pupils who complete second level will necessarily reduce educational

¹⁵ National Economic and Social Council, 2003, *An Investment in Quality: Services, Inclusion and Enterprise*, Report Number 111, March, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council, p.381.

¹⁶ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2002, *A League of Educational Disadvantage in Rich Nations: Innocenti Report Card*, Issue Number 4, November, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

¹⁷ National Anti-Poverty Strategy, (2002), *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs, p.12.

¹⁸ Kellaghan, T., 2002, “Approaches to Problems of Educational Disadvantage”, in *Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum*, 1-5 July, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, p.25.

disadvantage unless this is done in the context of a broader and more flexible curriculum¹⁹. More recently, the Chairperson of the Educational Disadvantage Committee, a statutory body with responsibility for advising the Minister on this issue, has suggested that “In setting targets for the educational system as a whole, the emphasis should shift from the concept of participation (eg. prevention of early leaving from school programmes leading to the Leaving Certificate) to benefit (outcomes for the individual, irrespective of where the learning has taken place). The statement of specific objectives for education can then be made in positive terms, setting targets for the achievement of certain levels of attainment (or of national qualifications) by specified proportions of the age cohort or the total population within the given time frame”²⁰.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a number of initiatives have been introduced to address educational disadvantage including:

- Provision of early childhood education for children in disadvantaged areas through the Early Start Programme
- Targeting of additional funds to schools in disadvantaged area through Breaking the Cycle Programme and the Programme for Schools in Disadvantaged Areas
- Introduction of new curricular programmes to promote pupil retention such as the Applied Leaving Certificate and foundation levels in some subjects
- Locally-based initiatives to help students at primary and secondary school such as breakfast clubs, after-school and home-work clubs
- Initiatives to promote access to third level education among young people in disadvantaged areas.

We examine below the effectiveness of these interventions (Section 2.4). Before doing so, it is necessary to examine in more detail how educational disadvantage is influenced by family (Section 2.1), school (Section 2.2), and neighbourhood (Section 2.3). We examine each of these in order to gain a better understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of educational disadvantage.

¹⁹ McCormick, T., and Archer, P., 1997, “The Strategy and Issues for Education”, Poverty today, July Number 36, Dublin: combat Poverty Agency.

²⁰ Hyland, A., 2003, “Chairperson’s Introduction”, in Educational Disadvantage Forum: Report of Inaugural Meeting, 18 November 2002, Dublin Castle, Dublin: Department of Education and Science, p.v.

2.1 Family Influences

The most obvious and measurable way in which families influence the educational outcomes of their children is through income. One of the highly significant studies in this area, usually referred to as the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics, was based on over 1,000 US children who were tracked from infancy to age 20, in order to examine the factors which influence school completion²¹. The surprising result of this study was not that income was the main influence on school completion but that family income when the child was 0-5 years (early childhood) was vastly more influential than family income when the child was either 6-10 (middle childhood) years or 11-15 years (adolescence). These findings are remarkably powerful in showing the overwhelming influence of parental income during the early years of childhood development as a predictor of educational outcomes. According to the authors: “the only stage for which parents’ income significantly predicted completed schooling is early childhood. Thus, the only reason that parents’ income during adolescence or middle childhood predicts completed schooling is apparently that income during those periods is correlated with income in early childhood.”²² These findings underline the pivotal significance of the quality of the home environment in the preschool years. Parents of preschool children with better incomes, in still imperfectly understood ways, appear to be able “to purchase better learning environments” for their children.

Other longitudinal studies, such as the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth have come up with similar results showing that family income in early childhood is a crucial factor in determining entry to third level education²³. The authors of this study argue that the likelihood of entering third level education is developed cumulatively through childhood and adolescence. When young people are reared from infancy in low-income households where parents also have low levels of education, this will have negatively impacted on the quality of their primary and secondary schooling, their scholastic aptitude, their tastes for education, and their expectations of what their adult lives can hold. One of the practical consequences of this is that scholarships to third level, *at that stage in their lives*, will tend to be a poor investment compared to the return - for themselves and the taxpayer - that could have come if the same money had been invested in their families when they were children. One of the

²¹ Duncan, G. J., & Brooks-Gunn, J., 1997. “Income Effects Across the Life Span: Integration and Interpretation”, in Duncan, G. J., & Brooks-Gunn, J., eds., *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²² Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997, op. cit., 604.

²³ Cameron, S., & Heckman, J. J., 1999. “Can Tuition Policy Combat Rising Wage Inequality?” in Kosters, M., ed., *Financing College Tuition: Government Policies, Social Priorities*. Washington, D.C.: AEI Press.

authors of this study, James Heckman – who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2000 - contends that the significance of early childhood for both education and the economy is still poorly understood and not properly acknowledged in public policy: "Policies directed toward families may be a more effective means for improving the performance of schools than direct expenditure on teacher salaries or computer equipment. Policies that seek to remedy deficits incurred in early years are much more costly than early investments wisely made, and do not restore lost capacities even when large costs are incurred. The later in life we attempt to repair early defects, the costlier the remediation becomes"²⁴.

A substantial amount of research has examined why family income has such a significant influence on the performance of children at school. From this it emerges that income is associated with significant differences between families in terms of the education level of the parents as well as the educational environment of the home and it is this, rather than income per se, which crucially determines educational outcomes. According to one review of the evidence, "the strongest predictors of disadvantage based on their relationship to school performance would appear to be the quality of the educational environment provided in the home (home 'atmosphere'), the level of education attained by the mother, and measures of relative poverty (eg, not owning one's own house, possessing a medical card). While more traditional measures of socioeconomic status (such as occupation and income) are poorer predictors of school performance, measures of them, or proxies of them, should not be ignored in the identification of disadvantaged backgrounds"²⁵. This finding suggests that home organisation, parental expectations, and parent-child interaction, which comprise the 'atmosphere' of the home, are central in determining if a child experiences educational disadvantage.

This consensus is confirmed in a recent report on educational disadvantage in rich countries by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence which states "educational disadvantage is born not at school but in the home. And government efforts to contain that disadvantage – in order to foster social cohesion and maximise investments in education – must also take into account what is now known about early childhood development. The essence of that knowledge is not complicated: learning begins at birth, and a loving, secure,

²⁴ Heckman, J.J., 1999, Policies to Foster Human Capital, Aaron Wildavsky Forum; see also Heckman, J.J., 2000, "Policies to Foster Human Capital", Research in Economics, volume 54.

stimulating environment, with time devoted to play, reading, talking and listening to infants and young children, lays down the foundations for cognitive and social skills. No government can therefore ignore the issue of what happens in the pre-school years²⁶.

It is these findings which provide the rationale for early childhood education and care, of which there are a wide range of initiatives in Ireland as elsewhere. In Ireland, particularly since the second half of the 1990s, there has been a substantial growth in these interventions, mainly in the form of “pilot projects”, with financial involvement from different Government Departments and the EU Commission. Examples include the Pilot Childcare Initiative and its successor, the National Childcare Programme as well as the Early Start Pre-School Pilot Scheme, Family Resource Centres and numerous initiatives under the auspices of local and community development programmes. In the US, the best known example is Head Start while the UK has more recently introduced the SureStart Programme.

The findings of evaluations into the effects of early childhood intervention programmes for children living in disadvantaged backgrounds are very similar, and indicate that such programmes improve cognitive development during early childhood and result in long-term improvement in learning and school success²⁷. These programmes also bring improvement in social interaction skills and in preparedness for school. A further finding is that high quality early childhood education programmes have been more successful than more modestly funded and less focused large-scale public programmes. One review summarised the findings of these evaluations as follows: “Interventions can and do make a difference to children and the size of the difference is directly related to the quality and style of the interventions; high quality programmes which focus on the child’s social interaction skills seem more likely to have long-term benefits and, for that reason, to be more cost effective. However ... no one intervention can overcome all the disadvantages which children from poor and vulnerable families are likely to experience²⁸”.

²⁵ Kellaghan, T., Weir, S., O’Huallacháin, S., and Morgan, M., 1995, *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency and the Educational Research Centre, p.41.

²⁶ UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre, 2002, *A League Table of Educational Disadvantage in Rich Nations*, Innocenti Report Card Number 4, Florence: Innocenti Research Centre, p.3.

²⁷ Kellaghan, T., 2002, “Approaches to Problems of Educational Disadvantage”, in *Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum*, 1-5 July, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, p.21.

²⁸ McKeown, K, *A Guide to What Works in Family Support Services for Vulnerable Families*, October, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.27. Available at www.doh.ie

The overwhelming importance of the early years should not cloud the fact that the risks of educational disadvantage occur at all stages of the educational lifecycle. This is acknowledged in the National Development Plan (2000-2006) which states that “addressing educational disadvantage requires intervention in the context of a continuum of provision from early childhood through to adulthood”²⁹. In Ireland, the programme which specifically focuses on the role of families in educational disadvantage is the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme. This programme, which was first introduced in 1990, tries to increase the parents involvement in their children’s education while also addressing any obstacles which the family may be encountering in supporting their child’s education.

2.2 School Influences

Schools are central to the education process but are particularly important in addressing educational disadvantage. This is because children who are disadvantaged are more dependent on school experiences for achievements in literacy, numeracy and other subjects compared to their more advantaged peers. In addition, disadvantaged children are likely to begin school with fewer positive literacy experiences and less literacy knowledge. It is important therefore to understand how schools work and to find forms of intervention which are effective in addressing educational disadvantage. These considerations make schools a crucially important in addressing educational disadvantage.

A recent study, entitled *Do Schools Differ?*³⁰, used a representative sample of Irish secondary schools to find out if school characteristics made any difference to the outcomes of students, both academic and non-academic. The results showed that schools have a substantial impact on academic performance even after the ability of students at intake is taken into account. Schools in which students are placed in mixed ability classes do much better academically in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate than schools with classes which are streamed according to ability. Similarly, academic performance is higher where schools offer flexibility in subject choice, have formal structures for pupil involvement, where discipline is perceived as ‘strict but fair’, where pupils tend to have positive interactions with teachers and where teachers have high expectations of pupils. The study also found that these school characteristics also had a significant influence on absenteeism and drop-out. In addition,

²⁹ National Development Plan, 2000-2006, (1999), November, Dublin: Stationery Office, pp. 97-98.

³⁰ Smyth, E., 1999, *Do Schools Differ? Academic and Personal Development Among Pupils in the Second-Level Sector*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

there was a significant if more modest differences between schools in terms of the personal and social development of students. According to the author, “pupils tend to have lower stress levels, more positive views of their abilities and even their appearances, and greater sense of control over their lives where they experience more positive interaction with their teachers”³¹.

These findings are in line with other evidence on school practices, particularly the practice of grouping students in classes according to their ability which is known to reinforce rather than reduce educational disadvantage. According to one review of the evidence, “the grouping together of students of low levels of achievement has been found to have negative effects on students’ motivation and achievement and so is likely to reinforce, rather than solve, the problems of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds”³².

Another aspect of the school is the curriculum. This is centrally determined by the Department of Education and Science but nevertheless forms an integral part of how students experience school on a day-to-day basis. The Junior and Leaving Certificate defines achievement in somewhat narrow academic terms and, for some students, this undervalues other knowledge and skills, leading to disaffection among those who are not likely to perform well. In response to this a new Leaving Certificate Vocational and Leaving Certificate Applied programme has been introduced as well as a range of Post-Leaving Certificate programmes. The effects of the new Leaving Certificate on educational disadvantage has still to be assess although the fact that the Applied Leaving Certificate is not recognised for progression to most higher education institutions undermines its value. As regards the Post-Leaving Certificate programmes, the indications that those availing of them tend to be those who already have the Leaving Certificate with the result that it “has not benefited those without general educational qualifications to the same extent”³³. Others, such as the National Economic and Social Council, have also identified the curriculum as crucial in addressing educational disadvantage: “international evidence suggests that success in reducing educational disadvantage is closely linked to success in diversifying what is on offer within the senior cycle of secondary education (in curriculum, courses and pedagogies) to cater for a

³¹ Smyth, E., 2000, “How Schools Differ”, in Furlong, C., and Monahan, L., (Editor), *School, Culture and Ethos: Cracking the Code*, Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, p.101.

³² Kellaghan, T., Weir, S., O’Huallacháin, S., and Morgan, M., 1995, *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency and the Educational Research Centre, pp.64-65.

wider range of student intelligences and abilities”³⁴. In line with this, the National Economic and Social Forum has also highlighted the importance of widening “non-formal provision for early school leavers”³⁵.

Many of the initiatives to address educational disadvantage in Ireland involve increased financial assistance to schools as well as measures to reduce teacher-pupil ratios. However the precise way in which these measures are expected to reduce educational disadvantage is often not made explicit and this may account for their limited effectiveness. For example, it has been found that reductions in class size only result in improved educational performance if teachers change their teaching styles³⁶. This is because smaller classes provide an opportunity to increase the amount and quality of teacher-pupil interaction by allowing the class time to be structured differently, giving more support for learning through small groups and one-to-one teaching. If teaching does not change as a result of reduced class size, then it will have little impact on learning. Some experts have suggested that this lesson has not been learned in the design of interventions to address educational disadvantage in Ireland: “The neglect of concern for the role of teaching is evident in the ways in which we continue to provide intervention programmes which look to schools and teachers to address children’s problems of low achievement and early school leaving, but do not acknowledge that changes of emphasis in relation to curriculum content, and changes in teaching approaches and methodologies, may be necessary qualities of the intervention”³⁷.

2.3 Neighbourhood and Contextual Influences

The exact way in which neighbourhoods influence educational disadvantage is difficult to measure and depends in part on how neighbourhood characteristics are defined. It is known that children from disadvantaged family backgrounds tend to have lower educational achievements than children from more privileged backgrounds. However, and it is this fact which underlines the importance of neighbourhood effects, children from poor backgrounds

³³ Smyth, E., and Hannan, DF., 2000, “Education and Inequality”, in Nolan, B., O’Connell, PJ., and Whelan, CT., (Editors), *Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, p.111.

³⁴ National Economic and Social Council, 2003, *An Investment in Quality: Services, Inclusion and Enterprise*, Report Number 111, March, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council, p.380.

³⁵ National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, *Early School Leavers*, Report Number 24, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

³⁶ Biddle, BJ., and Berliner, DC., 2002, “Small Class Size and its Effects: What Does the Evidence say about the Effects of Reducing Class Size”, *Educational Leadership*, Volume 59, Number 5, pp.12-22.; see also Ehrenberg, RG., Brewer, BJ., Gamoran, A., and Willms, JD., 2001, “Does Class Size Matter?”, *Scientific American*, November.

who share their school environment with other poor children have a much greater risk (up to one-and-a-half times greater) of becoming educationally disadvantaged than those who study alongside children from more affluent homes³⁸.

Recent research at the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra, Dublin, has shown that school-level performance of primary and secondary schools in Ireland – based on the average scores of all students in each school – is directly related to the number of students in the school with a Medical Card. The more Medical Care holders in the school, the poorer the academic performance³⁹. The more Medical Cards, the poorer the academic performance, a dramatic illustration of how the clustering of socio-economic characteristics influence not just individual-level performance but school-level performance as well. Parents tend to be aware of these neighbourhood effects and it is this which accounts for the fact that up to half of all second level pupils in Ireland do not attend their nearest school. As one researcher has observed, this indicates a “remarkable degree of active selection of schools on the part of parents and pupils ... [and] is closely related to social class, with those from higher professional groups making more active selections than those from other groups”⁴⁰

The way in which neighbourhoods impact on education, and indeed other aspects of child well-being, include characteristics such as the quality of neighbourliness or ‘social capital’ between families in the area, the degree to which there is shared sense of trust and values in the neighbourhood, including the value placed on education, the physical appearance and safety of the area, as well as the quantity and quality of neighbourhood resources such as childcare, family centres, recreational facilities, libraries, schools, health clinics, arts and crafts classes, etc. The scale of influence exercised by neighbourhood is difficult to measure but estimates tend to vary between 5% and 20%⁴¹.

³⁷ McGough, A., “Addressing Disadvantage: The Role of Teaching”, in Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum, 1-5 July, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, p.73.

³⁸ Willms, J.D. (1992) *Monitoring School Performance – A Guide to Educators*. Bristol: The Falmer Press.

³⁹ Archer, P., 2004, Personal Communication, Educational Research Centre, St’ Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

⁴⁰ Smyth, E., and Hannan, DF., 2000, “Education and Inequality”, in Nolan, B., O’Connell, PJ., and Whelan, CT., (Editors), *Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, p.111.

⁴¹ For a review of studies, see Sampson, RJ., Morenoff, JD., and Gannon-Rowley, T., 2002, “Assessing ‘Neighbourhood Effects’: Social Processes and New Directions in Research”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, volume 28, pp.466-467; see also Pratschke, J., “The Statistical Measurement of Neighbourhood Effects”, in Haase, T., and McKeown, K., 2002, *Developing Disadvantaged Areas Through Area-Based Initiatives: Reflections on over a Decade of Local Development Strategies*, April, Dublin: Area Development Management Limited, pp.42-50.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of how neighbourhoods have an impact on well-being was brought out by the Moving to Opportunity Programme in five US cities: Boston, Baltimore, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. During the course of this programme, low income families from public housing estates were given the choice of moving to private housing in suburban estates or to public housing in another part of the city. This programme provided a simple quasi-experimental design with randomly-selected ‘treatment’ and ‘control’ groups against which to compare the influence of affluent and poor neighbourhoods. The evaluation of this programme in Chicago compared the outcomes of children whose families moved to the suburbs with those who moved to inner-city neighbourhoods and found significant differences in favour of those who moved to the more affluent suburbs in terms of school drop-out rates (5% versus 20%), completion of college education (40% versus 24%), college enrolments (54% versus 21%), and employment (75% versus 41%) at the end of the study⁴². Evaluations for the other cities found that families that moved to more affluent areas experienced improved outcomes vis-à-vis overall physical and mental health, safety, boys’ problem behaviours and well-being⁴³

These findings draw attention to the importance of targeting disadvantaged neighbourhoods as part of a strategy to address educational disadvantage. However there are limitations to this strategy since research in Ireland and elsewhere has shown that the majority of children living in disadvantaged areas are not disadvantaged and the majority of disadvantaged children are not living in disadvantaged areas⁴⁴. Other research has shown that while there are strong pockets of poverty and disadvantage in some local authority housing estates, the broader picture suggests that “poverty, deprivation and disadvantage are spatially pervasive phenomena affecting almost every part of the country and every type of area within the country”⁴⁵. In practice this means that many of the existing programmes on educational disadvantage, which are targeted at disadvantaged areas, although reaching significant proportions of disadvantaged students, are also missing substantial proportions of them. As if to compound this limitation, the definition of disadvantaged areas used by the Department of

⁴² Kaufman J., and Rosebaum, J., 1992, “The Education and Employment of Low-Income Black Youth in White Suburbs”, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Volume 14, pp.229-240.

⁴³ See Sampson, R.J., Morenoff, J.D., and Gannon-Rowley, T., 2002, “Assessing ‘Neighbourhood Effects’: Social Processes and New Directions in Research”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, volume 28, pp.466-467; see also www.wss.princeton.edu/~kling/mto/

⁴⁴ Kellaghan, T., Weir, S., O’Huallacháin, S., and Morgan, M., 1995, *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency and the Educational Research Centre, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵ Nolan, B., Whelan, C.T., and Williams, J., 1999, “Spatial Aspects of Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland”, in Pringle, D., Walsh, J., and Hennessy, M., (Editors), *Poor People, Poor Places: A Geography of Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press, p.71.

Education and Science for the purpose of targeting educational disadvantage tends to be different to that used for local development initiatives in the National Development Plan (2000-2006) with the result that opportunities for coordination at local level are being missed.

In Ireland area-based initiatives have been used to promote local development since 1991 and these initiatives have included projects to address educational disadvantage. A full evaluation of these initiatives has not been undertaken although a number of reviews have been undertaken suggesting some positive impacts⁴⁶. Other Government Departments have also been involved in activities to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged children including the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and the Youth Diversion Programme (funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), the Springboard Programme (funded by the Department of Health and Children), and a wide range of youth and community-based programmes (funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs). However one of the difficulties with area-based initiatives to address educational disadvantage is that the Department of Education and Science does not have a regional or local administrative structure (apart from the schools themselves), and this makes coordination difficult at local level. As one report has observed, “locally based inter-agency bodies have always had difficulty engaging with the Department in a meaningful way at local level”⁴⁷.

2.4 Public Policy Influences

Educational disadvantage is influenced by virtually every aspect of public policy, but particularly by the policies and programmes in the Department of Education and Science. As we have seen, a wide range of programmes have been developed to specifically address educational disadvantage. In all, there are currently 33 separate programmes addressing educational disadvantage in primary and secondary schools at an annual cost of €133 million⁴⁸. These are targeted at about 300 schools, about 10% of the total although about 40% of these are in urban areas. The largest of these programmes include:

- Home-School-Community Liaison Programme (introduced in 1990)
- Early Start (introduced in 1994).

⁴⁶ See Haase, T., and McKeown, K., 2002, *Developing Disadvantaged Areas Through Area-Based Initiatives: Reflections on over a Decade of Local Development Strategies*, April, Dublin: Area Development Management Limited.

⁴⁷ National Crime Council, 2002, *Tackling the Underlying Causes of Crime: A Partnership Approach*, Dublin: National Crime Council.

⁴⁸ Áine Hyland, 11 February 2004, personal communication.

- Breaking the Cycle (introduced in 1996) and its replacement Giving Children an Even Break by Tackling Disadvantage (introduced in 2001),
- the 8-15 Early School Leaving Initiative (introduced in 1998) and the Stay in School Initiative (introduced in 1999) both of which have been subsumed into the School Completion Programme (introduced in 2002).

In addition, a range of structures have been put in place to include educational disadvantage as all, or part, of its brief. These include:

- Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion to coordinate all aspects of social inclusion at Government level (established in 1997)
- Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science to coordinate all aspects of social inclusion (established in 1998)
- Educational Welfare Board to promote school attendance and prevent early school leaving (established in 2001)
- Educational Disadvantage Committee to advise the Minister on all aspects of educational disadvantage (established in 2002)
- Educational Disadvantage Forum to inform the Minister on all aspects of educational disadvantage (established in 2002)
- ADM Partnerships and Community Groups whose work includes educational disadvantage (established from 1991 onwards)
- RAPID and CLÁR programmes⁴⁹ which coordinate services in a range of areas including educational disadvantage.

This range of activity is impressive although its impact on educational disadvantage is generally thought to be less than impressive. Initial evaluations of these initiatives are generally regarded as disappointing^{50 51 52}. According to one expert, “there is little or no convincing evidence that measurable pupil outcomes such as examination results or literacy and numeracy levels have improved as a result of these interventions. Surprisingly, even

⁴⁹ For an overview of these programmes, see Haase, T., and McKeown, K., 2003, *Developing Disadvantaged Areas Through Area-Based Initiatives: Reflections on Over a Decade of Local Development Strategies*, April, Dublin: Area Development Management Limited.

⁵⁰ Educational Research Centre, 1998, *Early Start Pre-School Programme: Final Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.

⁵¹ Ryan, S., 1999, *The Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme: Summary Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.

school attendance and pupil retention figures do not show significant improvement in schools which have been targeted for additional resourcing under these programmes. However, since base-line data is often scarce and unreliable, and since there has not been a tradition in educational circles in Ireland of focused target setting or of statistical measurement, it is difficult to assert with any degree of certainty what the outcomes of many of the targeted interventions have been”⁵³. The practical evidence for this is that the number of young people who are leaving school without any qualification has remained unchanged since 1997⁵⁴.

In addition, the structures for coordinating initiatives for educational disadvantage have not been effective, partly because the education sector generally has not participated in structures for coordination and integration to the degree that is possible or desirable⁵⁵. This reflects a more general problem with the public sector where coordination between different areas of functional responsibility has tended to be poor. The fact that educational disadvantage is inseparable from the influences of family, school, neighbourhood and a wide range of public policies implies that any response to the problem needs to take this multi-faceted dimension into account. However the inter-related nature of problems has not always been recognised in practice and professionals and agencies often fail to communicate with each other with the result that young people experiencing educational disadvantage often fall between the cracks.

In response to these difficulties the Educational Disadvantage Forum⁵⁶ and the Educational Disadvantage Committee⁵⁷ have called for a radical re-structuring of the entire approach to educational disadvantage. In December 2003, the Educational Disadvantage Committee recommended “a substantial shift away from the current programme-based approach” which, if adopted, would lead to the abolition of all of the programmes listed above – except the Home-School-Community Liaison Programme - and their replacement by “a single pool of

⁵² Weir, S., Milis, L., and Ryan, C., 2002, *The Breaking the Cycle Scheme in Urban Schools: Final Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.

⁵³ Hyland, A., 2002, “Looking to the Future – Ending Disadvantage?”, in *Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum*, 1-5 July, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, p.49.

⁵⁴ National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, *Early School Leavers*, Report Number 24, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

⁵⁵ See Haase, T., and McKeown, K., 2003, *Developing Disadvantaged Areas Through Area-Based Initiatives: Reflections on Over a Decade of Local Development Strategies*, April, Dublin: Area Development Management Limited.

⁵⁶ Educational Disadvantage Forum, 2002, *Report of Inaugural Meeting*, 18 November, Dublin Castle, Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

resources” which would be allocated to schools according to the level of educational disadvantage and would be deployed according to a written school plan. The central allocation of resources to educational disadvantage would be based on improved methods for identifying the degree of educational disadvantage within different schools, while financial and teaching resource would be allocated according to their rank scores in a table of educational disadvantage. The key steps in the proposals put forward by the Educational Disadvantage Committee include the following:

- Revisiting the selection of primary and post-primary schools to establish a rank order of schools based on the percentage of pupils with characteristics of disadvantage
- Devising a formula for the distribution of resources on a sliding scale consistent with the qualitative nature of educational disadvantage in schools
- Realigning programme support, on a phased basis, in terms of extra teachers and financial provision by shifting resources in accordance with the appropriate ranking and agreed levels of automatic entitlement
- Amalgamating the existing programme support services and bringing them together under a single educational disadvantage support structure with a specific focus on supporting schools in planning, implementation and evaluation.

Given that the Educational Disadvantage Committee is a statutory body with the specific remit to advise the Minister on educational disadvantage, it seems likely that significant changes may take place during 2004 in the overall strategy for tackling educational disadvantage in Ireland.

2.5 Summary

It is clear from this that educational disadvantage is a significant problem at all levels of the education system and is influenced by the characteristics of families, schools, neighbourhoods and by broader public policies. There has been significant progress in terms of the proportion of students completing the Junior and Leaving Certificate as well as the numbers entering third level colleges. Despite this progress, one recent review concluded that “in spite of the rapid increase in educational participation since the early 1980s and recent initiatives to counter educational disadvantage, educational participation and

⁵⁷ Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003, A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-Based Educational Inclusion Measures: Submission to the Minister for Education and Science, December, Dublin Castle, Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

attainment remain strongly differentiated in terms of social class background. Indeed there is evidence of a widening gap between the social classes in third-level entry⁵⁸. At the same time, Ireland compares reasonably well in terms of educational disadvantage with 24 other rich countries, a finding which gives no ground for complacency but illustrates that educational disadvantage is pervasive in all countries with some countries addressing it more effectively than others. It is on that ground that we now identify a number of opportunities that may be worthy of funding in the search for promising ways of addressing educational disadvantage.

3. The Challenge: Service Gaps and Opportunities

It is clear from the previous section that there is a substantial amount of activity which is endeavouring to address educational disadvantage in Ireland. Relatively little is known about what works, and this suggests that projects with the potential to produce lessons about effectiveness would be particularly worth considering. We now outline a selection of project ideas which address educational disadvantage from which lessons may be learned about effective ways of doing this work. Our selection of projects covers all stages in the educational lifecycle, with the exception of access to third level although the projects identified are likely to impact on that; moreover, as a recent report observed, there is already a substantial amount of resources directed at third level access⁵⁹.

3.1 Develop Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project Based on Evidence of Best Practice

We know that the seeds of educational disadvantage are sown in the early years of the child's life and indeed are measurable from a very early age. This is because the family's economic, social, and cultural characteristics exercise a powerful influence on the child's subsequent development. Faced with this reality, policy makers and researchers are consistently asking the question if there are ways of weakening the process by which certain family characteristics produce educational disadvantage, often from one generation to another. Early childhood education and care programmes have been developed in many countries, including Ireland, but the evidence that they work, as we have seen, is rather limited. What is

⁵⁸ Smyth, E., and Hannan, DF., 2000, "Education and Inequality", in Nolan, B., O'Connell, PJ., and Whelan, CT., (Editors), *Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, p.125.

⁵⁹ Fleming, T., and Gallagher, A., *Power, Privilege and Points: The Choices and Challenges of Third Level Access in Dublin*, Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact.

known, as we have seen above, is that high quality, well-resourced programmes can make a significant difference in addressing educational disadvantage and other child outcomes⁶⁰. The most dramatically successful programmes, based on systematic evaluations, are US-based, and include the Perry Pre-School Project, the Infant Health and Development Programme (IHDP) and the Carolina Abecedarian Project.

In view of this, there is a strong case for inviting a well-established and reputable voluntary organisation such as Barnardos or the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services to develop an early childhood development and care project for Ireland based on best practice elsewhere, and to do so in partnership with all the key stakeholders involved. This would be an evidence-based project founded on best-practice from elsewhere but transferred and customised to Irish conditions. It would be located in an area with one of the highest rankings in terms of educational disadvantage; it could even be targeted exclusively at Traveller children and families. The emphasis in this project would be on quality which, according to a recent OECD report on early childhood education and care, includes a well-informed and clear vision of purpose and aims, strong partnership with both families and primary school systems, well thought-out access policies to enable all children at risk to participate, high standards of staffing, motivation, and in-service training, and a built-in long-term agenda for research and evaluation⁶¹. In addition, quality includes the difficult-to-define yet crucial element which the OECD describes as “a stimulating, warm and supportive interaction with children”⁶². The challenge for this project therefore is to replicate the type of care and education which most parents in a position to do so are already providing but which is so difficult to replicate in funded programmes.

3.2 Support a Digital Community Project

Computer literacy is one of the keys to full participation in society. A recent study in Dublin has shown that access to computers as well as competence and confidence in their use is strongly related to level of education and is giving rise to a “digital divide” which threatens to exclude people who are educationally disadvantaged from the opportunities and benefits of

⁶⁰ For reviews of the evidence, see Shonkoff, JP., and Phillips, DA., (Editors), 2000, *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, Washington DC: National Academy Press; Danziger, S., and Waldfogel, J., (Editor), 2000, *Securing the Future: Investing in Children from Birth to College*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁶¹ OECD, 2001, *Starting Strong – Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris: OECD.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.96.

new technology⁶³. In recognition of this, the Dublin Institute of Technology has come up with the 'Digital Community Project' by providing computer training in eleven of the most disadvantaged communities in Dublin, including Fatima Mansions, St. Teresa's Gardens, O'Devaney's Gardens, Dolphin House, Iveagh Trust, Michael Malin House, Whitefriar Street, Charlemont Street, Bridgefoot Street, Hardwicke Street and Domnick Street flats. The project has the support of Hewlett Packard, Dublin City Council, Eircom, the Digital Hub and the Department of Education and Science.

The project has the following specific objectives:

- To locate and develop computer centres in 11 inner city flat complexes in Dublin where educational disadvantage is known to be a serious problem;
- To use computers to increase the self-esteem, confidence and skills of residents;
- To train residents in a certified Microsoft IT Academy so that they can become trainers for others in the community;
- To provide full technical support to ensure the project delivers a sustainable high quality service;
- To empower each group of residents with the skills to sustain the project indefinitely;
- To up-skill residents with a view to acquiring quality jobs.

The project is well supported by all the key stakeholders but there is need for a separate budget to cover the overall management and administration of the project for a five year period. There are also plans to extend the project to other areas of educational disadvantage. Further information on the project and its need for support is available from Dr. Tommy Cook at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

3.3 Develop an Integrated Learning Centre

It is widely recognised that one of the main problems in the public sector is the lack of coordination and integration of services. This is particularly acute in the case of education where schools remain relatively isolated from most other services and this has negative consequences for those experiencing educational disadvantage. In addition, educational provision within schools, particularly at second level, tends to be structured inflexibly around

⁶³ Haase, T., and Pratschke, J., 2003, Digital Divide: Analysis of the Uptake of Information Technology in the Dublin Region, Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact.

the curriculum whereas a more modular approach may suit some learners, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage. The Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change has put forward the concept of an integrated learning centre as a way of addressing these difficulties in order to provide a holistic response to educational disadvantage. The core objectives of the integrated learning centre would be:

- To provide a new learning experience to benefit all participants but particularly those who experience educational disadvantage;
- To facilitate the coming together of the various practitioners both voluntary and statutory working within the community in order to collaborate with a view to co-ordinating and integrating their services;
- To establish systems and structures for lifelong learning to ensure *a relatively seamless progression through an educational continuum from cradle to grave* (White Paper: Learning for Life: 30);
- To promote intergenerational learning;
- To offer easy access to the type of learning that is tailored to the needs of adults in the community and that will result in worthwhile outcomes in terms of their individual and collective development.
- To empower individuals and communities to change educational policy and systems.

It is envisaged that the centre would be a multi-purpose, fully-serviced learning space paying particular attention to its built environment. It could be a 'greenfield site' or accommodated within a current complex of schools / centres, located in a disadvantaged area but ensuring a balanced social mix of service users. The centre would be a national initiative promoting an alternative approach to educational disadvantage and would involve all the key stakeholders. Participating organisations would contribute financial resources or staff resources such as social worker, family support worker, youth worker, adult and community education worker, etc. A project manager would be needed to drive the initial concept and to facilitate initiatives such as in-service training for all staff, re-organisation of teaching and other staff time, structural arrangements to facilitate the integration of different services, ongoing monitoring, evaluation and research as part of the overall pilot.

The Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change would be willing to spearhead this initiative and, through their extensive contacts in the educational world, could identify suitable sites where it could be piloted.

3.4 Provide Technical Supports to Teachers and Schools Addressing Educational Disadvantage

Research on the factors influencing educational disadvantage clearly indicates, as we have seen, that teachers and schools make a unique contribution to the educational performance of students. This insight underpins an innovative programme developed by University College Cork which involves offering a range of supports to 42 schools in the city. The project, entitled ‘Bridging the Gap’, is designed to bridge the gap between the educational opportunities and achievements of pupils in disadvantaged areas compared to those in other areas. The project has five strands comprising:

1. Professional development of teachers through regular workshops and seminars
2. Establishing networks involving teachers, principals and community workers, on relevant topics for the purpose of sharing and building on good practice
3. Encouraging research, particularly among teachers in gathering and analysing data to assess the achievement of goals and targets
4. Disseminating findings on good practice drawing on local, national and international research
5. Combining school and community interventions aimed at improving educational experience and performance.

The evaluation report on the project for 2003 stated: “The results of the project are visible in improved attitudes, performance and motivation of pupils, as well as in the more focused approach to educational inclusion that has been adopted by the participating schools. The project has also achieved significant outcomes in the areas of professional development for teachers and principals, educational research, the establishment of productive networks, and dissemination of effective practice”⁶⁴.

There is a strong case for extending this project to support teachers and schools in rural areas such as counties Cork and Kerry and the project director, Professor Áine Hyland, is interested

⁶⁴ Deane, C., 2003, Bridging the Gap: Evaluation Report, October, University College Cork: Education Department.

in discussing this possibility. This project also opens the prospect of linking universities in other cities to schools in disadvantaged areas and is worthy of further consideration.

3.5 Pilot Innovative Responses to the Needs of Disadvantaged Young Boys

There is clear evidence that boys are doing less well at school than girls. In Ireland, boys are more likely to leave school with no qualifications and achieve less well in the Junior and Leaving Certificate⁶⁵. St. Vincent's Trust in Dublin, which has specialised in designing and delivering programmes for early school leavers since the 1970s, has found that boys are also more likely than girls to drop out of programmes in the non-formal education sector and this has led it to identify the need for more specific programmes tailored to the needs of disadvantaged young boys.

St. Vincent's Trust would like to undertake an in-depth study of the factors associated with the alienation of young boys from education and training and, on the basis of such a study, to design programmes that are more appealing and supportive of young men. Its experience suggests that many of these young men come from families and communities where there is an absence of caring father figures. Following their experience of failure in the educational system, many of these young boys drift easily into drugs, crime, homelessness and imprisonment; for some, this may be followed by depression and suicide.

This project is still at the conceptual stage and would require funding to bring it through to implementation. The Director of St. Vincent's Trust, Catherine Prendergast, is seeking support to develop this initiative.

3.6 Offer Direct Support to Schools in Disadvantaged Areas

In preparing this document we consulted the principals in two schools - one primary, one secondary - which have been designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Science. The primary school is St. Joseph's and is located in the north side of Dublin; the secondary school is Synge Street and is located in Dublin's south inner city. Since both schools are located in disadvantaged areas they are unable to meet shortfalls in state funding

⁶⁵ National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, Early School Leavers, Report Number 24, March, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum, pp.32-33; Smyth, E., and Hannan, DF., 2000, "Education and Inequality", in Nolan, B., O'Connell, PJ., and Whelan, CT., (Editors), Bust to Boom? The Experience of Growth and Inequality, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp.116-117.

through fund-raising from parents. For this reason, there are significant needs in the school which funding could address.

The Principal in St. Joseph's Primary School, Rosaline O'Donnell, indicated a need for funding for the following items:

- Build a fully -quipped stage in the hall to allow the children perform dramas which would benefit them in terms of self -esteem and confidence, enhance spoken language, allow the children to be creative, act out feelings and emotions, drama workshops on topics such as bullying, grief, growing up, etc. Some assistance from a trained professional would be needed in the use of the stage equipment.
- Equip the school hall with gymnasium equipment. The school would also like to employ a specialist teachers in aerobics, movement and gymnastics.
- A school bus - which would be regularly taxed, insured and serviced - is needed to take children to theatres, concert hall, art galleries, sports venues and outings of historical and geographical importance. Children at this school never get these opportunities since the school does not have resources to hire buses and the children miss out on valuable cultural experiences.
- IT equipment is needed such as computers, laptops, cameras, screens, and software. We would like to be in a position to employ an IT teacher who would not only up-skill the pupils but would also teach skills to parents of our children. Very few parents in our area are computer literate and this would have the benefit of increasing their self confidence and esteem and would be a positive in their relationship with their children. This is an area where our children lag behind other areas in so far as there are very few computers in their houses.
- A small fund to pay professionals and guest speakers to come and talk to parents about issues such as parenting children with challenging behaviour or sourcing help for children with language, emotional or behavioural problems. This fund could also be used to invite guest authors children poetry and stories to speak and read their work as a way of promoting a love of literature.
- Equip the kitchen so that children can be taught cooking skills as part of home economics.
- A horticultural tunnel in the garden where children, particularly those with special needs, could learn to grow plants and learn to care for the environment.

The Principal in Synge Street Secondary School, Keith Ryan, outlined two areas where funding could make a significant difference in meeting the needs of students. The first is a Technology Room which would allow the school to offer at least one practical subject such as woodwork, metalwork, technical graphics or technology. At present the school is unable to offer any practical subjects, apart from art and computers. This is a serious gap since most of the students are more oriented to practical rather than academic subjects. The estimated cost of a Technology Room is estimated to be around €50,000 but the Department of Education grant is only €6,500. The second requirement is a librarian. The school has a fully-equipped library but no one to run it. If the school had a librarian it could run a wide range of library-based activities – classes, events, activities – which would benefit pupils, teachers and parents.

4. Conclusion

In this document we have mapped out some of the key dimensions of educational disadvantage and the factors associated with it, particularly the influences exercised by family, school, neighbourhood and public policy. Consistent with this, we identified initiatives where project funding could make a difference. The areas identified offer a balance between prevention, early intervention and treatment and could make a significant impact on educational disadvantage. These initiatives need to be seen in the broader context of education for which the Department of Education and Science has primary responsibility. At the same time, the initiatives proposed could, if successful, have the effect of influencing the broader policy environment affecting educational disadvantage and it might be useful to bear this consideration in mind in selecting projects for funding. We also took care in selecting the projects to ensure that none of them duplicated or displaced existing sources of funding with the result that these initiatives represent genuine additionality in tackling the problem of educational disadvantage. Overall, the initiatives seem to strike the right balance by finding opportunities to address educational disadvantage that are not currently being met.

Appendix One Persons Consulted: Listed Alphabetically

Name	Position	Organisation
Peter Archer	Senior Research Officer	Education Research Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. www.erc.ie
Jim Cooke	Teacher	Synge Street Secondary School, Dublin 8.
Tommy Cooke	Director	Digital Community Project www.dit.ie – community links
Maura Grant	Director of Programmes on Educational Disadvantage	Department of Education and Science
Áine Hyland	Chairperson & UCC Professor	Educational Disadvantage Committee http://bridgingthegap.ucc.ie
Cyril Kelly	Former Principal	St. Brendan's National School, Artane, Dublin 11
Bernie McDonald	Education Coordinator	Area Development Management Limited (ADM), Holles St, Dublin 2.
Anne O'Gara	School Inspector & former Home-School-Liaison Teacher	Dublin
Rosaline O'Donnell	Principal	St. Joseph's Primary School, Macroom Rd., Bonnybrook, Dublin 11.

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Catherine Prendergast	Director	St. Vincent's Trust, 9 Henrietta St. Dublin 1.
David Rose	Director	Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change www.presentation.ie
Eithne Wolfe	Director	CORI Education Office