Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Ireland case study report 1
School Completion Programme:
Addressing the drop out

This report was written by Katya Williams on behalf of the UK Country Team:
Carole Leathwood, Marie-Pierre Moreau, Alistair Ross, Nicola Rollock, Katya Williams and Sarah Minty

IPSE
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University, UK

February 2008

IPSE INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES IN EDUCATION LONDON metropolitan university

UNIVERZITA HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ

KATHO KATHOLIEKE HOGESCHOOL ZUID-WEST-VLAANDEREN ASSOCIATIE K.U.LEUVEN

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ

MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA

Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III

UAB Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

School Completion Programme (SCP): Addressing the drop out

Summary

This case study reviews the Irish government's School Completion Programme (SCP). Early school leaving is defined as persons aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of educational attainment is lower secondary or below. The initiative aims to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people at risk of leaving school early and operates through schools, providing extra support to primary schools with low rates of retention and packages of support for young people at risk of dropping out of compulsory education. The programme works with schools, parents, and the community and provides activities in and out of school to help children and young people to engage with school. This case study sets the project in its historical and political context, describes its aims and objectives, the stages of its implementation, and the project outcomes.

Background on school completion

- In 2004, 12.9 percent of Irish young people left school early compared with an EU average of 15.9 percent (CSO 2004)
- The unemployment rate for early school leavers in this age group was 21.8 percent in 2004 compared with an unemployment rate of 7.9 percent for all persons aged 18-24.
- According to the 2002/2003 School Leavers' survey 23.5 percent and 13.2 percent of Irish men and women respectively, left school prior to completion of Leaving Certificate or its equivalent.

Policy Background

The School Completion Programme forms part of the Irish government's National Anti- Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and aims to reduce the impact of poverty on educational outcomes. The SCP is a key component of the Department's strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. The programme is funded by the Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund.

The Project Aims and Objectives

One of the key targets of the Strategy is 'to reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete support second level of equivalent will reach 85 percent by 2003 and 90 percent by 2006' (DES 2008). This measure aims to address this with targeted support aimed at increasing school retention to ensure completion of senior cycle at post-primary level. Another key target of the NAPS Strategy is 'to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006' and 'to reduce the proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy to below 10 to 20 per cent by 2007'.

The School Completion Programme (SCP) incorporates the learning, experience and elements of best practice established by the 8–15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) and the Stay-in-School Retention Initiative at Second Level (SSRI), the pilot phases of which came to an end in August and July 2002 respectively and is based on these key principles:

The School Completion Programme is based on a number of principles:

1. The programme is based on the principle of partnership. Schools (primary and post-primary), parents and relevant agencies collaborate formally through Local Management Committees and informally through the local co-coordinators.

2. The programme is young person centred. Each targeted young person at risk of early school leaving has supports tailor-made to suit his/her personal and academic needs.

3. The programme is preventative. Young people at risk of early school leaving are supported from an early age in recognition that home, school, environmental, social and economic factors influence the patterns of early school leaving.

4. The programme is based on a bottom-up approach. Different forms of support are offered in each cluster, depending on local needs, in recognition of the fact that local factors can influence early school leaving.

5. The young person's inclusion in the programme is based on an agreed set of criteria targeting those most at risk of early school leaving.

6. A "whole school" approach can be utilised in order to minimise the potential stigmatisation of young people at risk of early school leaving.

7. Supports are offered in-school, after-school, out-of-school and during holiday time in recognition of the fact that continuous support must be given to young people at risk of early school leaving.

8. Breaking the pattern of early school leaving and educational disadvantage is key to the programme. (DES 2008)

Implementation of the project

The project works through community networks of schools under the guidance of a management committee which devises initiatives and planned activities (in school, out of school and holiday support projects for children at risk). A key element underpinning the project is collaboration between schools, voluntary agencies and a planning process involving staff, parents and young people.

The scheme initially invited primary and second level schools in the most deprived communities with high levels of early school to bid for funding from the School Completion Programme.

Schools involved in the project design a retention plan - of activities and interventions that will prevent early school leaving and support young people with characteristics and behaviours that are indicative of real risk. Each local network must in the first instance target their support at individual young people who are most at risk of early school leaving. Beyond that activities and interventions which have a broader remit (sport and leisure facilities) or which benefit the whole school population may also be included in a network's retention plan. The programme also encourages schools to develop an "ethos of retention" making make school more relevant, meaningful and attractive to the pupils who are most at risk and promoting senior cycle as a natural progression.

The local retention plan acts as a contract between schools and service providers in the community network and the programme's coordination service (which supports monitors and evaluates the retention plans and their implementation).

Local networks are also encouraged to provide after-school, holiday time, home, family and community support and activities to improve young people's attitude to and readiness to benefit from education.

Project Outcomes

By June 2004
- 82 project sites, comprising of 112 post primary schools and 300 primary schools, are participating in the School Completion Programme.
- 53 second level schools remain supported under the "Stay In School Retention" strand of SCP up to 31 August 2005.
- From September 2003 to August 2004, a total of 19,476 pupils benefited from SCP.

Project Strand:

- 14,983 pupils who are most-at-risk of early school leaving
- 985 young people who have already left school early

Stay in School Retention Strand:

- 3,508 pupils received support under the Stay in School Retention Strand.

The Irish government aim to extend both the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the SSP and not already benefiting from these services within the next 5 years. These are to be combined with the Giving Children an Even Break programme into a new School Support Programme which will better coordinate provision for schools in disadvantaged areas.

References

Central Statistics Office (2004) Measuring Ireland's Progress http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/other_releases/2004/progress/measuringirelandsprogress.pdf Accessed 14/02/08

DEIS (2005) An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/DEIS_action_plan_on_educational_inclusion.pdf?language=EN Accessed 14/02/08

DES (2008) Aims and Principles of the School Completion Programme http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/si_aims_and_principles_scp.pdf Accessed 14/02/08

Department of Education and Science (2003) Retention Rates of Post Primary School Pupils 1994 Cohort, Dublin: Stationery Office, p 24

National Development Programme website: http://www.ndp.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=%2Fdocuments%2Foverview%2Fobjectives-and-strategy.htm&mn=ovem&nID=1 Accessed 14/02/08

Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2004) *A Review of school-based measures aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland.* Report to the Educational Disadvantage Committee. Dublin: Educational Research Centre

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/edc_review_measures.doc?language=EN Accessed 13/02/08

http://www.cfj.ie/content/view/154/100/ Accessed 14/02/08