

Appendix 2 - DE Policy Context

2.1 The vision of the Department of Education is for every young person to achieve to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development. The mission statement states that *“we will work together as partners in education and youth services to ensure a high standard of education for all children and young people, which will put them at the centre of education, motivate them, build their confidence and enrich their lives, and provide the foundation for a strong and vibrant economy.”*

2.2 In his statement of 26 September 2011 to the Assembly, the Minister restated his commitment to raise standards and tackle underachievement and inequality in the education system. The Minister described as unacceptable the gaps in achievement, especially between those pupils from disadvantaged areas and those from more affluent backgrounds. The holistic view of the education of young people is rightly focussing on elements such as pastoral care, personal and social development, health and well-being, all of which are critical to young people becoming citizens who make a positive and active contribution to their communities. The Business Plan of the Department of Education, and its key priority areas, are determined in the context of the spending plans for Departments approved by the Executive, the wider policy context, the Programme for Government and the Investment Strategy. The priorities for the Department of Education are:

- Raising Standards For All
- Closing the Performance Gap, Increasing Access and Equality
- Developing The Education Workforce
- Improving The Learning Environment
- Transforming Education Management

2.3 Each of these priorities are directly relevant to youth work as part of education and therefore closely link to the priorities developed here.

2.4 Standards in many schools are good. However, there is a variation, in particular, in the extent to which schools serving similar communities enable their pupils to acquire the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, without which children are likely to struggle in other areas of their education. Raising standards overall, and at the same time closing the gap in performance between the least and most disadvantaged pupils, must therefore be the top priority within the Education Service.

2.5 Education provides an opportunity for children and young people to overcome early disadvantage and grow up with strong aspirations and prospects for future employment and citizenship. It can secure improved outcomes for young people today and for future generations. It is essential therefore that education is viewed in its widest sense, focused on ensuring that every pupil fulfils their academic potential and personal and social development, and develops strong skills in numeracy, literacy, and employability.

Key Education Policies and Priorities

Every School a Good School

2.6 'Every School a Good School – A Policy for School Improvement' (ESaGS) was launched in 2009. This is a key strategy which focuses on how schools meet the needs of all pupils, including children who struggle with disadvantage. The strategy seeks to improve the life chances of all young people by raising attainment levels. It is based on the premise that schools themselves are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can bring about better outcomes for pupils. Raising standards for all, while closing the achievement gap, will help, in particular, underachieving pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Extended Schools

2.7 ESaGS policy committed DE to tackling inequality and disadvantage which will be achieved through a suite of programmes, one of which is Extended Schools (ES). The focus on the delivery of a quality education system, responsive to the needs of children, was a key driver for the ES programme. Schools qualify for ES funding based on deprivation indicators. The £11million funding is aimed at supporting activities which should be matched to the needs of the pupils and informed by the local community. The desired outcomes are improved standards of literacy and numeracy, adoption of healthier lifestyles and raised self esteem and aspirations. The programme is directly linked to the Minister's determination to narrow the gap in attainment levels by targeting pupils from areas of deprivation, which will help them to fulfil their potential by overcoming barriers to learning. The activities on offer must be linked to achieving key outcomes for children and may include breakfast clubs, after school study support and after school youth, sport and leisure activities, programmes for parents and community use of schools, and facilitating partnerships and collaboration in order to deliver better outcomes for pupils.

2.8 In a recent ETI evaluation of effective practice in ES, in almost 90% of cases where ES are effectively serving disadvantaged communities, ETI found that significant improvements are evident in the educational outcomes and the personal and social well being of pupils. ETI found that, of the examples of outstanding practice observed, ES is most successful in transforming life chances of individual pupils, thus providing good value for money.

Count, read: succeed – A Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy

2.9 *Count, read: succeed* is set in the context of ESaGS and aligns key work strands with a particular focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes:

- (a) The revised curriculum, which has literacy and numeracy at its core.
- (b) Revised assessment arrangements that complement the curriculum and attach priority to progression in literacy and numeracy.
- (c) Supporting the central role of teachers in raising pupil attainment.
- (d) Early intervention to address underachievement.
- (e) Engaging parents, families and communities.
- (f) More effectively identifying and sharing the best practice that exists in so many schools, including through ESaGS.tv.

2.10 Developing literacy and numeracy is a central element of a school's delivery of the revised curriculum and of the support and professional development for teachers in implementing the curriculum.

Entitlement Framework

2.11 The Entitlement Framework (EF) will guarantee all post primary pupils aged 14 and above greater choice and flexibility by providing them with access to a wide range of learning opportunities suited to their needs, aptitudes and interests, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend, including a minimum range of vocational courses.

2.12 The target date for the full implementation of the EF is September 2013. From that date, schools will be required to provide pupils with access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 (current target 24) and minimum number of courses at post-16 (current target 27). In both cases, at least one-third of the courses must be general (academic) and at least one-third applied (vocational/professional/technical). The remaining one-third of courses is at the discretion of each school and provides schools with an opportunity to develop a unique and distinctive curricular offer. Of equal importance to the range of courses is the coherence of the offer which should enable young people to choose from a package of courses that leads to progression to further education, higher education, training and employment.

2.13 The EF will be part of a wider, co-ordinated 14-19 programme which is being developed jointly by the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning. The programme will ensure complementarity of provision and coherent pathways for young people, with their choice informed by good quality careers education, information advice and guidance. The aim is to provide greater choice and flexibility for young people to select courses that meet their needs and aspirations, as well as the needs of employers and the economy.

Review of Irish Medium Education

2.14 The Review of Irish Medium Education aims to provide an important milestone in the continuing development of Irish-medium Education, by presenting a comprehensive, creative and strategic way forward for the sector. A series of recommendations include a specific recommendation in relation to encouraging and supporting informal opportunities for learning through the medium of Irish in the youth sector and through the extended schools approach.

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity

2.15 The aim of the Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy is to contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self respect and respect for others, by providing children and young people, in formal and non formal education settings, with opportunities to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions within the resources available. The objectives of the policy are:

- Ensure that learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination;
- Educate children and young people to live and participate in a changing world, so that they value and respect difference and engage positively with

it, taking account of the ongoing intercommunity divisions arising from conflict and increasing diversity within our society; and

- Equip children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding and recognition of, and respect for, difference.

Community Use of School Premises

2.16 ESaGS underlined the importance of communities to schools, and the need for engagement between schools and pupils, parents, families and communities. School premises are a significant resource that could be better used by local communities to improve relationships and links between schools and their communities. Existing legislation allows for school premises to be used by outside groups. It is important that schools recognise the significant positive impact that they can make in their communities in support of healthier lifestyles, greater access to facilities, opportunities for extended learning and social activities. DE, on the back of a Working Group Report, has asked the ELBs, working in conjunction with other school sectors, to develop a detailed set of guidelines for schools. The guidance will seek to enhance provision by providing the necessary support to school leaders in considering how their premises can be made available to meet wider community needs and will draw upon the case studies and draft templates identified within the Working Group Report. The guidance may also be of use to the youth sector in considering whether to use school premises.

Area Based Planning

2.17 Area-based planning is a strategic approach to planning education provision on an area basis. It is an important driver in achieving the vision for education as area-based planning is about identifying the education needs of children and young people on an area basis and planning to meet those needs, i.e. it is about ensuring children and young people have the opportunity to access and benefit from services and facilities that can meet

their education needs and enable them to reach their full potential at each stage.

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