

Profiling Challenges to the Education Sector in Donegal in 2012

A Report by the
Economic Sub-Group of
Donegal Children's Services Committee



Donegal County Development Board



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

ag obair le chéile DO LEANAÍ
working together FOR CHILDREN
Coiste Seirbhíse Leanaí Dhún na nGall Donegal Children's Services Committee



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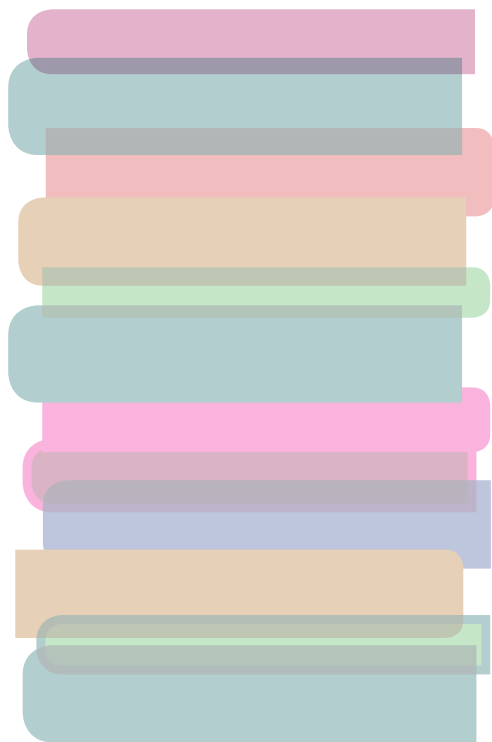
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Chapter 1

The Education Sector in County Donegal



1.1 TOWARDS DEVELOPING A PROFILE

One of the themes underpinning the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the *'right to education, play, leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion'*. Over the last number of years there have been a number of direct and indirect cuts to education, with the potential to impact on this developmental right of the child. This report sets out to examine these cuts and to determine the impact that such cuts will have in the Donegal context.

The starting point for this research is to develop a good understanding and a profile of the educational sector, its infrastructure and programmes in County Donegal. It will set about gaining a better understanding of the population that currently is in the educational system, those about to enter the educational system and those who are about to leave the educational system in the county. Finally, the chapter will summarise the budgetary cuts to the educational sector and the likely impacts that these will have on schools and families in Donegal into the future.

1.2 DEMAND FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

In Donegal there was a total population of 161,137 in 2011. Of this figure, 80,523 were male and 80,614 were female. Over the period of 2006-2011, there was a population increase of 348,404 within the State and an increase of 13,873 people in Donegal.

1.2.1 Pupils in school or about to enter school

The total population aged between 0-19yrs was 47,487 in 2011 in Donegal, and this is the likely users of pre-school, primary and post-primary facilities. Table 1.1; below groups the population into distinctive life cycles. In 2011, there were 10,267 persons 0-3yrs of age, 21,923 persons 4-12 yrs of age and 15,297 persons 13-19yrs of age.

Table 1.1: Educational life cycles in Donegal in 2011

Age Group	Educational Life Cycle	Donegal	State
0-3 yrs	Pre-School Age	21.6%	22.9%
4-12 yrs	Primary School	46.2%	45.3%
13-19 yrs	Post-Primary	32.2%	31.8%

Source: CSO, 2012. Census of the Population, 2011

1.2.2 Pupils who have left the education system

In 2011, 85% of the population aged 15 yrs and over (or 105,743 persons) had ceased their full time education in County Donegal, group characteristics of which are outlined in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1: Summary statistics of persons who have left the educational system

<p>∴ The average age at which people finished their education in Donegal was 18.1 years</p>
<p>The census showed that there was some improvement in the percentage of persons who left school in Donegal with no formal or primary education, over the period 2006-2011 decreasing from 28.9% (28,475 persons) in 2006 to 24.9% (26,361 persons) in 2011</p>
<p>∴ Donegal retained its ranking as the county with the highest percentage of persons with 'no formal or primary education'</p>
<p>Females are more likely to have a third level or higher education in Donegal than males with 22.1 % of all females (11,710), whose full time education has ceased and who are 15 years or over, have attained a third level degree or higher in County Donegal compared to 14.4% of all males (7,580)</p>
<p>∴ In 2011, 26,867 persons in County Donegal had attained a third level qualification after completing two or more years of study. Census 2011 shows that Donegal ranked as the ninth highest county in the State in terms of the number of persons who had attained a third level qualification in 2011.</p>

Source: Research and Policy Unit, 2013. 'What We Know – A Profile of the Education Sector in County Donegal'.

Box 1.2 The top 10 qualifications in County Donegal in 2011

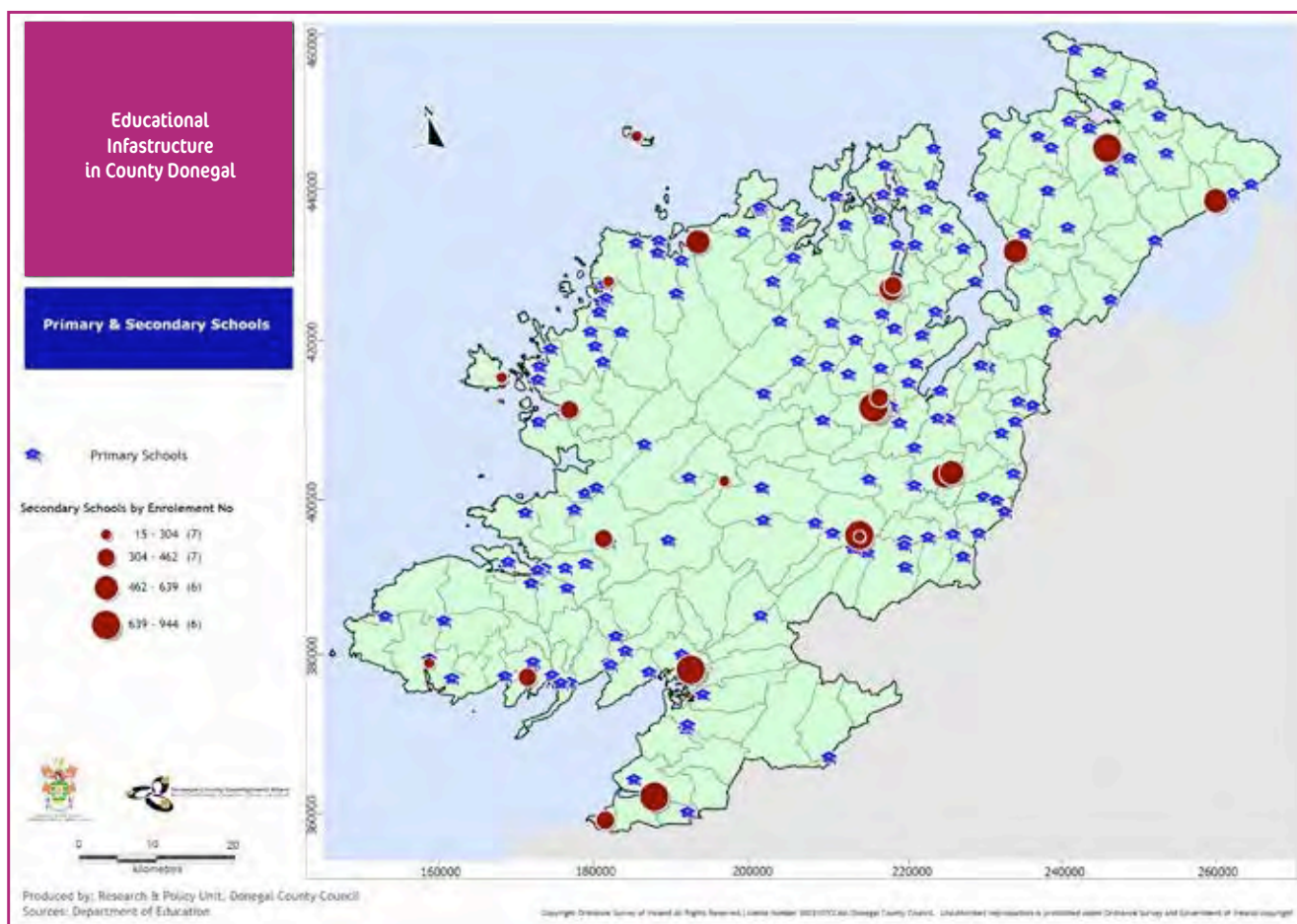
Rank
1. Social sciences, business and law attained by 6,510 persons; (1 st in State)
2. Health and welfare attained by 4,724 persons; (2 nd in State)
3. Education and teacher training attained by 3,979 persons; (5 th in State)
4. Science, mathematics and computing attained by 2,998 persons; (4 th in State)
5. Engineering, manufacturing and+- construction attained by 2,763 persons; (3 rd in State)
6. Nursing and caring attained by 2,347 persons; (7 th in State)
7. Business and administration, broad programmes attained by 1,800 persons; (6 th in State)
8. Humanities attained by 1,459 persons; (9 th in State)
9. Accounting and taxation attained by 1,134 persons; (8 th in State)
10. Arts attained by 1,116 persons; (11 th in State)

Source: Research and Policy Unit, 2013. 'What We Know – A Profile of the Education Sector in County Donegal'.

1.3 EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMMES

1.3.1 Primary and Post Primary Schools

Donegal had a total of 177 mainstream primary schools, 27 post-primary schools and 2 special schools in 2011. Of this number, 7 primary schools are in the DEIS¹ Urban Band 2 and 81 primary schools in the rural band. There are 12 post-primary schools which qualify for DEIS status in the county.



1.3.2 Educational infrastructure and disadvantage in Donegal

The 2011, The Pobal HP Deprivation Index, 'Area Profile for County Donegal', compiled by Feline Engling and Trutz Haase highlights that County Donegal is the most disadvantaged Local Authority area within the Border region, which in turn is the most disadvantaged region in the State. This report highlights that Donegal has been massively affected by the economic downturn after 2007, reflected in deterioration in the absolute deprivation score from -7.1 in 2006 to -13.2 in 2011. This represents a drop of -6.1, compared to a nationwide drop of -6.5.

¹ The Department of Education and Skills had a range of national programmes in place to address educational disadvantage throughout the public school system. In 2005, following a review of these programmes, the Department published *DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an action plan for educational inclusion* (pdf). The plan brought a number of those programmes together under the framework of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). DEIS is a more integrated approach to the issue of educational inclusion. This action plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). Its frame of reference is based on the definition of "educational disadvantage" in the Education Act (1998), section 32(9).

The county contains extensive areas of significant deprivation. Of the total 149 Electoral Divisions (EDs), more than two-thirds of EDs (104) are marginally below the average, another 35 EDs are in the 'disadvantaged' category and two EDs are 'very disadvantaged'. Only eight EDs, just over 5% of Donegal's EDs are above the national average. Of these, seven are marginally above the average while one ED falls into the 'affluent' category. Geographically, the only two slightly affluent areas are to the north of Donegal Town, and the wider environs of Letterkenny, but in each case excluding the towns themselves. The most disadvantaged areas are to the north of Glenties, as well as the north-western seaboard and the Inishowen peninsula.

At a local level, the most disadvantaged EDs are Doocherry (-25.5), Aran (-20.4), Glentogher (-16.4), Glenleheen (-16.2) and Binbane (-15.8). While the first two EDs fall into the category of 'extremely disadvantaged', the latter EDs fall into the 'disadvantaged' category. Overall, there are 35 EDs in County Donegal that classify as being 'disadvantaged'.

The most affluent EDs comprise of Lough Eske (11.1) and Castlewray (8.1), but only Lough Eske falls marginally into the 'affluent' category.

This index is based on the three dimensions of affluence/disadvantage, which comprise of a Demographic Profile, Social Class Composition and Labour Market Situation. The level of education within the County directly and indirectly impacts on all of these dimensions.

1.4 ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE A NEW INTEGRATED APPROACH

The following programmes have been developed by the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage throughout the school system.

1.4.1 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

In 2005, following a review of programmes in place, the Department of Education and Science (now Education and Skills) introduced DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. The plan brought a number of programmes together under the framework of DEIS. DEIS employs a more integrated approach to the issue of educational inclusion providing for:

- :: a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage and
- :: a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) to bring together and build upon the previous schemes and programmes.

The programme was to be rolled out to 600 primary schools (300 urban/town and 300 rural) and 150 post-primary schools in the State.

The following schemes and programmes were integrated into the SSP on a phased basis over the five year implementation period;

- :: Early Start²
- :: Giving Children an Even Break (incorporating the primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle)
- :: The Support Teacher Project (primary level)³
- :: Aspects of the Early Literacy Initiative, including the Reading Recovery Initiative and the Junior Certificate School Programme Literacy Strategy and Demonstration Literary Project
- :: The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme⁴
- :: The School Completion Programme⁵ (which is being funded under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund)
- :: The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for second level schools and related projects in second level schools supporting access to third level.

The primary and second level School Books Grants Scheme were to be continued as before but would take into account the identification process introduced by the action plan and targeted additional funding to be made available under schemes to schools participating in the SSP.

1.4.2 School Meals Programme

As part of the DEIS programme, the School Meal Programme was introduced to supplement the diets of school-going children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to help them fulfil their potential within the educational system and to reduce the risk of early school-leaving. There are two schemes;

1. The **Urban Scheme** supports school meals for primary schools in urban areas. This programme consists of daily sandwiches or buns and milk. The scheme is not a replacement for home meals.
2. The **Local Projects Scheme** gives funding directly to national and post primary schools, local groups and voluntary organisations, which operate their own school meals projects (the meals may be hot or cold). It also covers Pre-schools catering for disadvantaged pre-school children. These meals must be targeted at areas of disadvantage or at children with special needs. Funding is allocated on the basis of a rate per meal per child. The Department of Social Protection and Local Authorities in some areas provide funding for school meals..

² Early Start Pre-School Scheme : Early Start is a one-year preventative intervention scheme offered to pre-school children (3 to 4 years old) in some schools in designated disadvantaged areas.

³ The Learning Support Teacher Scheme: Learning support teachers provide extra support teaching for children experiencing learning difficulties, particularly in the core areas of literacy and numeracy. Generally this extra support is provided in the form of extra teaching in small groups or individually.

⁴ The Home-School Community Liaison Scheme aims to improve co-operation between home, schools and communities to advance the educational interests of disadvantaged children

⁵ The School Completion Programme aims to help students from disadvantaged areas stay in school to complete their Leaving Certificate. The programme is a support strand within the National Educational Welfare Board under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It forms part of the Department of Education and Skills social inclusion strategy Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) to help children and young people who are at risk of or who are experiencing educational disadvantage.

1.4.3 Donegal Youth Service

Daybreak is managed by Donegal Youth Service and is an interventionist programme, which encourages the release of positive development within each of its participants by offering educational support to early or potential early school leavers and those who are occasional attendees aged between 12 –15 years. Daybreak offers a holistic approach to working with young people offering support to those who need assistance with coping or social skills. The programme works with up to six young people on a daily basis. This allows the young person to avail of one-to-one tuition to strengthen them academically. The day is broken up into different blocks divided between academia; more creative/sports orientated endeavours and personal and social development programmes. Daybreak provides tutoring in numeracy and literacy skills, as well as individually tailored curricular support in the morning. Young people then prepare and cook their lunch in the on-site kitchen before settling down to an afternoon devoted to personal development work and life skills i.e. helping young people interact more effectively with other people and the world around them.

The organisational headquarters are based in Letterkenny and the service extends throughout County Donegal, with 33 affiliated Youth Clubs countywide and a range of projects that provide programmes and training to over 5,000 young people and over 600 adult volunteers.

1.4.4 Donegal Travellers Project

The Donegal Travellers Project (DTP) was established as a women's development project in 1996. The original community development project, which employed two staff members, delivered a women's development project to a group of Traveller women and responded to Traveller issues as they emerged in Donegal. In the beginning, the project devoted most of its energy to the issues of accommodation, challenging racism, and building relationships within a growing community sector in Donegal. As part of its involvement in the "Respecting and Connecting Communities Project", the Donegal Travellers Project is undertaking projects in the following areas;

- :: To organise a range of activities and events that provide opportunities for greater interaction between the Irish Traveller and the settled communities. It creates opportunities to enhance recognition and awareness of Traveller culture, and encourages Travellers to be involved in the planning and implementation of these activities and events
- :: To provide a positive portrayal of Travellers through dissemination of positive news stories and images in the local print, radio, and internet media, and to highlight the vital role of the media in addressing sectarianism and racism by complying with code of practice guidelines when reporting incidents relating to minority communities.

1.4.5 Youthreach

The Youthreach programme seeks to provide early school leavers (15-20 years) with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society, to progress to further education, training and employment. Participants of the Youthreach programme find an opportunity to re-engage in education, to learn new skills and to gain qualifications. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of the programme content. The programme provides a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communication and IT, along with a choice of vocational options such as Catering, Hairdressing, Computers, Woodwork, Photography, Video, Sports, Art and Craft, and a work experience programme. It supports learners in overcoming personal, social and learning difficulties, developing self-confidence to enable them to participate in society, and in gaining a range of competencies essential for further learning.

It provides a range of educational training and work experience options to enable the learners to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enhance their employability, so as to progress further. Courses are free of charge and a training allowance is paid, which depends on the learners age. Many centres have special programmes for lone parents and access to guidance and counselling is offered.

These programmes are managed at national level by the Department of Education and Skills and at local level by the former Vocational Educational Committees. They are delivered in Youthreach Education Centres, which are operational for 226 days per annum.

1.4.6 National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The **National Educational Psychological Service** (NEPS) supports the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education. NEPS psychologists specialise in working with the school community. They work with both primary and post primary schools. They are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. The psychologist works in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. They offer services aimed at meeting needs, for example, supporting individual students (through consultation and assessment), special projects and research. NEPS aims to promote mental health and well-being in schools and in prevention and early intervention. When an incident occurs in a school the NEPS psychologist will seek the Critical Incidents Management Plan (CIMP) of the school. If such a plan is not already in place, this is the first thing the psychologist will put in place following the incident. NEPS psychologists' experience has proven that planning with on-going review will ensure readiness when an incident occurs. If a plan is in place when an incident occurs there is a clear statement of what procedure needs to be followed. A good plan will ensure that no individual is overburdened and that important elements in the response are not forgotten. Generally, the Principal will play a key role, being responsible for many of the tasks. The other main person who will provide support to the Principal is the Guidance Counsellor. Other members of staff may also be involved including the School Chaplain, Home School Liaison Co-ordinator and members of the Special Education and Pastoral Care teams. The expertise and training of these persons is of extreme importance.

However, the budgetary cuts by the Department of Finance to education will compromise the effectiveness of the invaluable service provided by organisations like NEPS. The movement by the Department to no longer have Guidance Counsellors as ex quota within the overall staff compliment of schools, will result in Principals having to make the decision to return Guidance Counsellors to normal class room teaching duties, consequently resulting in less availability of such Counsellors for the pastoral care of pupils. For the NEPS Psychologists this is detrimental, in so far as the role of the psychologist is to work with the various persons within the school. For pupils who may have been involved in a critical incident or who is involved in an on-going programme with the NEPS Psychologist and the Guidance Counsellor, it will result in less time and professional support being available for the pupil.

1.4.7 Traveller Liaison Officer

The role of this officer was to work on a one to one with Traveller families in their own home environment. This officer was the link between the Traveller community and the school. These officers encouraged Travellers to become actively involved in the education system. They worked with the families by encouraging enrolment of their children in school and then by encouraging them to attend school on a daily basis.

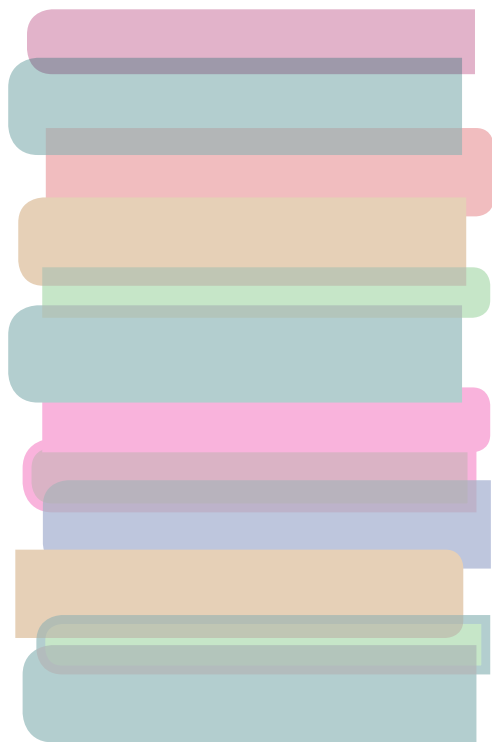
1.5 TAILORING THE RESEARCH PLAN

The above profile documented persons either entering the educational system, in the educational system or people who had left the educational system in Donegal.

It is only by understanding key statistics on persons who use the educational services; on the level of deprivation and disadvantage within the county; on the types of programmes that were introduced to ensure that all persons including marginalised groups achieve an education, that we begin to get an understanding of the localised impact which the budgetary cuts can have on these young persons, their families and education providers within the county. Furthermore, it provides us with a more focused and formulated plan for the development of the questionnaires and the key stakeholders that needed to be involved in and consulted within this research. This concept is developed further in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

What Stakeholders Said



2.0 INTRODUCTION

At the start of the process a number of consultations took place with the key stakeholders, who deliver and provide education and other supports to children and their families. The purpose of these consultations was two-fold. They served to ascertain the views of key representatives of children, young people, their families and vulnerable groups within the County. The consultations also served to scope out the different research tools that were to be used in the various consultations with parents, young people, primary and post-primary schools. This chapter will present key issues arising from these consultations.

2.1 SELECTING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

From the onset, the focus of the initial consultations was to ascertain the views of professionals who work directly or indirectly with all persons who are affected by the education cuts. Through the guidance and direction of the Economic Sub Group of Donegal Children's Services Committee, it was agreed that the Research and Policy Unit would consult with a pre defined list of stakeholders. (See Table Below)

Table 2.1: Educational Stakeholders in County Donegal

Name of Person	Organisation	Role/Organisation
Anne McAteer	Health Service Executive	Health Promotion Dept, Health Service Executive
Siobhan McLaughlin	Manager Donegal Travellers Project	DTP aims to provide a strategic approach to promoting change for the Traveller community in Donegal
Peter Walker	Health Service Executive	Social Inclusion
Sally Bonnar	County Donegal Education Centre	Director of the County Donegal Education Centre
Mary Surplus	Department of Education and Skills	Traveller Liaison Officer (Post has ceased to exist)
Margaret McKeague	Mevagh Resource Centre	Co-ordinator for the Meavagh Resource Centre
Dr Martin Gormley	Vocational Educational Committee	Chair of the Donegal County Childcare Committee and Adult Education Officer
Deirdre McHugh	National Educational Psychology Service (NEPs)	Senior Educational Psychologist
Denise McCool	Inishowen Development Partnership	Community development and training/ education liaison
Dr Sandra Buchannan	Youthreach	Co-ordinator of Youthreach which offers opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience.
Liam Ward	Donegal County Council	Chair of the Children Services Economic Sub-Group and Director of Housing and Corporate Services DCC
Christina O'Donnell	Donegal Youth Council	Co-ordinator for the Donegal Youth Council

2.2 KEY ISSUES RAISED

All of the above consultations were based on a structured questionnaire and a summary of all the issues raised are contained in Box 2.1 below.

Box 2.1: Stakeholders outline of issues associated with education cuts in Donegal

<p>One of the issues raised was whether the cuts to education in Donegal was as severe as in other counties?</p> <p>:: Does Donegal's proximity to Northern Ireland and its high rural factor impact on the severity of these cuts in comparison to the rest of the Country?</p>
<p>Another key concern was the impact that the cuts would have on the future role of DEIS in Donegal having regard to the high levels of deprivation persistent in the county since 1991. The stakeholders questioned whether the process of application for the DEIS programme was fair and in particular the use of pupil numbers in a school to predetermine whether or not a particular school would qualify for DEIS funding or not.</p> <p>::</p>
<p>The respondents questioned the importance of the continuation of the School Completion Programme in Donegal, given the high rates of absenteeism?</p> <p>::</p>
<p>Another issues was the impact of the withdrawal of the Traveller Liaison Officer Capitation grants and how they are awarded to individual schools. Cuts in funding for activities within the school.</p> <p>::</p>
<p>The respondents outline the important role of NEPS</p> <p>::</p>
<p>Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTR). The respondents questioned if this is an issue country wide or county wide? Is the national figure a true representation of the figure operating in schools? Does the school have a walking/administrative Principal or a Principal who teaches on a daily basis? What effect does this have on the school?</p> <p>::</p>
<p>The respondents asked if teacher numbers are reduced in schools, what impact will this have on subject choice and the type of graduates Ireland is going to produce in the future, when compared with the high quality graduates produced in the past?</p> <p>::</p>
<p>The respondents questioned will schools be forced to put higher and ordinary level pupils into the same class if there are insufficient teacher numbers. This will have serious implications for the pupils and results</p> <p>::</p>
<p>A major concern for all responents was the implications of cuts in terms of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers, Guidance Counsellors etc</p> <p>::</p>
<p>Guidance Counsellors provide a pastoral care which was deemed by all stakeholders to be of extreme importance to pupils, and there was concern by all if this is taken away</p> <p>::</p>

¹ In 2005, the Department published DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an action plan for educational inclusion (pdf). The plan brought a number of those programmes together under the framework of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). DEIS is a more integrated approach to the issue of educational inclusion. Its action plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18years). Its frame of reference is based on the definition of "educational disadvantage" in the Education Act (1998), section 32(9), as: "...the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools."

² Donegal according to the Trutz Haase has maintained its ranking as the most deprived County in the State since 1991.

Box 2.1: Stakeholder outline of issues associated with education cuts in Donegal *continued*

::	Will schools be forced to put higher and ordinary level pupils into the same class if there are insufficient teacher numbers. Respondents believed that this will have serious implications for the pupils and results
::	What are the implications of cuts in terms of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers, Guidance Counsellors etc
::	Guidance Counsellors provide a pastoral care which was deemed by all stakeholders to be of extreme importance to pupils, and there was concern by all if this is taken away
::	The issue of absenteeism; are schools ignoring this issue for fear of losing teachers if pupil numbers fall. The respondents asked if it was sufficient to have one Education Welfare Officer supervising the entire County?
::	The rising costs of education for families who are already struggling, e.g. the cost of mock exams, voluntary contributions, book rental schemes, clothing, transport etc was a major issue
::	Respondents asked what will the impact of Bus Éireann's new rules be, in terms of distance from schools on families in Donegal? If families now have to pay for transport what impact will it have? Will it ultimately mean that families are more marginalised?
::	A key question raised was what impact will cuts to education have on the family life style? Will activities outside of school continue to happen? Is it a case that parents can no longer afford them? The Croke Park hours - are they a benefit or are they detrimental to pupils/teachers?
::	Another concern was will these cuts have a social implication on pupils, e.g. teachers less willing to give extra hours for extra-curricular activities outside of school core hours and duties?
::	Respondents questioned how will ethnic minority families be affected by these cuts?
::	Third level education – the new grant system, a key concern of respondents was what impact will SUSIE have on students attaining their grants on time and the subsequent knock of affect on family's income?
::	Will the increased fees in England, cause an increase in the points system in Ireland as parents in England will opt to send their children to Ireland for third level education
::	Some respondents raised concerns on the cross border movement of pupils due to the cuts, what implication will this have for the future?
::	Is amalgamating schools the way forward or is it a step back?
::	Transition year grant – if this year is no longer an option for students, what implication will it have on the broader learning experience of the pupil.

2.3 SCOPING AND DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH TOOLS

All of these issues were presented to the steering committee and it was agreed that the research tools developed would concentrate on exploring some of the key issues outlined above to determine how they have affected young people, their parents and the primary and post-primary schools in the county.

Due to the different audiences that this piece of research sought to capture the views of, it was agreed that five different research tools would be developed and tailored to the needs of each of these specific groups. The research tools included a -

- :: **Primary school questionnaire**
- :: **Post-primary school questionnaire**
- :: **Youthreach questionnaire**
- :: **Parents Focus Group**
- :: **Youth Focus Group.**

These research tools were presented back to the steering committee. The questionnaires were tested on the steering committee and amended accordingly. It was agreed that these draft final questionnaires would be piloted on four different groups;

- :: **Post-primary and Primary Principals**
- :: **Youthreach Co-ordinators**
- :: **Donegal Traveller Project**
- :: **Donegal Youth Service.**

All observations and suggestions from this pilot group were incorporated where feasible and the final questionnaires were developed.

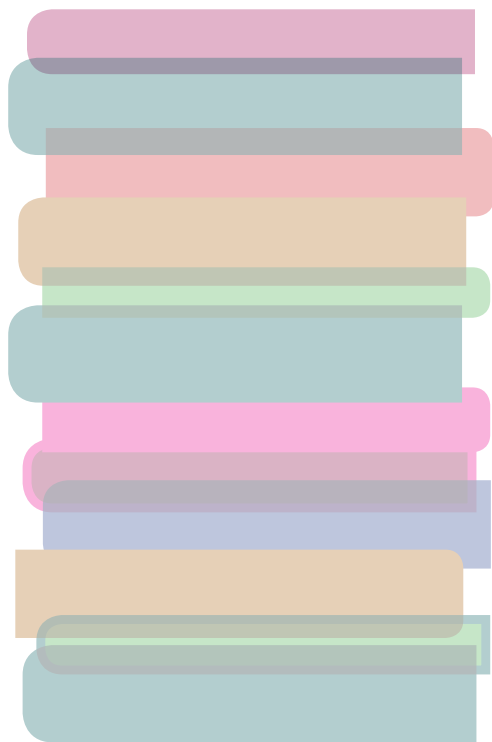
These questionnaires went live in October, 2013. At the same time five different databases and reporting facilities were developed and all returns were inputted and analysed by the Research and Policy Unit.

2.4 GOING FORWARD

As this stage the methodology developed was both robust and developed in partnership with the key players and stakeholders in the sector. The above sections detailed the methodology, which captured a diverse sample of children, young people and their families across the county. In addition, it set out to survey the primary, post-primary and Youthreach facilities that they attend. The survey also examined the various national programmes and organisations that have been rolled out by the Department of Education and Skills to support families and young people involved in education. The remainder of the report will focus on the returns from each of these target audiences. Chapter 8 will present recommendations from the steering committee on how issues raised through this research can be addressed and championed at local and national level by the Children's services Committee.

Chapter 3

The Cuts



3.0 SUMMARISING THE CUTS

This chapter highlights the budgetary cuts that were introduced through the various budgets by the Government since 2010. The Government aimed to bring about the budgetary cuts to the education sector over a five year period. As these cuts were on a phased basis and the result of several budgets, it was difficult to develop a concise plan of what the actual cuts were to be and the potential impacts these cuts would have on schools, families and pupils in Donegal.

3.1 SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The total area of County Donegal is 486,091 hectares, or 6.9% of the total land area of the State making Donegal the fourth largest county in the State in terms of land mass. Donegal's location on the periphery of the island of Ireland, geographically distant from Dublin and mainland Europe, hamstrung by the presence of the border, has long determined the need to improve good access into and within the county. Donegal is totally dependent on a roads-based transport system reflecting the small internal market and dispersed settlement pattern.

Table 3.1; below highlights that travel by car is the principle mode of transport for pupils aged between 5-12 yrs, followed by the bus, mini bus or coach. However, the most important mode of transport for pupils aged between 13-18 yrs and students aged 19 yrs+ is the bus, mini bus or coach.

Table 3.1: Travel to Primary, Post-Primary & Third Level Education 2011

	On foot	Bicycle	Bus, minibus or coach	Motorcycle or scooter	Motor car: Driver	Motor car: Passenger	Van	Other, incl. lorry
Children at school aged between 5 and 12 years	1,906	60	5283	11428	43	3
Students at school or college aged between 13 and 18 years	1428	28	6008	7	235	4735	33	6
Students at school or college aged 19 years and over	1318	74	952	7	2016	710	85	3

The school transport scheme is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. This section highlights the changes to the school transport scheme in Ireland which have been introduced by Bus Éireann, the main designated school transport provider in the State. The changes in terms of distance requirements, increases in fees and changes in terms of eligibility have been introduced on a phased basis and commenced in 2011. There have also been a number of schools throughout the county which have been closed (Closed School Rule) or amalgamated by the Department of Education and Skills.

3.1.1 Primary School Transport Scheme

For a pupil to be eligible for transport to a primary school they must be attending their nearest school and live 3.2km or more from the school. The pupil must also be between 4-12 yrs of age. Children with special needs are also eligible for free transport to and from special schools and to special classes. In all instances, there is regard given to ethos and language and each case is individually considered by Bus Éireann.

Under the **Central/Closed School Rule**¹ (CSR) current pupils living less than 3.2km from their school were entitled to free transport to their school of amalgamation. The same was true in the case of an area where a number of schools closed or amalgamated into one new school. However, from 2012/2013 school year, the distance criteria of 3.2km was applied to all pupils, hence resulting in pupils who had availed of free transport, losing this service or having to pay for the service. For new entrants (2012/2013) to primary school eligibility ceased for the CSR. This new system also set down that for a service to be retained in any particular area there was a requirement of not less than 10 eligible pupils in order to retain service in that area. Table 3.2; summarises the new rules.

3.1.2 Post-Primary Transport Scheme

The use of the Catchment Boundary Area (CB) System as a means of determining eligibility ceased to have effect for all new entrants from 2012/2013. There is a distance requirement on pupils of 4.8km from the school and they must also be attending their nearest post-primary education centre having regard to ethos and language. Similar to the case of primary schools, an instance may arise where by pupils from the same family may be entitled to travel to different schools based on location. There is a case for pupils to apply for concessionary travel. New entrants in 2012/2013 were not assessed under the catchment areas system. Pupils who are not eligible for school transport, under the above criteria, may apply for concessionary transport, subject to a number of terms and conditions. These concessionary pupils will not be exempt from paying the annual charge nor will they count for the establishment or retention of a service. Pupils who hold a valid medical card will only be entitled to free transport if they are attending their nearest post-primary education centre.

¹ Central/Closed School Rule: Pupils eligible for transport under CSR and who reside 3.2km or more from their school of amalgamation will retain their eligibility for the duration of their primary school cycle up to a maximum of 7yrs.

3.1.3 Fees for Primary and Post-Primary School Transport

The schedule for fees for school transport scheme state that:

- :: Primary school pupils are liable to a charge of €100/child/year to a family maximum payment of €220
- :: Family availing of both primary and post-primary transport shall pay a family maximum of €650/year
- :: Family can avail of concessionary travel² at €100/pupil subject to a family maximum payment of €220 at primary school level
- :: Pupils can apply for Remote Area Grants³
- :: Eligible pupils with a valid medical card are exempt from these charges
- :: Post-primary pupils a fee of €350/year with a family maximum fee of €650/year.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of criteria for School Transport Scheme

Requirement	Primary School	Post-Primary School	Notes
Distance Requirement	Must live 3.2km	Must live 4.8km	Must attend nearest primary or post-primary education centre
Medical Card Holder	Free of charge	Free of charge	Fee for concessionary travel
Fees Payable	€100/pupil/year Family Max €220/year	€350/pupil/yr Family Max €650/yr	Families with pupils in both primary and post-primary pay a Max of €650/year
Concessionary Travel Fee	€100/pupil/year Family Max €220/year	€350/pupil/year Family Max €650/year	Medical card holder must pay for concessionary travel
Pupils with Special Needs	Free of charge	Free of charge	<i>If attending a special school or special classes</i>

² Concessionary Travel: Pupils who are not eligible for school transport may be permitted to avail of transport on the bus on a concessionary basis if there is a spare seats on the bus. The full charge must be paid. There is no waiver for pupils with a medical card. Pupils classed as being non-eligible are classified as this, if they are not attending their nearest school or who do not meet the distance criteria.

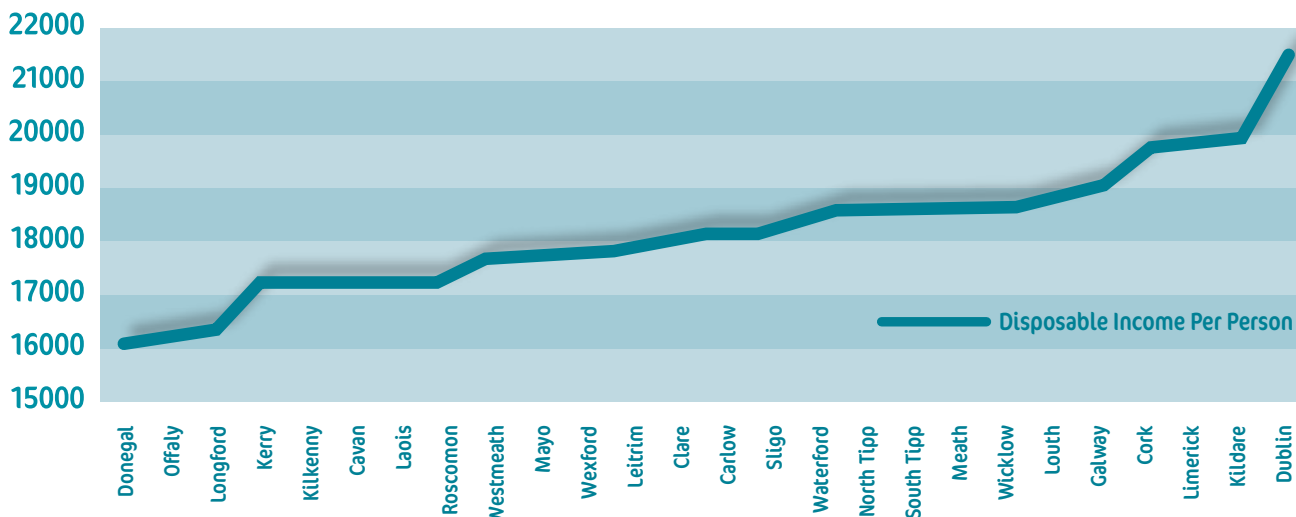
³ Remote Area Grants: a grant is payable by the Department as a contribution towards private transport arrangements for eligible pupils for whom no transport service is available. These grants may also be paid for eligible pupils who live 3.2km or more from the nearest pick up point for school transport.

3.2 SCHOOL FUNDING

The most recent estimates of total disposable income per person in County Donegal, in 2010 was €16,106 per person, making it the county with the lowest disposable income in the State. Donegal's average disposable income in 2006 was €17,252 and once again this was the lowest figure for the entire state.⁴

Budgetary cuts resulted in a decrease of 6% in capitation funding for schools over a five year period, returning funding of the educational system to the 2007 basic capitation levels. It also saw the abolition of the “Minor Works Grant” for schools. The removal of this grant will ultimately result in schools in the county having to look towards the parents of their pupils to replace contributions and fundraising to provide for the funding that schools were guaranteed through this grant. It is likely that any cuts to school funding will place increasing pressure on many of the low income households in the county to help make up this shortfall in state funding.

Fig 1 Disposable Income Per Person



Source: CSO, 2013 ‘County Incomes and Regional GDP, 2010’

Schools have experienced a direct budgetary cut in the reduction of the Supervision/Substitution Scheme payable to schools. This cut saw a reduction in administration fees payable to schools from 5% to 2% from 2012. There was also a call by the Department of Education and Skills to abolish modern languages programmes in primary schools from 2012. In 2011 there were 34,992 persons in Donegal who were born outside of the State. This inward migration can bring new ideas, skills and diversity into the labour force. But it also places an obligation on providing increased linguistic capabilities among the resident population to fully embrace and communicate with our new residents. However, in 2011, there were 201 persons who had attained a qualification in foreign languages in Donegal (9,947 in the State) and 414 persons who had attained a qualification in their mother tongue (11,610 in the State). The abolition of modern languages programme in primary schools is likely to have a detrimental effect on future development of modern languages in the county. The remainder of this section will deal with the additional cuts in school funding.

⁴ According to the CSO Consumer Price Index, December 2011 annual average rate of inflation in 2011 was 2.6%. This compares to a rate of -1.0% for 2010 and -4.5% for 2009. The largest annual price rise for the year was recorded in April 2011, when prices on average rose 3.2% compared to the previous April

3.2.1 Supports for children with additional needs

There were 22,646 persons with special needs in Donegal in 2011 which corresponds to 14.1% of the population, a growth of 3.9% since 2006. Both of these percentages are higher than the State figures of 9.3% in 2006 and 13% in 2011. Although at this stage figures are not available on the age composition of people with a disability, these figures indicate that Donegal will be disproportionately impacted on by cuts to supports for children with additional needs.

In terms of **Resource Teachers, Special Needs Assistants and Learning Support Teachers**, the budget did not introduce any direct cuts. However, this is an area of care and support that is held very close in the hearts of Irish families. In recent years there has been a drive by the Department of Education and Skills to provide in-class supports for pupils with additional psychological, educational, social, physical and emotional needs. However, through the initial consultations with stakeholders this is an area which was noted as experiencing many difficulties in terms of funding and the provision of frontline personnel to provide for the needs of many pupils with additional needs in the county.

Since 2010, there was a loss of 10% in Learning Support Hours provided to pupils (that is 45mins/wk). Through the Croke Park Agreement, Special Needs Assistants must provide an additional 72 hours, which is a total of 12 days extra work. However, these additional hours cannot be spent working with their pupils. In addition to the issues of class room supports, that of **Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)** is also critical. One of the main benefits of the DEIS programme was the reduction in the PTR rates in schools. However, when the PTR is calculated at national level, it includes all in-class supports such as Resource Teachers and Learning Support Teachers. Therefore it is not a true reflection of the exact pupil to teacher ratio, but represents the overall staffing allocation within a school.

In 2012, funding to the **School Completion Programme (SCP)**⁵ was reduced by 6.5% or €2m. This programme is a vital link in terms of retaining young people within the school system. It is a programme that had short and long term effects. It is important in retaining young people in education in order to increase their employment opportunities in Ireland in the future.

The **National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)** for the county currently provides 6.9 psychologists for the county covering primary and post-primary schools, which is in compliance with the national allocation for the State. However, when one has regard for the size of the county in terms of landmass and the geographical spread of the county, each psychologist has to cover 25-40 schools. When these figures are further broken down the actual time that is allocated to individual pupils is minimal.

The **Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO)** provided a very crucial link between the two worlds of most significance to a child, that of home and school. In the past this officer would have supported families affected by poverty and who were disadvantaged. However, since the recession the role of the officer became more important for many families including those families who have fallen victim to the strains of the recession and who are affected by unemployment etc. This rural officer encouraged parents to become involved in their children's education and in the life of the school.

⁵ School Completion Programme: This is a programme which is aimed at 4-18yr old pupils. It aims to offer help and support to young people who are at a high risk of early school leaving. It's co-ordinators offer in school, afterschool, out of school and holiday support to pupils and their families.

The budgetary cuts also saw the loss of the **Traveller Liaison Officer**. There was one officer appointed in the county. The role of this officer was to work on a one to one with Traveller families in their own home environment. This officer was the link between the Traveller community and the school. These officers encouraged Travellers to become actively involved in the education system. They worked with the families by encouraging enrolment of their children in school and then by encouraging them to attend school on a daily basis.

3.2.2 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and legacy posts

The impact of programmes like DEIS, in ensuring that children are retained within the educational system in schools, is evident with the reductions in the percentages of persons whose full time education had ceased without any formal or primary education. The percentage of persons in County Donegal aged 15 years and over, whose full time education had finished with 'no formal or primary education' had decreased from 28.9% (28,475 persons) in 2006 to 24.9% (26,361 persons) in 2011. Such an improvement was also evident in the State where comparable figures indicate that 15.2% of persons aged 15 years and over, had ceased their full time education with 'no formal or primary education' compared to 18% in 2006.

Through the planned reduction to capitation funding in 2013, the Government announced the phased withdrawal of 428 **legacy teaching posts** throughout the State from primary schools in DEIS Band 1 and 2. The Government at a later date, after much opposition from the educational sector, reduced the initial figure, and 235 of the posts to be cut were retained. This meant the total withdrawal of 192 posts - from primary schools outside of Band 1 and 2 and from DEIS post-primary schools - would proceed as planned. However, the Minister for Education, Mr Ruairi Quinn at the time stated that the financial impact of retaining the primary school posts would result in bringing forward, in 2012, the planned reduction in overall capitation which had been planned for 2013. This accounted for a reduction in capitation in 2012 of 3.5% in DEIS schools.

The importance of retaining this programme for County Donegal cannot be overstated as Donegal retains it ranking as the county with the highest percentage of persons with 'no formal or primary education' in the entire State.

3.2.3 Guidance Counsellors

Throughout the State the role of **Guidance Counsellors** was classified as ex-quota posts, which meant that these posts were not included in the teacher allocation figures for schools. The budgetary cuts resulted in these posts no longer being classified as ex-quota. For many schools a decision had to be made whether to retain the support and guidance provided by Guidance Counsellors to pupils or to lose this support and place these teachers back in the classroom teaching their core subjects.

“Guidance Counsellor is limited due to cut backs in my school” - *Response from Youth Focus Group, 2012*

A clear focus and direction in terms of a career path for pupils has never been more important than it is in today's current economic climate. In February 2013, there were 20,965 persons in Donegal signing on the live register. One can only assume that to remove the provision of Guidance Counsellors in schools will have a serious impact on the type of graduates that the county will be producing in the future. The Research and Policy Unit of Donegal County Council carried out a survey in 2010 entitled: *"Making the Future Happen - Addressing the Unemployment Challenge in Donegal"* The respondents to the survey were asked to highlight the different factors which they feel have or could assist them in their job seeking activities; the right type of education and training was highlighted as one of the key job assisting factors. Some of their comments are outlined below;

"Realising that retraining and re-skilling are necessary to gain work in today's labour market"

"Having a solid educational background"

"Doing courses that are relevant to today's market needs"

"Having a clear idea of the skills required to compete for jobs in today's market"

Making the Future Happen - Addressing the Unemployment Challenge in County Donegal, 2010

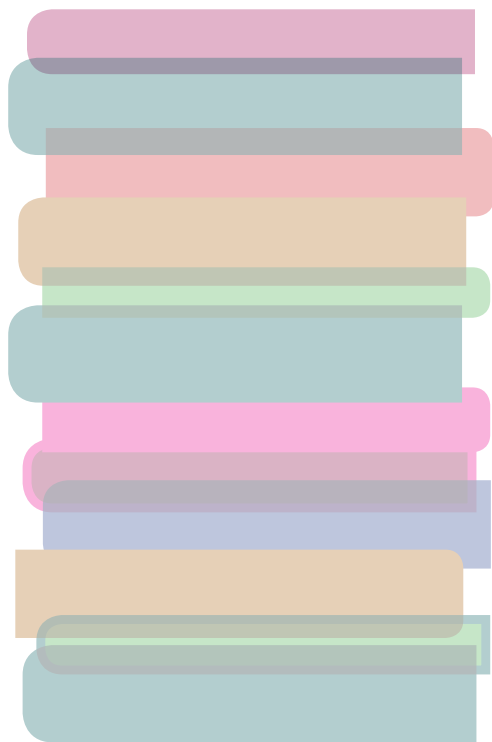
All of these comments illustrate the importance of good career and skill guidance.

3.3 SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE ANALYSIS

This chapter outlined the budgetary cuts to education within the county and drew some inferences of the potential impact that such cuts will have on sectors of the community, for example; young people who travel to school on the bus, rural dwellers, low income households, newcomer families, Traveller families and unemployed families. The next chapters will present the actual results, comments and observations of persons who are directly impacted by the cuts.

Chapter 4

What Young People Said



4.0 METHODOLOGY

According to the Survey of Income and Living Conditions in Ireland, in 2011, the risk of poverty rate, increased to 16.0% from 14.7% in 2010. In addition, the report highlighted that persons living in rural areas were more likely to be at risk of poverty (18.8%) compared to persons living in urban areas (14.2%). Therefore, in conducting the Youth Focus Group questionnaires, it was necessary to control for this factor and survey pupils who were attending schools in either rural or urban areas. On this basis students were surveyed from the transition year programme, firstly Milford Community School, secondly Mulroy College, Milford and then thirdly Loreto College, Letterkenny.

As poverty and social exclusion are intrinsically linked, the research sought to ensure that the views of specific target groups were captured. Pupils were surveyed from the Letterkenny area through the Donegal Youth Service Centre and through the Donegal Traveller Project, in addition to learners from the Youthreach Programme.

As the Youthreach survey involved a modified version of the youth questionnaire it was not possible to draw comparisons between all questionnaires. The results of the Youthreach questionnaire are presented in Chapter 5. This chapter details the results of 87 students drawn from the other access channels.

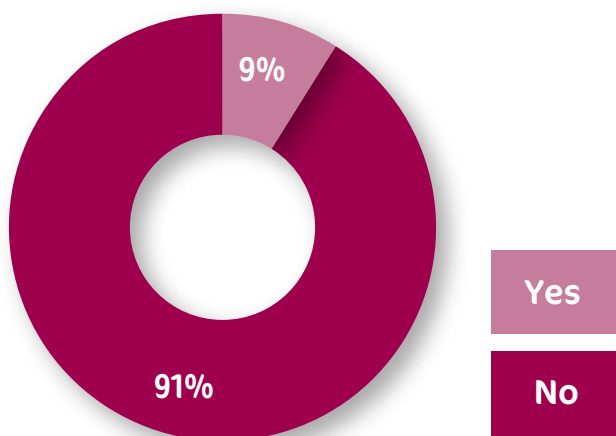
4.1 TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL

The statistical report in Chapter 3, draws attention to a review of the School Transport Scheme, conducted by the Department of Education and Skills in March 2011, and titled “A Value for Money Review of School Transport Scheme”. It highlighted that the unit cost per pupil transported has increased from €354 in 1997 to €1,438 in 2008 an increase of over 306%. This increase exceeds the overall inflation rate of 49.2% and the increase of 51.2% in the inflation rate for transport services.

The first set of questions in this youth survey aimed at establishing the most common mode of transport used in the County at present.

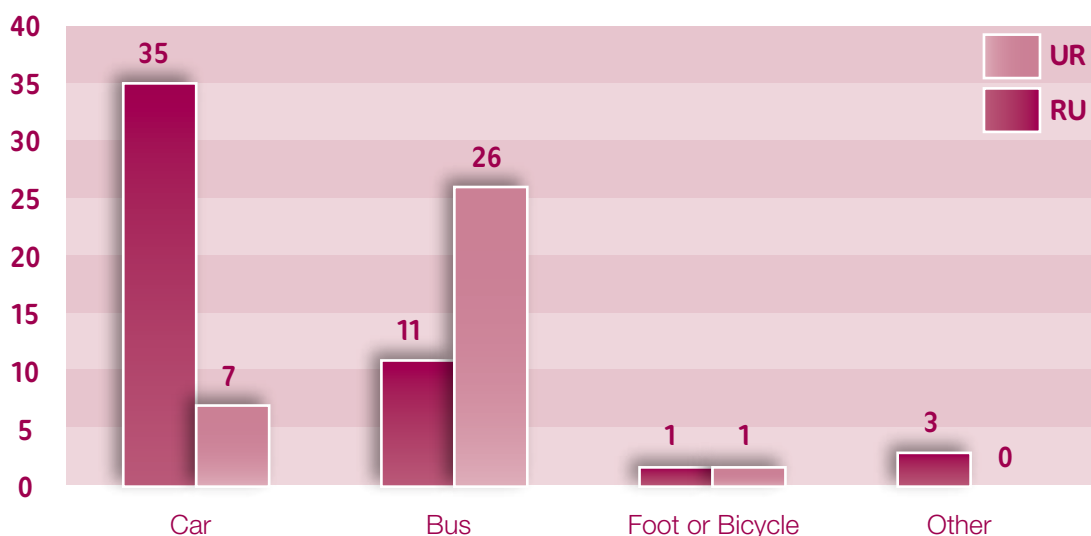
Respondents were asked if their mode of transport had changed from the previous year. Only 8 pupils of the 87 stated that their mode of transport had changed (See Figure 1). The most noted reason for the change in transport mode related to the pupils having changed school or having gone to college. Of all the pupils surveyed none of them availed of the support of the Travel Liaison Officer or knew of anyone who had availed of this service.

Figure 1: Change in travel to school



With regard to the range of schools examined, it was also decided to explore the idea of there being a difference within the County on an urban rural split on a number of the questions. Of the 87 pupils studied, Figure 2; shows that in the urban areas 35 pupils travel by car compared to 7 in the rural areas. This coincides with the higher incidence of 26 pupils taking the bus in the rural areas compared to 11 in the urban areas. In both urban and rural areas there was one incidence of a pupil attending school by foot or bicycle.

Figure 2: Travel to school by urban and rural location



Chapter 5 and 6; will further examine travel from the parents' perspective and the youth who attend Youthreach centres throughout the County.

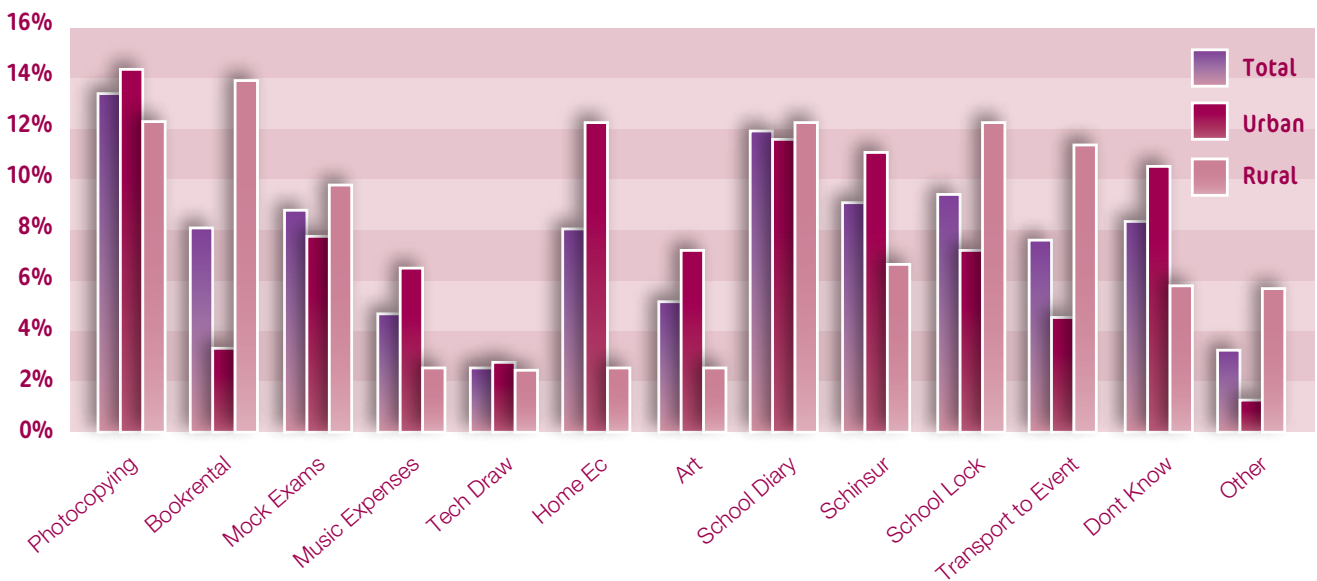
4.2 SCHOOL FUNDING

Chapter 3; highlighted that recent budgetary cuts to the educational system in Ireland has seen a 6% decrease in funding to schools over a four year period, which ultimately will result in the funding of the educational system returning to the 2007 capitation levels. Section 2 of this questionnaire, aims to explore if such reductions are being felt at local level and the impact, if any, this is having on families in Donegal.

Of the 87 pupils surveyed, there was a valid response of 75. 32 pupils said their parents did not pay a voluntary contribution and 43 pupils answered “yes”.

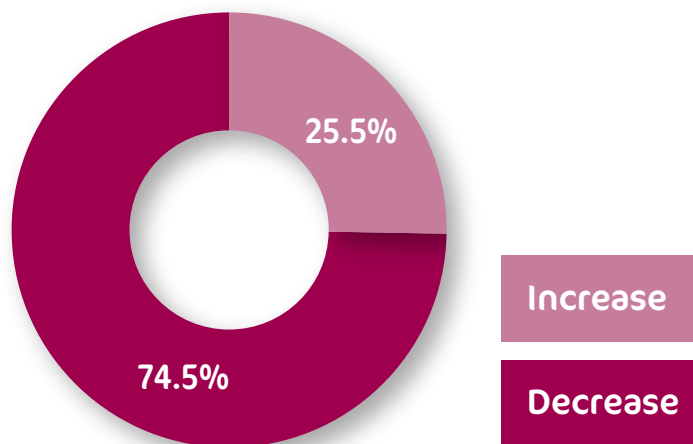
Figure 3; below outlines the pupils perception of what voluntary contributions are being used for.

Figure 3: The use of voluntary contributions (Rural v's Urban)



Respondents were asked if they knew if the voluntary contributions would increase or not and 74 % said “yes” while 25 % said “no”. In addition, the young people were asked what impact would this have on their families and their replies are detailed in Box 1.

Figure 4: Will the voluntary contribution change?



Box 1: Extraction of comments regarding the impact of voluntary contributions on families from a young person's perspective.

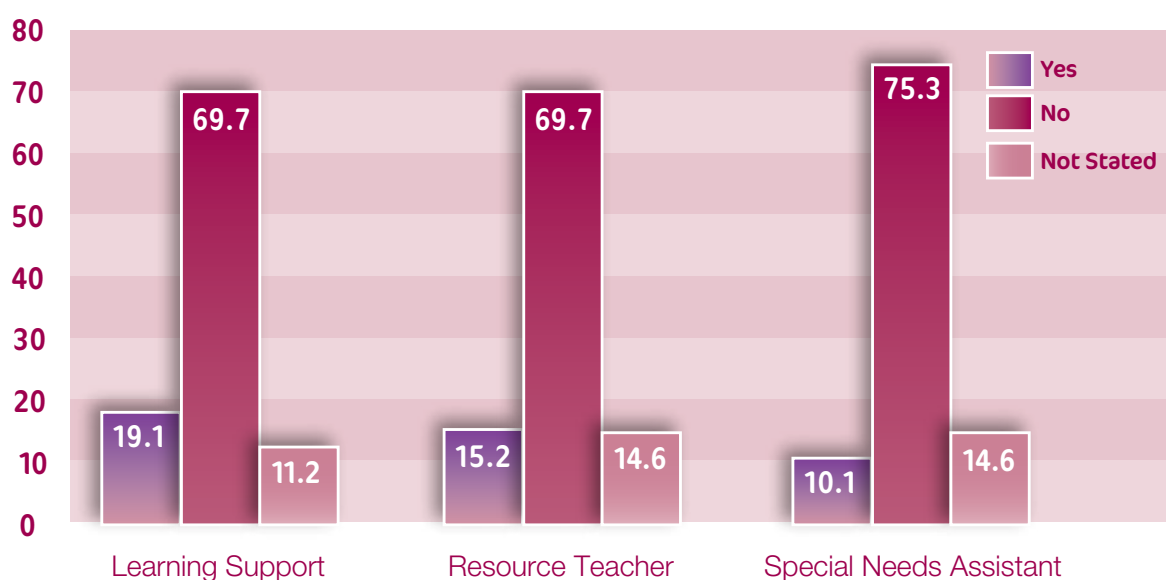
<i>Yes as it add ups to a lot of expense which cannot be used for more important debts etc</i>
<i>No because it is the same every year</i>
<i>Yes because it would mean paying out more money</i>
<i>Yes it's hard for my parents to get money, especially because the schools don't give you any notice about when you have to pay it or how much it will be</i>
<i>It could have an impact because it is a lot of money</i>
<i>Yes it prevents them buying what they could last year</i>
<i>Yes because money is tight because the government put on a tax</i>
<i>No it is needed</i>
<i>Yes because it's a lot of money in TY and there is a recession</i>
<i>Yes, they have to pay money for me and my brother and sister</i>
<i>Yes because it's very expensive</i>
<i>Yes because it is extra money going towards school and not for food or other necessities</i>
<i>Yes less money for fun activities with family</i>
<i>Yes as more money is spent on school facilities and yet some things are not improving</i>
<i>Would not have extra money for emergency doctor visits</i>
<i>Yes because parents do not have much money and they have to pay a lot for books, uniforms, etc and don't have that much money left to pay for a contribution and it puts pressure on them</i>
<i>Possibly if it increases by a large amount but it's unlikely to make much impact</i>
<i>Yes too much money spent on unnecessary things which could be used on essentials</i>
<i>Yes it could. This money could have been spent on more food</i>
<i>If it was to increase it wouldn't make a significant change but it would be better if it could be avoided</i>
<i>No but only because my father has a secure income</i>
<i>Yes because really the school should be able to afford it</i>
<i>Hopefully it won't</i>
<i>Yes because money is very tight lately and all these fees at school are unnecessary it should be voluntary</i>
<i>Don't pay any voluntary contributions</i>
<i>Yes for some families. I do art so that's extra contribution</i>
<i>Yes because the finance state is decreasing and less money now</i>

4.3 IN CLASS SUPPORTS

The first part of this section will examine in class supports for pupils. For the purposes of this study in class supports could include the services of a Learning Support Teacher¹, a Resource Teacher² or a Special Needs Assistant³ (SNAs). As the statistical section in Chapter 1 showed there has been no direct cut to the allocation of Resource Teachers, in that the figures for 2011-12 and 2012-13 has been maintained. The percentile threshold has been increased making it more difficult for children to be assessed⁴. With regard to Learning Support Teachers, there has been a 10% reduction in learning support hours since 2010 and the Special Needs Assistants have to do an additional 72 hours under the Croke Park Agreement, but this time cannot be used in direct contact with the pupils.

The purpose of this section is to identify the numbers in the survey who availed of these services and is outlined in Figure 5. 10.1% of students have either themselves or a family member availed of the support of a Special Needs Assistant. 15.7% have availed of a Resource Teacher and 19.1% of a Learning Support Teacher.

Figure 5: In class supports



In addition the survey sought to determine whether such supports were helpful from the young person's perspective. The benefits of such services are outlined in Box 2; below.

¹ A Learning Support Teacher service is generally available to all primary schools. The Learning Support Guidelines (pdf) published by the Department of Education and Skills explain the aims and activities of learning support programmes. They include the procedures for identifying and selecting children who might have difficulty with reading or mathematics, learning difficulties or special educational needs and who need supplemental teaching. It is the Learning Support Teachers who provide this extra teaching –Further psychological assessment does not occur until the Learning Support Teacher and the class teacher have tried to address the child's problems. Children who continue to have difficulty coping with the curriculum can be psychologically assessed by the National Educational Psychological Service and may be eligible for resource teacher support.

² A Resource Teacher is a specialized educator that focuses on helping children with physical or educational learning difficulties to develop their reading and writing skills. This category can include teachers who are specialised in educating students who are visually or audibly impaired, and those teachers who concentrate on life skills and basic academic processes to the mentally impaired.

The Resource Teacher works with students, parents, teachers and clinicians.

A large part of the Resource Teachers job is to collaborate with other teachers to ensure the success of all students.

The Resource Teacher works with the entire student population through teaching in the classroom alongside the classroom teacher. She/He may work with a small group, half the class, or teach to the whole class.

Resource Teachers also work with individuals or groups that may need more focused instruction on a specific concept or curriculum outcome.

This may occur within the classroom, or outside the classroom.

Resource Teachers also work with a small segment of the school population to plan for individuals who have very specific needs.

³ Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are allocated to schools to work with children who have specific care needs. They provide non-teaching care support. SNAs support pupils who have care needs resulting from a disability, behavioural difficulties or a significant medical issue. This might include a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour makes them a danger to themselves or other pupils. Pupils' needs could range from needing an assistant for a few hours each week (for example, to help feed or change the pupil(s) or bring them to the toilet) to requiring a full-time assistant. SNAs may work with more than one child and can also work on a part-time basis depending on the needs of the school.

⁴ As less children are being assessed, in the long term there will be a reduced requirement from these additional supports as students who currently fall on the border line of requiring additional supports will be refused additional support in the future on the basis of the increase in percentile and ultimately this will reduce the requirement from Learning Support Teachers, Resource Teachers and SNAs.

Box 2: The impact of in-class supports from a child's perspective.

<i>I did not need the resource teacher after attending her class</i>
<i>It helped my brothers with reading etc</i>
<i>The Resource Teacher worked with my brother at a slow rate on things he found difficult so it did help</i>
<i>Cause they helped with the exam questions that I did in the exam books</i>
<i>My brother has gotten so much better at his work</i>
<i>My brother has Down Syndrome and wouldn't be able to cope without them</i>
<i>He has gotten better and now knows the maths better and do it easily</i>
<i>Helped them with work and interacting with other pupils in the class</i>
<i>Because it helps me get from class to class</i>
<i>As my brother suffers from a disability and it was essential for him to have her</i>
<i>Because my sister is smaller than the normal 5yr old as she had 7 heart defects and the SNA helps open doors and lunch boxes etc</i>
<i>Yes I found it helpful especially with English</i>
<i>My brother's spelling far improved a great deal</i>
<i>He is learning a lot</i>
<i>It helped me with Maths and English</i>
<i>I had a strong difficulty with Maths and Irish but the learning support helped me comprehend them</i>
<i>They found it was a great help if they were struggling in some subjects</i>
<i>It helped me and my sister with our spelling and trouble to read</i>

The second part of this section explored the rationale for young people wanting to go to school. It begins by asking pupils what makes them want to go to school each day and their most frequent responses are outlined in Box 3. In addition, pupils were asked if they knew the names of different programmes designed to encourage them to stay in schools. Only 12 pupils replied “yes” to this question and the only programme that they were aware of was the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Box 3: Rationale for attending school from the pupil's perspective.

<i>To see my friends, education, I want a good job!</i>
<i>To get an education</i>
<i>To meet friends, to learn and to develop my skills</i>
<i>We have no choice if we want a good job later in life. It's also good to see my friends and socialise</i>
<i>To get an education and get a good job at the end in which I can live comfortably with my family</i>
<i>Go to college and can get a job I will enjoy doing</i>
<i>To see my friends and for trips</i>
<i>Good fun, activities</i>
<i>Work toward getting to college and making something of my life</i>
<i>My parents</i>
<i>I don't want to go to school each day</i>
<i>Friends and education. I like most classes - English</i>
<i>The craic and it gives us something to do instead of being bored sitting around the house</i>
<i>My education, seeing my friends, keeping up a good attendance record</i>
<i>I know that I need to work to get a good life and that school is how I do that. I am also very interested in learning as much as I can</i>
<i>To see friends and we are forced by our parents</i>
<i>TY is enjoyable because we do fun activities etc. I also want to get an education</i>
<i>I want to get an education and as a TY student I don't want to miss out on any opportunities school offers me during the year</i>
<i>I like Thursday because I have home EC and get free food. And my friends</i>
<i>Education need leaving cert</i>
<i>To achieve my full potential and to meet friends</i>
<i>Down town at lunch</i>
<i>Leaving Cert</i>
<i>To make something out of myself. Free internet, free printing as much pages as you like</i>

Donegal is the fourth largest County in the State in terms of land mass @ 4,841 km² with approximately 73% residing in rural areas compared to the State average of 38%, yet it has only one Educational Welfare Officer employed within the county. The survey aimed to explore the prevalence of absenteeism within the county. The survey asked the pupils if they had been absent from school for more than 20 days and only 9.1 % indicated “yes”.

4.4 SCHOOL MEALS

Perhaps one of the most telling impacts of the recession on the lives of pupils was revealed by the statistic that 71% of students (61) in this survey indicated that they take a pre-packed lunch to school each day, yet 98% (or 83 students) had a canteen in their schools. 69.5% (or 57 students) took money to school with them each day. The average amount of money taken to school each day was €3.73. 92% (or 80 students) found that school dinners / meals were a good idea. A selection of student comments regarding this provision are outlined in Box 4.

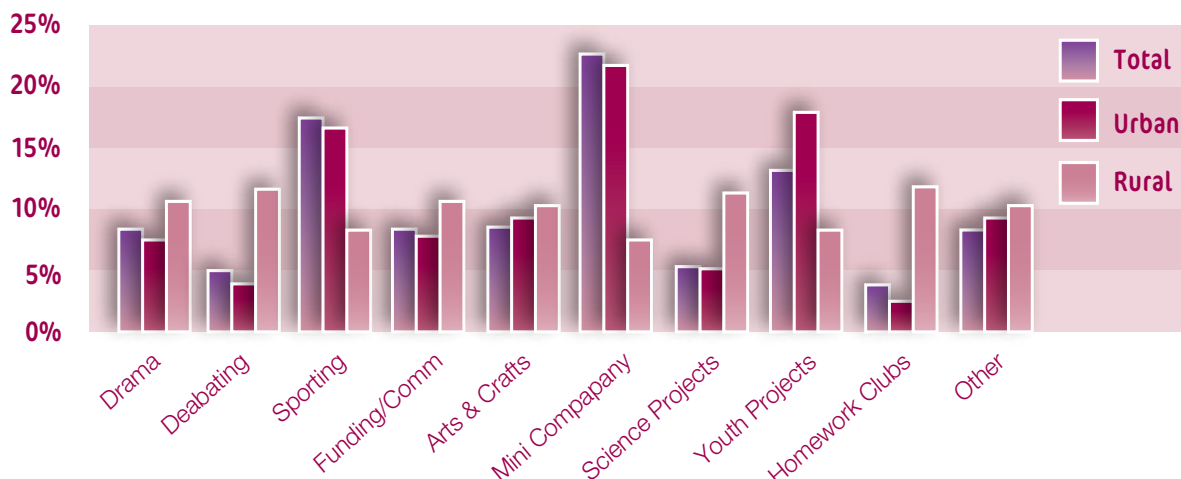
Box 4: Are free school lunches a good idea – what the pupils said

<i>Yes to save money</i>
<i>Yes because lunch is very expensive</i>
<i>Yes, I think they are as lunches are quite dear. Also it would be encouraging to give free lunches out. It would also help families in debt. However the food would have to be decent enough.</i>
<i>No because the school need the money to buy the food</i>
<i>Yes because it costs a lot of money every week if you are buying lunch every day</i>
<i>They are for people who have a storage of money but the service could be abused</i>
<i>Yes because at home money is tight and this would help solve this issue when it comes to lunch</i>
<i>They are a good idea for those in need of them. Peoples whose family are in money trouble</i>
<i>Yes it is a good idea because when you forget money or packed lunch you have nothing</i>
<i>Yes as sometimes you end up eating unhealthy lunches and it would prevent this</i>
<i>Yes how are lunches free though? If the government start giving out free lunches money will be cut in something more important</i>
<i>Yes as we are paying out money for so much so we should be getting at least free lunches</i>
<i>Yes because it will make sure people will eat it all</i>
<i>If they were healthy they could be but unhealthy free lunches would be unhelpful towards encouragement of children and young people to eat well. Healthy ones could be a good idea if such a thing was available in the school</i>
<i>Yes they remove the possibility of children not getting lunch which is very high. Also it would remove another burden from parents</i>
<i>Yes because everyone needs to eat in order to concentrate but some people can't afford it</i>
<i>Obviously because sometimes I skip lunch and that is not good for my health</i>
<i>Yes it would encourage people to eat healthy food if it was provided</i>

4.5 EXTRA ACTIVITIES

Figure 6; outlines the extra curricular activities that are organised or run by schools. In total in the urban areas of the 53 students surveyed, 42 students answered “yes” and in the rural areas of the 34 students surveyed, 22 answered “yes” to taking part in extra activities at school. The survey showed that in urban areas the top two extra activities outside of school core hours were mini company at 21.5%, youth projects at 17.7% and sporting activities at 16.5%. In the rural areas the mini company was noted as the lowest rate at 7.3%. The top activities in rural areas were homework clubs at 11.4% and debating at 11.4%. In the urban areas homework clubs were noted at 2.5%, the lowest rated activity in the urban areas. In urban and rural areas the survey highlighted that 70.8 % said that these activities were free of charge while, 29.2% said that they were not.

Figure 6: Extra curricular activities organised or run by schools



Box 5: Impact of extra curricular activities on a young persons life

<i>Mini company gives us the experiance of being an entrepreneur</i>
<i>It makes us healthier and fitter, we meet new friends and it makes us more aware of setting up a company</i>
<i>They allow me to have free time, relax and have fun.</i>
<i>They give me something to do in my spare time and help me meet new people</i>
<i>They get you more involved in the school and make you more aware, but they are on at awkward times and it makes it hard for my parents to collect me</i>
<i>Some mean going to football matches and missing school</i>
<i>They help me better myself and it doesn't cost too much</i>
<i>Well they let us play sport to represent our school and try achieve things for our school</i>
<i>They give me something to do and means I'm not lying in the house all the time</i>
<i>Sporting activities have a positive effect on your life and health. YSI help make more friends and bond as a group</i>
<i>Socialise with other people and do good work</i>
<i>They're rewarding when you look back as you feel you have achieved something. They are generally fun and a nice thing to take part in but they can be time consuming, not too much though</i>
<i>They let me meet new people and gives me the chance to help my community improve</i>
<i>They make us aware of other students in the school. Also they get you involved e.g. make new friends. You can also entry numerous competitions with these activities</i>
<i>They help you socialise better with people outside the school</i>
<i>Doesn't really have any impact</i>
<i>They get us active and give us the ability to learn new things about ourselves</i>
<i>It helped me realise that I am good at drama</i>
<i>Sporting activities, athletics is the only sport I take part in and I love it</i>
<i>They are helpful for communication skills</i>
<i>No, 1st years aren't aloud to do anything</i>
<i>Mini companies and community events are a great way to get involved in community work and looks great on your CV. Mini company are a great way to get experiance</i>
<i>Well they give you more opportunities, new way of doing things. New experiance, new friends</i>
<i>I take out my anger while doing boxing</i>

The survey sought to determine if the school, from the student perspective offered the same amount of activities this year as last year, 65% (or 51 Students) said “yes” and 35% (27 students) said “no”. Box 6; outlines the reason for their answer.

Box 6: Comments on whether the school offered the same amount of activities this year as last year.

<i>I haven't had to stop anything I did last year</i>
<i>Yes or even maybe more</i>
<i>It is a school with great sporting history and loves students getting involved</i>
<i>They offer more activities such as "build a bank" and mini company</i>
<i>Each activity that was on offer last year is still on offer now if not a few extra</i>
<i>TY has more opportunities for students</i>
<i>I was in third year last year so I could do mini company</i>
<i>Lost out on more activities because of budgets</i>
<i>Last year there was a camogie team. Unfortunately no teacher has time to help us as they are doing other sports, working or taking care of their families</i>
<i>Our school is well funded we pay for a lot of things</i>
<i>Because we do Russian and we are in TY so we go a lot of places</i>
<i>Because lack of money and if a cost is asked then people do not participate much</i>
<i>There aren't many activities other than sporting on constantly in school</i>

4.6 YOUR CLASS

This section of the questionnaire aimed to explore the opinions of the students with regard to their class size and their feelings towards mixed classes of both ordinary and higher level students. The survey showed that the average class size was 24.7 students. Figure 7; below details the students' responses when asked, from a 'learning perspective how would you rate class size?' 53.8% stated that from a learning perspective their class size was "good".

Figure 7 - Rating of class size from a learning perspective



Students were then asked if they were in classes which had mixed abilities of both ordinary and higher level. Of the students who responded to this question 88% (73 students) said “yes”. When asked ‘Does it work to mix both ordinary and higher levels students in a class?’, 58.2% (46 students) said “yes”. Box 7; further details what the students felt about being part of a mixed class.

Box 7: Does mixing ordinary and higher level classes work?

<i>Because ordinary level students get a chance to learn higher level and enhance their knowledge</i>
<i>If you put the effort into learning you should succeed</i>
<i>Some people are smarter than other and it isn't fair</i>
<i>We are learning at a pace that suits everyone</i>
<i>It lets you know what you have to do in other levels if you wish to switch</i>
<i>Because everyone is treated equally</i>
<i>There isn't too many in our class meaning that the teachers get to help each one individually as in other schools there are more in each class.</i>
<i>It prevents the teacher focusing on a specific level</i>
<i>I'm unsure because for pass students it could be good to learn harder things but for higher students I don't know if it's good to learn things you already know</i>
<i>Higher should be in a higher class</i>
<i>We can do a bit of both levels</i>
<i>I feel this is not good because people get distracted when the teacher is giving the other level different work or teaching them something</i>
<i>In TY Irish, it's very frustrating because we are doing really really simple stuff</i>
<i>Because those doing ordinary level would find it more difficult than those doing higher level it's not fair</i>
<i>It can be good for higher level students to go over basics and for ordinary level students to try harder work</i>
<i>I did all honours subjects in third year and now doing common level, I find it too easy, I'm not learning many new things</i>
<i>By mixing two levels, more focus may be on people who need more help and there is not much time for the teacher to concentrate on a certain topic</i>
<i>I'm in TY so it doesn't effect us too much as we be all doing the same level. Exam years however are split and that means the class is beneficial to everyone as it suits their level</i>
<i>The people from ordinary level get more attention and therefore higher level students are let to drop their standard</i>
<i>Because it doesn't make people feel segregated because of their activities</i>
<i>Because people in ordinary level have to struggle with honours</i>
<i>The worse students should get the best teachers</i>

In Section 6 students were asked ‘What they would like to be when they would finish school?’. Box 8 sets out the responses received from the students. As Guidance Counsellors are no longer regarded as ex quota within the overall teacher allocation in post-primary schools, the questionnaire asked the students if they had access to a Guidance Counsellor when they required this service 74.4% (61 students) answered “yes”.

Box 8: What do you want to be when you leave school

<i>Be an English teacher/hairdresser</i>
<i>Secondary school teacher/doctor</i>
<i>Primary Teaching</i>
<i>Get a PhD</i>
<i>Don't know yet</i>
<i>Something involving cooking</i>
<i>Game design/development or animation or computer science</i>
<i>Join the gardai</i>
<i>Become a DJ</i>
<i>Something in business</i>
<i>Teacher or physiatrist</i>
<i>Sports</i>
<i>Audio visual technician</i>
<i>I would like to do something involving sports, e.g. sports psychology or analysing the way you move while participating in sports events</i>
<i>Teacher (primary or secondary) or a physiotherapist</i>
<i>Do lectures or nursing</i>
<i>Maybe speech therapy or paediatric nursing</i>
<i>I want to be a children's author</i>
<i>Childcare/beauty</i>
<i>Primary school teacher but not sure</i>
<i>Something in medicine or science line like a dermatologist or a forensic scientist for example</i>
<i>Something to do with special needs (IT nursing) and more so America straight away to get out of this place</i>
<i>I would like to do teaching or vetinary but points are high for vetinary studies so i'll probably be a teacher</i>
<i>Psychology, history, english or art</i>
<i>I want to go to Trinity College Dublin and study history, political science or sociology</i>
<i>I either want to do forensic science or pharmacy in UCD or England, Yeal, Oxford or do law in Dublin</i>
<i>Hair and beauty or home design</i>
<i>Be a doctor - preferably a physiatrist or radiologist</i>
<i>I want to go to college and study psychology then hopefully become a clinical psychologist or criminologist</i>
<i>I'd love to do something involving children or fashion or modelling or air hostess or psychologist</i>
<i>Photographer</i>
<i>Hairdresser or a doctor</i>
<i>Teaching, child psychology or else working with deaf kids</i>
<i>General nursing</i>
<i>Beautician</i>
<i>Go to college</i>
<i>Study performance arts and psychology</i>
<i>I would like to be a teacher or a nail technician or a guard</i>
<i>Design my own heels and dresses as a designer for i'm very artistic</i>

Box 8: What do you want to be when you leave school continued

<i>I have no idea because that's why i am doing TY</i>
<i>Comic art/graphic design</i>
<i>Law or teaching</i>
<i>Computer technology or event management</i>
<i>Paramedics</i>
<i>Art technician</i>
<i>Start my own business</i>
<i>I want to go to college and study to be a vet</i>

4.7 OTHER COMMENTS

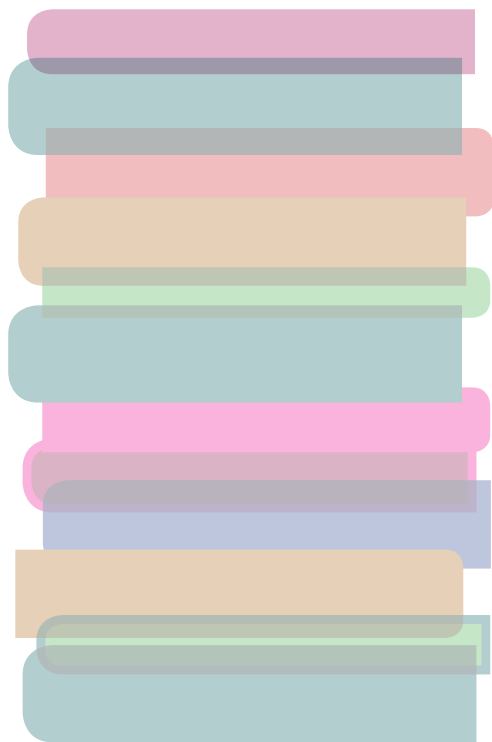
The purpose of this section was to give the students who participated in the survey an opportunity to express any additional views or comments they had regarding the education system.

Box 9: Additional comments provided by the students

<i>Stop making cutbacks</i>
<i>They should put the prices down as we are teens and barely have any money and its also the recession. The portions are small also. People in our school would buy food more often if the prices went down</i>
<i>Cuts involving teachers may affect me next year when it comes to choosing my LC subjects. Some classes are on at the same time which means you might not get to chose all the subjects you want as there are not enough teachers to accommodate the students needs. this could be difficult for some students who need particular subjects for the course and degrees they wish to follow</i>
<i>I think the classes should focus more on the subject and less on the exam</i>
<i>I feel that TY is extremely expensive and that the DCSC should pay towards something</i>
<i>With the cutbacks the classes are much bigger than usual so therefore the teacher is under pressure and very stressed with the amount of students in each class and therefore become really moody and not nice towards students and therefore students dislike school and not want to go</i>
<i>A lot of money goes towards school books, uniforms and school activities and a major strain on families. School is fabulous</i>
<i>I think school should offer some lessons that would effect people who want a profession in a certain trade to teach them the necessary skills</i>
<i>It takes a few weeks to get an appointment with the counsellor due to the lack of funding</i>

Chapter 5

What Youthreach Learners Said



5.0 METHODOLOGY

The Youthreach Programme is targeted at early school leavers to provide them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate fully in society. Their participation in this survey provides an insight into the importance of these targeted programmes to ensuring such groups are not further excluded from progressing to education, training and employment in the future

A total of 44 learners responded to the survey from Youthreach centres in Letterkenny, Ballyshannon, Gortahork and Lifford. The questionnaire was sub-divided into 5 sections;

- :: Section 1 – Supports for Youthreach
- :: Section 2 – Youthreach meals
- :: Section 3 – Activities in Youthreach
- :: Section 4 - Work experience
- :: Section 5 – Other comments.

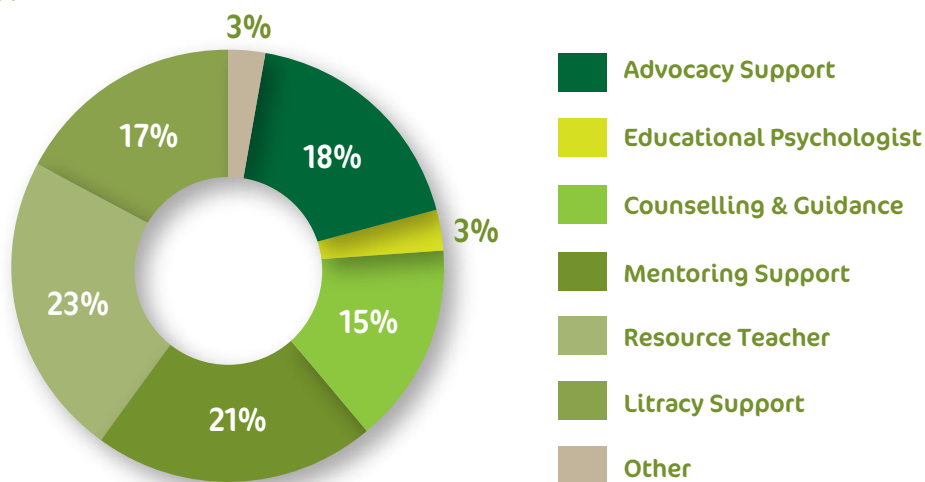
5.1 RESULTS FROM SECTION 1 – SUPPORTS FOR YOUTHREACH

The first set of questions in the youth survey was aimed at (a) establishing the range of supports that are available to the learners who attend Youthreach; (b) whether or not they have availed of these supports; (c) to ascertain if they felt that these supports were beneficial and finally; (d) to examine absenteeism.

While the Youth Focus Group examined the in-class supports for students, the Youthreach questionnaire focused on more tailored supports for the learners. It was interesting to see the comments from both the pupils and the learners perspective and the variation between the supports.

Respondents were asked if they or any of their brothers or sisters had availed of the support services outlined in Figure 1. Of the 44 learners surveyed there was a valid response of 37 respondents. The survey showed that 23.1% (27 learners) availed of the supports of the Resource Tutor, 20.5% (24 learners) the Mentoring Support and 17.9% (21 learners) the Advocacy Support. The least used support service at 2.6% (3 learners) was the Educational Psychologist.

Figure 1: Supports in Youthreach



The learners were asked if they found these supports helpful; 86.8% (33 learners) respondents said “yes” and 13.2% (5 learners) said “no”. Box 1 details what the respondents said when asked to specify why they found the supports provided within Youthreach helpful.

Box 1: Responses to why the learners found the supports provided by Youthreach helpful

<i>Literacy support because it's helping my spelling etc</i>
<i>Helped educate me on jobs I'm interested in</i>
<i>They help me with a lot of things</i>
<i>Counselling and guidance was very helpful for me to go and chat to someone about my problems</i>
<i>Before the social worker came to my house I wasn't going to go to the centre, but after it I started Youthreach</i>
<i>When I was at Youthreach I got a lot of help from people at Youthreach</i>
<i>I don't think it helped me in anyway</i>
<i>I think they are very helpful because I can do far more stuff since I left school</i>
<i>I thought the counselling was helpful because I could talk and express my feelings</i>
<i>I found it helpful to talk to someone about my problems and to get mentored on my education and goals</i>
<i>The tutors are really helpful and are great in their roles</i>
<i>Mentoring support is good it helps you to set goals</i>
<i>The advocacy support helped me find a part-time job and the counsellor here helped set me up for independent free counselling that I could not find myself. My key worker is also helping me get my DRI</i>
<i>They help me to get work experience</i>

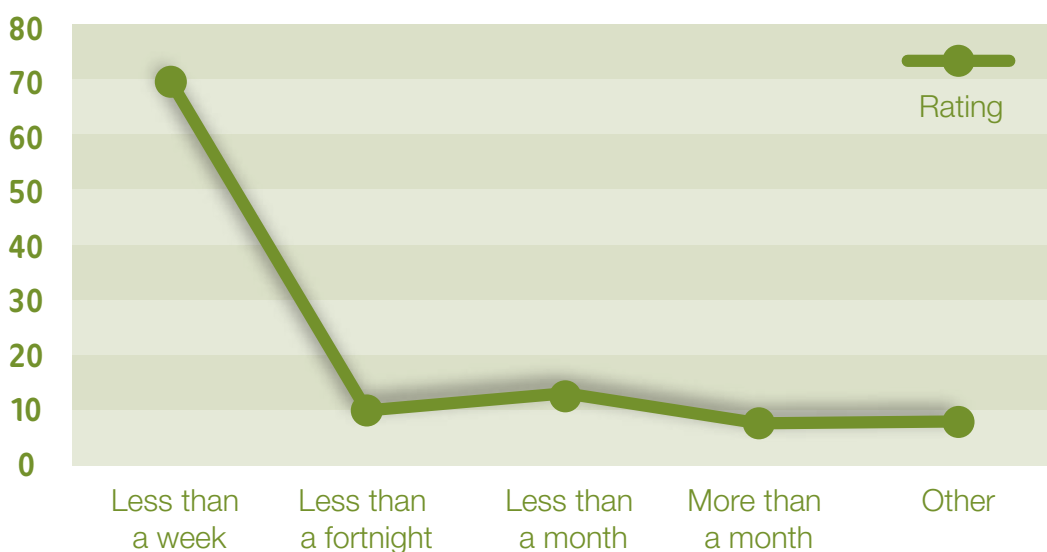
Section 1 of the questionnaire explores what makes the learners want to attend Youthreach on a daily basis and on the issue of absenteeism. Recall one of the main reasons why pupils attended school in the Youth Focus Group was to see their friends. In the Youthreach case the learners were more inclined to attend the centre to get an education or develop their career choices. Box 2 outlines the responses from the learners when asked what makes them want to go to Youthreach on a daily basis.

Box 2: Responses when asked what makes you want to go to Youthreach each day

<i>Get my FETAC and it's good money</i>
<i>Education and learning</i>
<i>Getting paid and passing level 3</i>
<i>So I can get an education and help with finance</i>
<i>To get an education and to get out of the house each day</i>
<i>To get an education and to get paid, to learn to do something when I am older</i>
<i>Left school early but want to do something with my life</i>
<i>To learn new stuff and get my leaving cert</i>
<i>So by the time I'm finished I can get a job</i>
<i>I am here to learn and to get a course in childcare</i>
<i>I want to get 90% attendance and pass</i>
<i>I got to learn life skills, get work experience. I get financial support, it gives me new things to do and opportunities that I would not have otherwise</i>

Learners were asked about the length of time they had ever been absent from Youthreach and what made them decide to come back to the centres. Figure 2 details their responses. Responses were received from 36 learners. 69.4% (25 learners) were absent for less than a week, 11.1% (4 learners) were absent for less than a month and 5.6% (2 learners) were absent for more than a month. Box 3 sets out the responses received when asked what made the learners decide to come back to Youthreach. The responses detailed that the majority of learners returned to Youthreach because they appreciate the benefits of education. The need to return to Youthreach to receive their weekly allowance was also a critical factor.

Figure 2: Have you been absent from Youthreach for this length of time



Box 3: Responses when asked why did they come back to Youthreach after a period of absence

<i>I really enjoy it and would like to get my qualifications</i>
<i>To pass my level 3</i>
<i>Because I was feeling better</i>
<i>Returned after family bereavement</i>
<i>Was in crutches and I was off three days</i>
<i>Because it's boring at the house and nothing to do</i>
<i>Because I was in hospital and then came back again to Youthreach</i>
<i>Because I wasn't sick no more</i>
<i>Because you get fed up lying about the house</i>
<i>I came back to Youthreach because I need to finish my FETAC levels</i>
<i>I wanted the money</i>
<i>Money was getting tight and short</i>
<i>Because I needed to pick up my attendance</i>
<i>I needed to get paid, I was bored doing nothing at home, I missed the people there</i>
<i>There was a family matter to attend to and I came back once it was resolved</i>
<i>Because I didn't want to miss anymore days</i>
<i>Because I want to learn</i>

5.2 RESULTS FROM SECTION 2 - YOUTHREACH MEALS

As part of the services offered by Youthreach the learners are provided with meals throughout the day. The aim of this section was to ascertain from the learners if the meals they were having throughout the day were provided at the various centres or at home. Figure 3; below sets out the percentage of meals the learners receive at the centre. Of the 41 learners who responded when asked what meals they had at the centre; 50% said they had lunch, 21% had breakfast and 17.1% had snacks at the centre. In comparison of the 42 learners detailed in Figure 4; who responded when asked what meals they had at home; 19.4% had breakfast, 27% had dinner and 26% had supper at home.

Figure 3: Learners eat the following meals at the centre

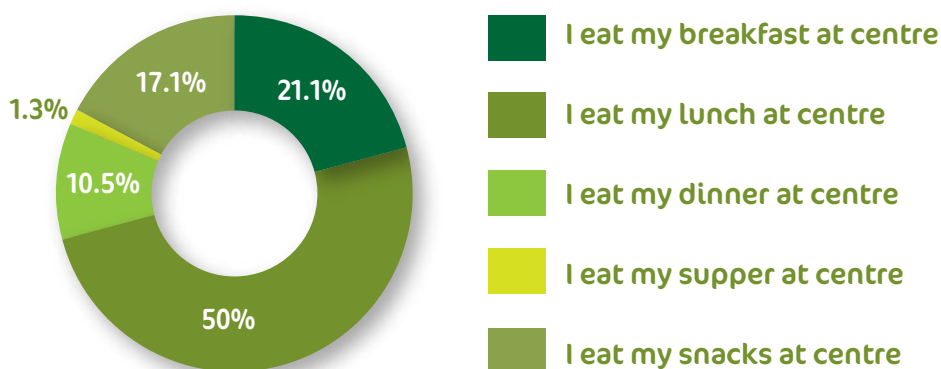
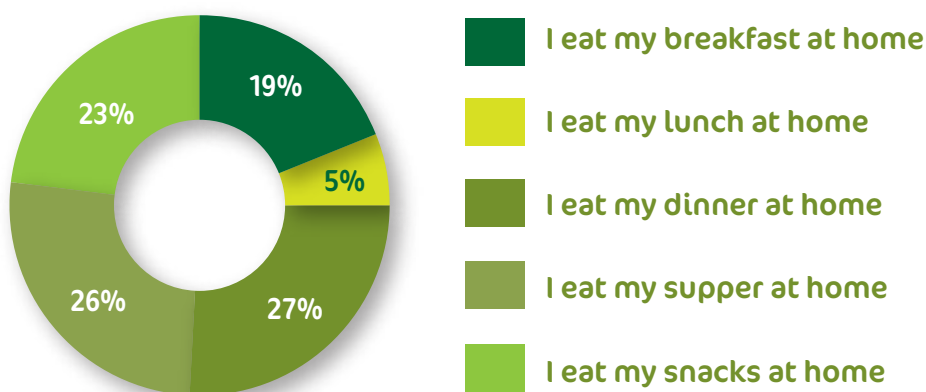


Figure 4: Learners eat the following meals at home



Box 4: Responses when asked if they felt that the meals provided at Youthreach were helpful

Yes
<i>Not really because all I get would be chips</i>
<i>Yes good meals a lot of food choices</i>
<i>Yes they are helpful. We do not need to buy them ourselves</i>
<i>Yes cause I am always hungry in Youthreach around 1-2pm</i>
<i>Yes because we haven't to buy the food</i>
<i>Although the food is very basic and not amazing, I do not have the money for packed lunches, so yes they are helpful</i>
<i>Yes because they come at the right time in the day</i>
<i>Yes to kill the hunger</i>
<i>Aye because it keeps me stronger</i>

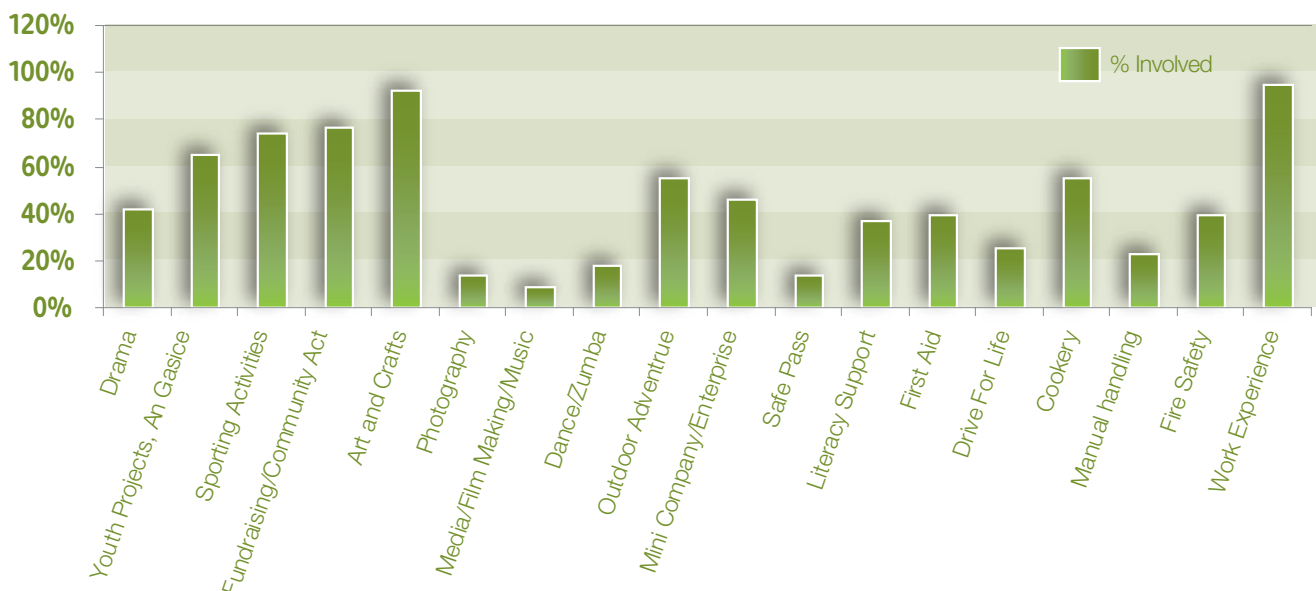
The learners were asked if they ‘take money to Youthreach each day to buy other food and if so, how much money did they take with them?’ The survey showed that 97.7% of the learners took money with them on a daily basis to buy other food and when calculated it worked out at an average of €4.13 per day. This figure is higher than the average amount taken in the Youth questionnaire, which was recorded at €3.73. When both the pupils and the learners were asked if they felt free school lunches were a good idea, both groups were unanimous in highlighting the cost saving benefit to their families.

5.3 RESULTS FROM SECTION 3 – ACTIVITIES IN YOUTHREACH

Section 3 set out to determine the number of activities Learners were partaking in at Youthreach. These activities range from social and creative activities like drama, arts and crafts, photography to practical activities like first aid, manual handling, fire safety, work experience, etc. 43 Learners responded to this question. 11.5% took part in work experience, 11.3% took part in arts and crafts, 9.3% took part in fundraising/community activities and 9% took part in sporting. The survey indicated that the lowest level of participation was in media/film making and music at 1.1%, 1.7% took part in photography and safe pass. When asked if there was a cost associated with these activities, 9.3% indicated that there was a cost involved. When asked how much did these activities cost, the learners stated that on average it was €2 for activities. 93.2% of the learners stated that these activities were helpful to them. The learners were asked why they felt the activities in Youthreach were helpful to them. Box 5 sets out their responses.

Recall extra curricular activities organised and run by schools was broadly similar in that, the top three participation rates in school were mini company, sporting and youth projects.

Figure 5: Percentage of activities learners are involved in at Youthreach



When comparing both the learners and the pupils perspective in terms of whether they found the extra curricular activities helpful, it is evident from the responses in Box 5 below, that the Youthreach participants were more focused on how these activities could benefit their future careers, learning and development. The pupils surveyed in the Youth Focus Groups viewed these activities from a more social perspective.

Box 5: Responses on whether learners find the activities at Youthreach helpful

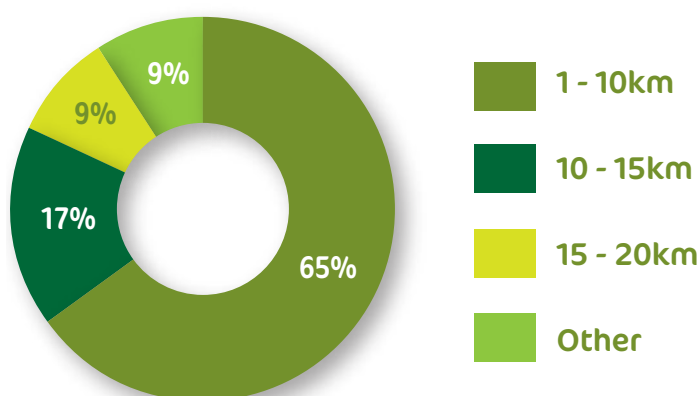
<i>Enjoy exercising and learning new things</i>
<i>I find work experience helpful because it helps you find out what you want to do</i>
<i>To get food</i>
<i>Because it's stuff we need to know in the future</i>
<i>Work experience is very helpful and first aid</i>
<i>I enjoy doing a variety of different things</i>
<i>Enterprise activity makes us more responsible</i>
<i>Because it gets us involved and can give more opportunities</i>
<i>Because it gives you something to do and look forward to</i>
<i>Work experience helped me get a job, and see what jobs I like. I love arts and crafts and I also love fundraisers and community activities we do</i>
<i>Because I have got my safe pass, first aid and many other important things, thanks Youthreach</i>
<i>I like art and craft</i>
<i>Because it helps me with my life</i>

Work Experience

As part of the Youthreach programme the learners are encouraged to take up active work experience. The questionnaire sought to establish from the learners if this was the type of work experience they wanted to obtain. Of 38 respondents, 81.6% said they got the work experience they wanted at Youthreach. The learners were then asked if the work experience they got this year was different to last year., 71% of the learners said it was. The survey detailed that 85.7% of the respondents felt that the work experience they got was good for their learning and development. 79.3% of learners stated that did not have to travel further to their work experience this year.

The learners were asked what distance they travelled to their work experience. Figure 6 details same. 65% of learners stated that they travel between 1-10km to their place of work. 9% of respondents stated that they travel 15-20km to work.

Figure 6: Distance travelled for work experience



The learners were then asked what they wanted to be when they would leave Youthreach.

Box 6: Responses to what learners want to become when they left Youthreach

<i>Social studies/college</i>
<i>A mechanic and open my own business</i>
<i>Pro kick boxer or engineer</i>
<i>A PE teacher or manager of a football under 12's</i>
<i>Go to tech and do my Level 3 in hair and beauty design</i>
<i>I would like to work with children or work in a fashion shop</i>
<i>Childcare assistant after Youthreach</i>
<i>Lorry driver or a mechanic</i>
<i>Military</i>
<i>I would like to get a distinction in LCA and go on to do a PLC course and then go to college where I want to do a course on disability care</i>
<i>Teacher/fitness instructor</i>
<i>I haven't decided yet</i>
<i>I would love to become a guard</i>
<i>Hairdresser, beauty, social worker</i>
<i>Own my own farm, agricultural contractor</i>
<i>Something to do with nursing</i>
<i>A writer or artist</i>
<i>A mechanic</i>

5.4 RESULTS FROM SECTION 7 – OTHER COMMENTS

The purpose of this section was to give the students who participated in the survey an opportunity to express any additional views or comments they may have had regarding the education system. Box 7; below sets out the addition comments provided by the learners.

Box 7: Responses other comments

Youthreach is a good place for young people to come to each day. And we meet new people

I had a very good time at Youthreach when I was in Youthreach. And thanks to all the staff at Lifford Youthreach

I am not here long enough

I think Youthreach is very helpful and I like it. I have got good at most stuff since I left school and they are all really friendly

I need Youthreach not just for financial support, but for an education in a nice environment that no school ever offered me. Here I get to do subjects I enjoy. I feel comfortable and don't feel pressure

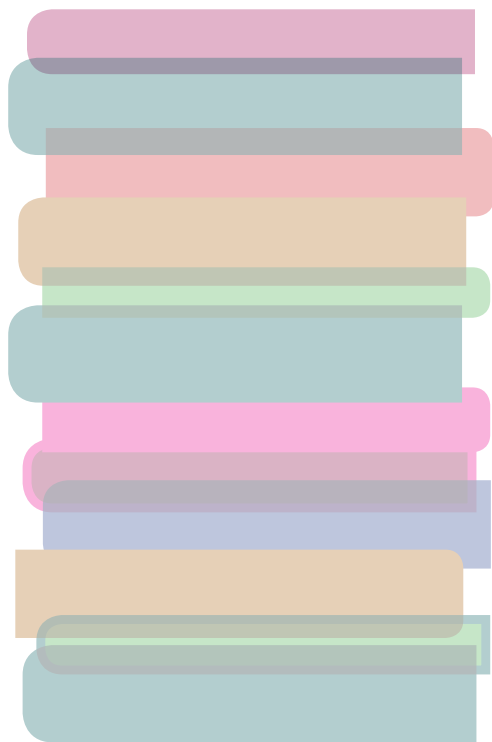
All the teachers are nice to everyone

Please change the food in Youth reach Letterkenny or help fund it

I am very thankful for Youthreach as I get on well here and learn a lot

Chapter 6

What The Parents are Saying



6.0 METHODOLOGY

Bringing up a family in Donegal is more difficult today, than in other parts of the country. The county faces the highest deprivation rates and the highest unemployment rates in the country. In addition, it also has the lowest levels of educational attainment, income levels and experiences difficulties in accessing services. Budgetary cuts to education place further pressures on families.

This research sought to determine the impact of these cuts on parents in Donegal. In conducting the Parents Focus Group questionnaires, it was decided to carry out a sample survey incorporating parents from a wide variety of backgrounds and from various parts of the County in centres in Donegal Town, Inishowen and Letterkenny.

A total of 20 parents took part in the survey. The questionnaire was sub-divided into 5 sections;

- :: Section 1 - Travelling to school
- :: Section 2 – School funding
- :: Section 3 – Supports for children with additional needs
- :: Section 4 - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
- :: Section 5 – Non DEIS schools
- :: Section 6 – Other allowances
- :: Section 7 - Other comments.

6.1 RESULTS FROM SECTION 1 – TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL

The first set of questions in the parent survey aimed at establishing the most common mode of transport currently used in the county and to establish the number of trips parents make on a daily basis. The questionnaire sought to ascertain from the parents the impact of changes to the school transport scheme on their families. Parents were also asked if they would permit their child / children to walk or cycle to school and the results are presented in Box 1.

Respondents were asked how their child / children travels to school. Of the 20 parents who responded 15 parents stated that they travel by car and 4 parents travel by bus (Table 1). Parents also stated that they averaged two trips per day. When asked if they would permit their child(ren) to walk to school, 14 parents said “no”. Box 1 details the answers received when parents were asked the reason why they would or would not permit their child / children to walk/cycle to school.

Table 1: Travel to School

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Car	15	75.0
Bus	4	20.0
Other	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

Box 1: Responses when asked why they would or would not permit their child to walk/cycle to school

<i>Too much traffic</i>
<i>Because we are close to our school we feel that it would be safe doing so.</i>
<i>My son has Aspergers Syndrome and would not be capable of walking to school on his own</i>
<i>Too dangerous, main road with no cycle path or footpath</i>
<i>Undecided</i>
<i>The road is too dangerous traffic at 100km/hr on bends</i>
<i>Live too far away and children would have to walk along the by-pass</i>
<i>Because my child going to primary school is only 9 yrs old. The pupils going to secondary school would have a lot of books to carry to school on a daily basis</i>
<i>We are too far from the school and my child is too young</i>
<i>I would allow them to walk if the weather is dry and mild and they are at the age where I can trust my children</i>
<i>Child safety on the road can be at risk by drivers who have no regard for children</i>

When asked if they use the Bus Éireann bus service, 25% of parents said “yes”. Of the parents who said they did not use this service the most noted reason for non-use of the service was because the family was not eligible for the service. Table 2; details the responses when parents were asked what they felt was the most economical mode of transport. 38.9% of parents stated that it was the car and 33.3% said by foot.

Table 2: Responses to what is the most economical mode of transport

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Car	7	38.9
Bus	4	22.2
By Foot	6	33.3
Other	1	5.6
Total	18	100.0

Of the parents surveyed 100% stated that their child /children never availed of the supports of the Transport Liaison Officer. According to the new school transport rules in place by Bus Éireann, even if a child qualifies for free transport in terms of the distance rules etc in 2012/2013, there will be no guarantee that a younger sibling will be entitled to avail of the same bus route service. The survey asked parents if they would be affected by this rule. Of those surveyed 15.8% (3 parents) said they would be affected by this rule.

6.2 RESULTS FROM SECTION 2 – SCHOOL FUNDING

Similarly to the questions presented in the youth questionnaire, the aim of this section was to ascertain from the parents the amount of voluntary contributions which they are required to pay and their perception of what these monies are used for. In the survey 88.2% of parents stated that they pay a voluntary contribution to the school. When asked what they believe this contribution was being used for by the school, Table 3 details that 28.6% (14 parents) said that it was used for photocopying; 24.5% (12 parents) stated book rental. Art and school diaries were joint at 12.2% (6 parents). Just 2% of parents believed the money was being used for mock exams and school insurance. 48.1% of parents believe that the voluntary contribution payable to the schools will increase in 2013/2014. Box 2 details the responses from parents when asked what they felt the impact of an increase on voluntary contributions would be on their family.

Table 3: Use of Voluntary Contribution

Use of Voluntary Contribution	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Photocopying	14	28.6%
Book rental	12	24.5%
Mock Exams	1	2.0%
Technical Drawing	2	4.1%
Art	6	12.2%
School Diary	6	12.2%
School Insurance	1	2.0%
School Locker	2	4.1%
Transport to event	4	8.2%
Other	1	2.0%

Box 2: Responses from parents when asked what they felt the impact of an increase in voluntary contribution would have on their family

This will cause more distress to families who already are finding it hard to stretch their weekly income

Will mean less budget available for after school activities. Pressure on home budgets

We will have to pay more

Will put even more strain on low income families and embarrassment if unable to pay

I imagine that this will increase in the coming years due to cut backs. This will impact our family financially and although I am happy to contribute if it increases year on year other areas will suffer

Every additional cost impacts on family as more and more costs must be met from a fixed income. Children may have to go without some other equipment or games. It is another tax

I don't know if it will increase in 2014 but it would impact greatly on our family. It is like a silent tax. We have 5 children and can not afford to pay anymore

If there was an increase as I think there will be, as a lone parent to five children I honestly don't know how I will cope

While we pay a contribution every term, it is hard due to the number of children we have, 4 in total, so if you have to give one a €10 you have to give it for the other children

Have three children and it is expensive enough already

6.3 RESULTS FROM SECTION 3 SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Section A of the questionnaire sought to ascertain from the parents if any of their children had ever availed of the supports of a Resource Teacher, Learning Support Teacher or a Special Needs Assistant. The parents were then asked if the reduction in the teaching support time would ultimately have an impact on the child(ren). Of the parents surveyed 47.4% of parents said that their child had availed of these services, with 52.6% stating that their child had not availed of any support service.

Box 3: Responses when asked what the impact of the reduction in teaching support time would be on children

He no longer has the support he needs because he had a test and as a result he lost his support. He scored 18 in his test and the average is 50

My child would have serious problems at school if his resource hours are cut as this one-to-one teaching is so important for his learning abilities and life skills

Development would be severely hindered. Would be critical to the child's educational progress

They will go back ways on all the good

My child has now lost out on this support and is struggling to keep up

My child has now been assessed and her maths which she was having trouble has now improved, therefore she is now back in mainstream class

If my child is not getting the support that they need the impact would be that my child would not want to go back to school

It will impact on my child as she needs one to one support to better her understanding of the topics

Visiting teacher for Travellers is gone

Box 4: Responses by parents when asked what they felt the impact of the reduction in teaching support time on other children in their child’s class.

<i>The classes are much bigger and so the children are not going to get the same time with the teacher</i>
<i>Teacher would either have to take extra time with my child or else he would fall behind - other children would also suffer</i>
<i>Loss of learning support will impact on the pace and learning of the wider class as need to ensure children don't get left behind</i>
<i>Puts more stress on teacher and thereafter affects children</i>
<i>Class maybe held back to allow extra support thereafter other children may not be reaching their full potential</i>
<i>Their confidence will be away down again. More kids in class & teacher not be able to cope with them all</i>
<i>Other children have also lost out on hours and are finding it difficult</i>
<i>The learning support hours will suffer</i>
<i>It will impact on loads of children who used this support and then need it as will help them further education</i>

Section B focused on the School Completion Programme (SCP). Of the parents surveyed only one parent stated that their family had benefited from the SCP programme.

Section C of the questionnaire explored the impact of the service provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Of those who responded 21.1% of parents stated that a NEPS psychologist had visited their school in 2012/2013. 42.1% of the schools were in an urban area and 57.9% in a rural area. 15.8% of parents stated that their child / children had engaged with the psychologist. 42.9% of parents who responded to this question said that this service was a benefit to their child. Box 5 details the responses from the parents when asked what they felt the benefit of the service was to their child(ren).

Box 5: Responses by parents when asked what they felt the benefit of the NEPS’ service was to their child / children

<i>He has had an assessment and needs to be seen by a psychologist to possibly benefit him by diagnosis of particular difficulties</i>
<i>My son suffers from Asperger’s Syndrome and psychological services are critical for him</i>
<i>Following assessment she gained access to resource lessons however she has not been followed up since the initial assessment</i>

Section D focused on the Home School Liaison service provided by the Department. This section aimed to ascertain from the parents what they felt the benefits of this programme was to them on an individual level in terms of becoming involved in the school and also the benefits for their child. 22.2% of parents stated their child / children had access to the Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO). Of this figure, 45.5% of parents said that it helped them become more involved as parents in their children's education. Box 6 details the responses by the parents when asked how did the support of the HSLO help them become more involved in their child(ren's) education. 57.1% of parents said it helped them become more involved in the life of the school. Box 7 details the responses by parents when asked what benefit they got from the HSLO in terms of them becoming involved in the life of the school.

Box 6: Responses by parents when asked to specify how did the HSLO help them become more involved in their child / children's education

Helps to encourage parents participation in programmes

All new infants received a visit from HSCL which was positive for new parents and linking to school

Visited children prior to junior infants

Because my child had problems and the Home School Liaison Officer came to my home and spoke with myself and my child and told us the benefits of school which helped us a lot

She visits home and helps/advises keeps parents in picture

Box 7: Responses by parents when asked to specify how the HSLO helped them to become more involved in the life of the school

My child did not have the same work as the other children

I understand the way the school works and I get to meet the teachers

I have been on the Parents Association Committee in the school

6.4 RESULTS FROM SECTION 4 – DELIVERING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN SCHOOLS (DEIS)

This section of the questionnaire aimed to elicit from parents the benefits of the DEIS programmes in schools which qualified for the status. Parents were asked if their child/ children attended a school which qualified for DEIS. Of the 13 parents who responded to this question, 7 parents stated that they believed the DEIS programme was a beneficial programme. Box 8 details the reasons why the parents felt the programme was a beneficial programme.

Box 8: Responses by parents when asked what the benefit of the DEIS programme was for their child(ren)

<i>Lower class numbers</i>
<i>Smaller class ratios - better for children</i>
<i>Very beneficial to the children in many ways</i>
<i>Extra support is fantastic to aid in the progression and development of my children</i>
<i>It will be great and they would probably eat healthier food</i>

As part of the DEIS programme school meals are provided for in the designated schools. Of the 19 respondents 52.6% of parents stated that lunches are provided in the school. 50% of parents said that they avail of the free lunch service.

6.5 RESULTS FROM SECTION 5 – NON-DEIS SCHOOLS

This section of the questionnaire sought to obtain from the parents who had children attending non-DEIS schools, their views in terms of what they felt the possible benefits would be to their child / children (ren) if they attended a DEIS school. It also examined school lunches in terms of the financial cost to parents on a daily basis. 61.5% of parents stated that their child(ren) did not attend a DEIS school. 83.3% of parents stated that they prepare a lunch on a daily basis for their child(ren). 26.7% stated that they give their child(ren) money for lunch which is on average €24.33 per week.

Parents were asked if they felt that the school which their child / children was attending could benefit from the DEIS programme 33.3% of parents said “yes”. Box 9 details the responses by parents when asked what they believed the benefit of DEIS would be for their school. It clearly highlighted that parents feel DEIS would have a positive impact in terms of pupil teacher ratios and the cost of education to parents would inevitably be reduced.

Box 9: Responses by parents when asked what they believed the benefit of DEIS would be to their school*They could benefit from extra funding and resources**Encouragement of parent participation and increase value of education for pupils**Better pupil teacher ratio**Cheaper for the parents. We are putting enough money everywhere else**There are children in school who would benefit from school lunches and from lower class sizes**I have 4 children in school and it would relieve the financial pressure slightly as well as benefitting from extra advantages that DEIS schools receive***6.6 RESULTS FROM SECTION 6 – OTHER ALLOWANCES**

The final section questioned parents about the school clothing and footwear allowance. Of the 17 respondents, 42.1% stated that they avail of the allowance, with 59.9% stating that they did not qualify for the allowance. As part of the budgetary reductions parents were asked what would the likely impact be on their family if this allowance was to be reduced. Box 10; details the responses by parents.

Box 10: Responses by parents when asked what impact the reduction in the school clothing and footwear allowance will have on their family*Major**Further cutbacks will result in our children's education suffering in the long term. Our schools have improved too much over the year, this would be a serious dilemma for the future of this country.**It would be terrible. I'm really depending on this money for uniforms**It will have a very big impact. I am very worried already about the cost of sending my 4 children back to school in 2013**Children have to go without**A massive impact, I have 5 children; 2 in secondary & 3 in primary and being a lone parent on benefits this will be drastic on my children, they will have to do without, unfortunately**Harder to get uniforms*

6.7 RESULTS FROM SECTION 7 – OTHER COMMENTS

This final section gave parents an opportunity to voice any additional comments they had. Parents are very disillusioned with the current situation. There is a fear among families in the county about future cuts to the educational budget and also the growing reliance on families to provide additional funding in order to run the schools on a daily basis. One parent's quote highlights the level of discontent among parents;

“I really feel that Ireland was showing care and progress to our children’s education but as we see with the amount of cuts in our schools, I feel that Ireland will soon become a place where only the wealthy families will be able to avail of proper education, in return, Ireland will not be a great place to bring up children”.

Box 11: Responses by parents when asked for any other comments they may have

The impact of cuts are only starting to truly materialise this year. Much more fundraising required by schools to try and maintain standards and supports

All children will suffer because of the cuts to DEIS, in our school it was very important. Now our teacher is gone, children will suffer

We are under severe pressure to make ends meet ourselves in our household and I am so fearful that with cuts to school funding, that we will be asked to contribute more and more. We don't have any extra money to give

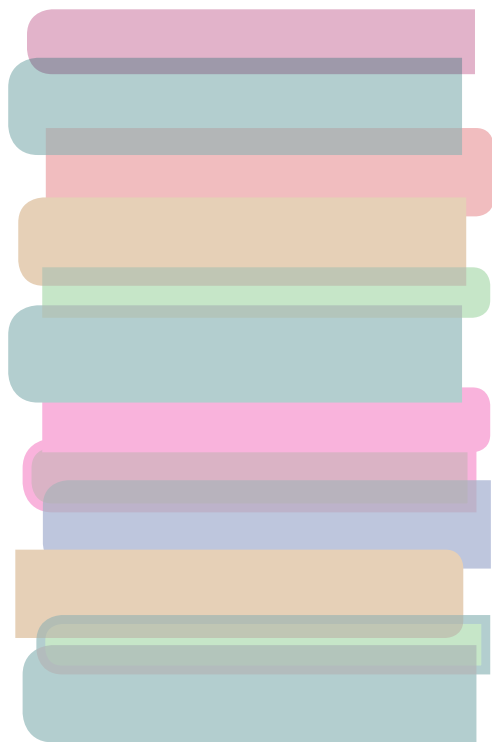
The other impact that the cuts are having is that schools have no money to spend on resources such as art and crafts, numeracy, literacy products which would help pupils in learning

A lot of families that are already on low incomes are going to suffer drastically. The children are the most important people in this and they should be protected from poverty

I would hope the schools would have the full support of our government in terms of our children's education and how their life time opportunities will develop - life skills. Education is power!

Chapter 7

What Teachers and Principals Said



7.0 METHODOLOGY

Chapters 4 and 5 detailed the impact of the cuts in education from the young person's perspective, while Chapter 6 presents the viewpoint from the parents perspective Chapter 7 will explore how these cuts are impacting on schools from the perspective of the teaching staff.

In conducting the survey for the primary and post-primary schools two questionnaires were devised. The questionnaires went live to all schools including primary, post-primary and the schools for pupils with additional needs on the 21st October 2012.

A total of 36 primary schools and 12 post-primary schools responded to the questionnaires. While the questionnaires were different, there were similarities in a number of the sections.

The primary school questionnaire had eight sections;

- :: Section 1 - Supports for children with additional needs
- :: Section 2 - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
- :: Section 3 – State funding for schools
- :: Section 4 – Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)
- :: Section 5 – Absenteeism and Education Welfare Officer
- :: Section 6 – Cost of education
- :: Section 7 - Health and holistic welling being of children
- :: Section 8 - Other comments

The post - primary school questionnaire had ten sections;

- :: Section 1 - Supports for children with additional needs
- :: Section 2 - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
- :: Section 3 – State funding for schools
- :: Section 4 – Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)
- :: Section 5 – Career development and Guidance Counsellors
- :: Section 6 – Transition year programme
- :: Section 7 - Absenteeism and Education Welfare Officer
- :: Section 8 – Cost of education
- :: Section 9 - Health and holistic welling being of children
- :: Section 10 - Other comments

7.1 RESULTS FROM SECTION 1 – Supports For Children With Additional Needs

7.1.1 Resource Teacher/Special Needs Assistant/ Learning Support Teacher

This section sought to ascertain from both primary and post-primary schools if the budgetary cut backs have had any impact on the numbers of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers and Learning Support Teachers in the schools. Figure 1 and 2; details the impact to the supports in schools from the teachers perspective. Figure 3 and 4; further details the impact in terms of whether or not there was an increase or decrease in the numbers of supports in the various schools. In primary schools there was a significant decrease in all supports; Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers and Learning Support Teachers. In the post-primary schools there was no indication of increases in any of the supports but a decrease of all three supports for pupils in the class room, especially Resource Teachers and Learning Support Teachers.

Figure 1: Respondents assessment of impact of cuts on the numbers of in-class supports in primary schools

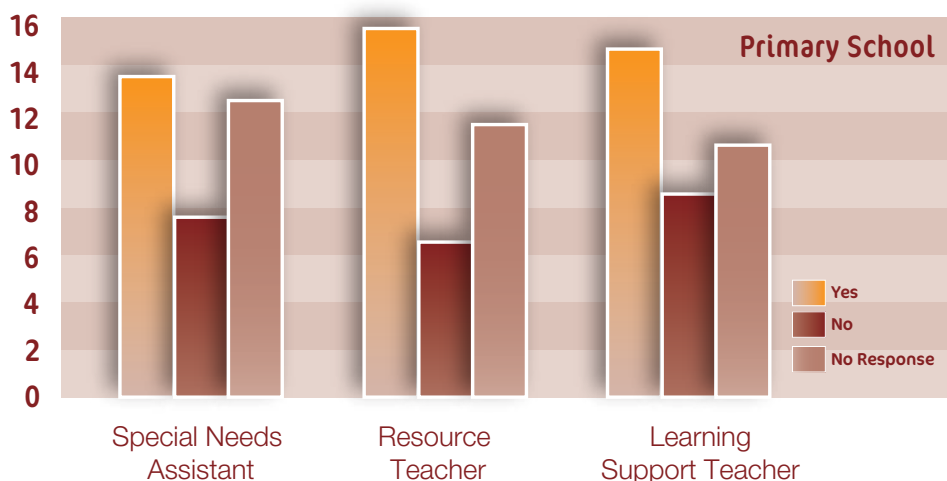


Figure 2: Respondents assessment of impact of cuts on the numbers of in-class supports in post-primary schools

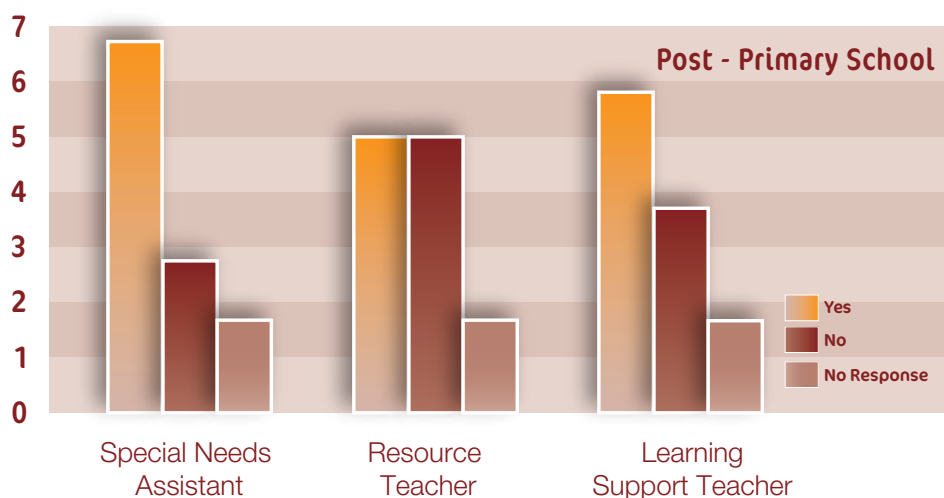


Figure 3: The increase or decrease of in-class supports in primary schools from the respondent's perspective

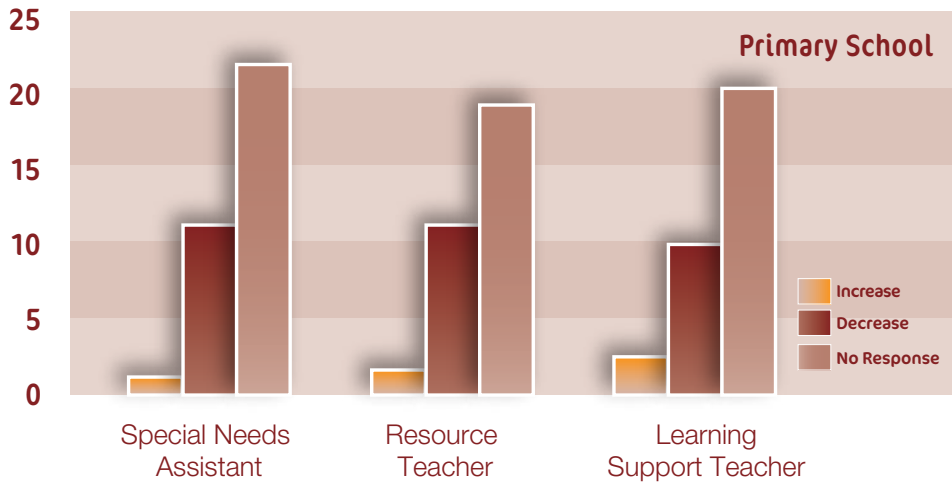
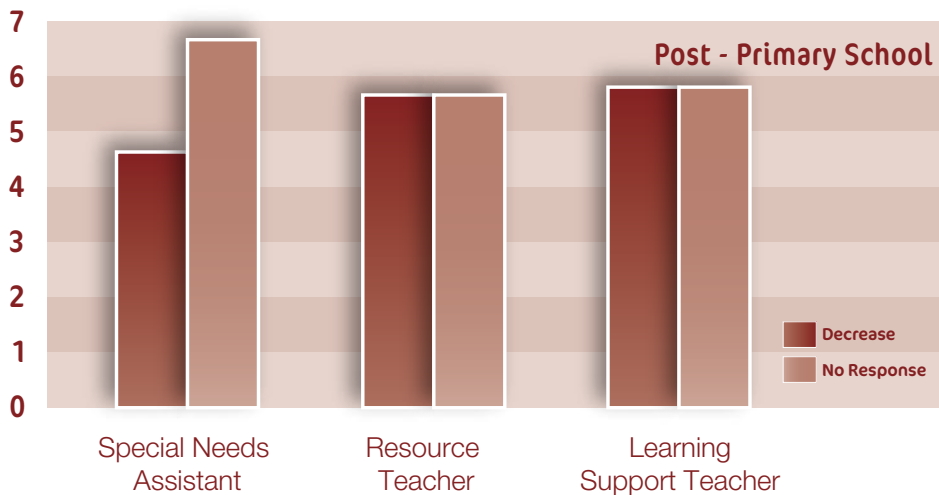


Figure 4: The increase or decrease of in-class supports in post-primary schools from the respondent's perspective



The research set about obtaining the views of teachers/principals in the schools with regard to the impacts of budgetary cutbacks in terms of the supports in-class, focussing on individual matters such as “behaviour management of pupils, skills development of pupils” etc. The following series of commentary boxes highlight the responses received from the teaching staff at primary and post primary levels. Boxes 1-8; details the responses from primary schools. It is evident that overall a negative impact is being felt in the schools in terms of the impact these cuts are having on the pupils’ intellectual, emotional and social development. It is clear that the reduction of in-class supports has implications for the entire class and not just individual pupils. The cuts have also put added pressure on teachers who have to accommodate pupils at all levels within their single class room environment. It extends further into the home lives of the pupils affected in terms of the pressure and frustration felt by parents.

Boxes 9-15 detail the responses from the teaching staff in post-primary schools. The negative implications of budgetary cuts are being felt in post-primary schools across the county impacting at individual level, with the pupils directly affected but also on the pupils in the wider classroom, the teachers in the class and the family at home.

Box 1: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the behaviour management of pupils

Behaviour management of pupils
<i>Daydreaming, hard to keep focused on the task</i>
<i>SNA's are not able to work with two children in different rooms at different times</i>
<i>Major impact</i>
<i>Constant disruption in class</i>
<i>Less one to one time in resource</i>
<i>Increase in class sizes - more challenging behaviour</i>
<i>Fewer staff available to support class teacher</i>
<i>Inadequate SNA cover</i>
<i>Loss of Home School Liaison Teacher</i>
<i>It hasn't really impacted on pupils as such</i>

Box 2: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the skills development of pupils

Skills development of pupils
<i>Less one to one tuition</i>
<i>Less time for pupils learning English, their 2nd language</i>
<i>Less time available per child</i>
<i>No French and EAL in school anymore</i>
<i>With the reduction in SNA, the children do not have the help and support with the curriculum they previously had and sadly for these children who had SNA's, it was important in aiding their progression in school</i>
<i>Extreme lack of progress</i>
<i>Less time to devote to those most in need of support, as personnel stretched too far</i>
<i>Limited budget to buy new materials</i>
<i>For autistic and language challenged children the cuts have affected their development as they have less time with their resource teacher in a one to one setting</i>
<i>Not enough SNA support for adequate computer and one to one time</i>
<i>It has impacted on the level of skills development we can provide</i>

Box 3: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the personal care of pupils

Personal care of pupils
<i>No HSLO to work with parents</i>

Box 4: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the family of the pupil

Family of the pupil
<i>Parents are feeling discontent and a few have been verbally aggressive</i>
<i>Foreign families don't get language help</i>
<i>Frustrated at loss of hours</i>
<i>More emphasis on parents sharing the work load to supplement learning support. No home visits</i>
<i>Home School Liaison Teacher cut</i>
<i>More families find it harder to support their children</i>

Box 5: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on travel to and from school for the pupils

Travel to and from school for the pupils
<i>Families have to pay for bus transport or provide own</i>
<i>Pupils have to pay for transport - before this amalgamation schools did not</i>
<i>Free bus service cut</i>
<i>More expensive</i>

Box 6: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the attendance of the pupils

Attendance of the pupils
<i>Good</i>
<i>Excellent</i>
<i>DEIS co-ordinator used to visit homes of chronic absentees. This post has been cut out</i>
<i>Below average</i>
<i>DEIS cut</i>

Box 7: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on the active participation or engagement with other pupils

Active participation or engagement with other children
<i>Many out of school activities that children attended can no longer be afforded by parents</i>
<i>Lacks opportunity for supervised group work</i>
<i>No change</i>
<i>Average</i>
<i>Would benefit from more SNA input</i>
<i>Not being able to afford bus to field trips</i>

Box 8: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in primary schools on other

Other
<i>Child with Downs Syndrome getting no support due to budget cuts</i>
<i>Many initiatives introduced have had to be cut as we no longer have the personnel to oversee them</i>
<i>Individual programmes much harder to deliver as shortage of Resource Teachers, less time given in Learning Support also</i>

Box 9: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on the behaviour management of the pupils

Behaviour management of pupils
<i>Much more difficult</i>
<i>Students receive less individual care which has an overall negative impact on their general well being or their learning needs</i>
<i>More difficult, less teachers in middle management is a serious issue</i>
<i>The students who have reduced SNA allocations time are obviously more difficult</i>
<i>Lack of SNA support in supporting students with behavioural problems</i>

Box 10: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on the skills development of pupils

Skills development of pupils
<i>In large classes skills development is decreased</i>
<i>Less teachers, less time</i>
<i>Less resources to have cooperative learning</i>
<i>The decrease or denial of SNA time will adversely affect skills</i>
<i>Significant impact</i>

Box 11: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on the personal care of pupils

Personal care of pupils
<i>Still well looked after but difficult</i>
<i>This has remained a priority and hopefully remains unaffected</i>
<i>Less so</i>
<i>Difficulties associated with toileting due to lack of SNA</i>

Box 12: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on the family of the pupil

The family of pupil
<i>Feel under more pressure</i>
<i>Less support at a time when more is required due to economics</i>
<i>Cause of greater concern to family</i>
<i>Difficult for me to say but no doubt school issues cause stress at home</i>

Box 13: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on travel to and from school

Travel to & from school
<i>Bus fares up</i>
<i>The change in business arrangement by DES & Bus Eireann is a major stressor</i>

Box 14: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on attendance

Attendance
<i>None</i>
<i>Less so</i>

Box 15: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools on the impact of cuts to in-class supports in post-primary schools on the active participation or engagement with other children

Active participation or engagement with other children
<i>None</i>
<i>Not always possible due to cuts in LS</i>

7.1.2 School Completion Programme (SCP)

The examined the impact of the School Completion Programme in schools. Of those surveyed, 23.5% of primary schools and 66.7% of post-primary schools qualified for the programme. Of these groups, 33.3% of primary schools indicated that they would be availing of the programme in 2012/2013 and 72.7% of post-primary schools would do so. For the schools that availed of this programme it proved to be extremely beneficial in terms of;

- :: The school premises availed of funding that benefited the interior and exterior of the buildings. There was also provision for the schools to avail of equipment such as instruments, computers etc
- :: For the families it encouraged family participation in school activities and funding was provided, which paid for school trips, hence taking the burden off families
- :: For the pupils there are many benefits from extra curricular activities such as breakfast and homework clubs, to extra tuition, literacy support etc
- :: For the teaching staff extra support hours for pupils were provided and extra tutors for subjects such as music, art, sport, pottery etc
- :: Other benefits noted by the teaching staff included provision of Summer and Easter camps for the pupils and after school activities.

Box 16 and 17; details the responses from the primary and post-primary schools when questioned why they did not avail of the SCP programme?

Box 16: Responses from teaching staff in primary schools when asked why they did not avail of the SCP

<i>Not included or aware of it</i>
<i>The school wasn't chosen to be suitable for The School Completion Programme</i>
<i>Did not qualify</i>
<i>Unsure</i>
<i>Always hoops to jump through. As we are not a DEIS school we come in at the bottom</i>

Box 17: Responses from teaching staff in post-primary schools when asked why they did not avail of the SCP

<i>Don't qualify to meet the requirements</i>
<i>Our retention rate is well above national average</i>

Finally, in this section the teaching staff were asked if their schools will avail of the SCP programme in 2012/2013, 72.7% of post-primary schools said "yes" and 33.3% of primary schools said "yes", they would avail of the programme.

7.1.3 National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The research also explored the role of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Of the primary schools who responded 82.4% stated that they availed of the NEPS service and 83.3% of post-primary schools. 63.3% of primary school teaching staff stated that the amount of time allocated by the psychologists was not adequate and 75% of post-primary schools stated the same. The survey also asked the teaching staff if they had to contract this assessment from other resources. In primary schools, it was noted that school funds were used to provide the assessments. In the post-primary schools it was stated that the assessments were conducted by qualified members of staff and from private assessments. 93.3% of primary schools and 90.9% of post-primary schools both stated that they will be providing this psychological assessment in 2012/2013 in the school.

Boxes 18 and 19; outlines the responses from primary and post-primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the psychological service has on pupils

Box 18: Responses from primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the psychological service has on pupils

<i>Still on waiting list</i>
<i>Very little impact, it is inadequate for our need, we still need to commission private assessments at cost to school/parents</i>
<i>Little impact as the child did not receive an SNA, which he needs in order to achieve in class. Child has to follow a differentiated curriculum in a four class setting</i>
<i>The lack of service meant that a number of parents decided to have an assessment done privately. Those who could not afford it had to do without!</i>
<i>Focus on pupils transferring to secondary school (outgoing) left little time for assessment of current pupils - No benefit to our school but beneficial for 6th class pupils</i>
<i>Inadequate service</i>
<i>It is good to have a psychologist assigned to the school but he appears to have too many schools to cover</i>
<i>This is a very important service and the psychologist meets with all involved with the child to give support and guidance. Unfortunately her time is also stretched</i>
<i>NEPS service impact is huge. One of the most vital services on offer to our school</i>
<i>Of huge value to the school as an external support</i>
<i>It caused a strain as school funds stretched enough</i>
<i>I feel that the time spent was inadequate to cater for this particular pupil's needs. Our psychologist has a vast amount of schools to cover</i>
<i>Enabled us to avail of resource hours for a child who would have had to wait. NEPS hours are inadequate</i>
<i>Longer waiting time. No feedback or meeting with parents</i>
<i>Follow ups - not the same as having involvement of NEPS, often badly needed in schools dealing with EBD</i>
<i>Effective, in that, if diagnosed the child's problem and advised us on how to proceed</i>
<i>Beneficial to pupil/staff and parents</i>
<i>Psychologist with us this year - very helpful etc. One assessment to be completed for year 2012/2013</i>

Box 19: Responses from post-primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the psychological service has on pupils

<i>Identified children with learning/emotional needs</i>
<i>Positive impact</i>
<i>Less of a service when needed most</i>
<i>It greatly helped access other services for a number of pupils</i>
<i>The NEPS service to our school is significant and on-going. It has been and is a core service we are very happy with. We are very happy with the level of service</i>
<i>What service??</i>

7.1.4 Supports for Ethnic Minorities and the Traveller Communities

The research examined supports for ethnic minorities and the Traveller community in schools. Boxes 20 and 21 detail the responses from the teaching staff at both primary and post-primary level, when asked what impact the withdrawal of the Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) service has had on the relationship between the school and the community concerned. On reviewing the responses from the school at both levels, it is evident that the major impact of the cuts to this vital service is the linkage that has been lost between the home and the schools. The teachers see this officer as the person that focussed on targeted groups and provided vital support for all persons concerned, the pupils, the parents and the school. It ultimately will have a negative effect on participation of targeted pupils and affect retention rates in school. In the long term for pupils who would have benefited from this additional support it will further marginalise them in society.

Box 20: Responses from primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the withdrawal of the HSLO service has on the relationship between the school and the community concerned

<i>It has been withdrawn two years ago</i>
<i>Already withdrawn in 2009</i>
<i>Activities previously organised not completed now</i>
<i>We did have (and lost) rural co-ordinator and this has had a negative impact on parents</i>
<i>Was very beneficial to all particularly to liaise with the home</i>
<i>It was a major loss to the school when this service was lost</i>
<i>Withdrawn four years ago</i>
<i>The school staff can no longer meet with the parents before they enrol their children. No ongoing support/liaison with families that are experiencing difficulties</i>
<i>It can create a barrier between home and school if you don't get a chance to speak to parents</i>
<i>More work for teachers, principals. Less help and support for teachers, parents and children</i>
<i>It means that families and pupils find it difficult to cope with their own problems</i>
<i>Already withdrawn a few years back. It was a very useful link between home and school</i>

Box 21: Responses from post-primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the withdrawal of the HSLO service has on the relationship between the school and community concerned

<i>It will close down a unique connection between school and the home, severing the only channel of communication effectively operating for these families</i>
<i>Very serious impact on home/school links</i>
<i>Major debilitating effect with less opportunity to meet with and build a relationship with the home</i>
<i>Break of links especially with parents less likely to engage with more formal links e.g. parent teacher meetings</i>
<i>Very significant- this service is not singularly directed at Ethnic minorities and the Traveller community. It is for the majority of it's time directed at parents (families) who need major support</i>
<i>If withdrawn it will affect the service we provide to parents. The more parents are involved the better the retention and participation</i>
<i>Huge implications - the most vulnerable students and their families will loose this essential support</i>

In the budgetary cuts the role of the Traveller Liaison Officer was terminated. The survey strived to ascertain from the schools the impact this withdrawal has had on the primary and post-primary schools. In the post-primary schools the teaching staff stated that they did not have a sizable Traveller community in their schools. In terms of the withdrawal of the HSLO for Travellers, one school noted that “We have a small Traveller community group who are generally very well integrated into the school community. However, we have a number who are transient - and nobody can tell us whether they have left or not”. The loss appears to be more acutely felt at primary level.

Box 22: Responses from primary school teaching staff when asked what impact the withdrawal of the HSLO for Travellers has on the relationship between the school and the Traveller community concerned

<i>Was very helpful in integrating these children and bridging the link between home and school</i>
<i>Will lead to a drop in attendance by children from Traveller community</i>
<i>Less time to give to family and their difficulties e.g girls approaching puberty</i>
<i>The loss of this was unfortunate. As the visiting teacher was a great link with the families, and had a very positive and open link with all connected</i>
<i>Less communication between school and Traveller community</i>
<i>This was a very positive service - encouraging pupils to attend school regularly, encouraging parents to attend P/T meetings. Often visited homes on behalf of school. No one now to do this job</i>

7.2 RESULTS FROM SECTION 2 –Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS)

The DEIS programme was developed to provide additional support and resources in disadvantaged areas. The survey aimed to establish if the schools who availed of this programme found it to be beneficial. Of the primary schools who responded, 50% said “yes” and 88.9% of post-primary schools said “yes”. Funding has been cut to this programme through the budget. The survey asked the schools what the impact of these cuts on schools were throughout the county? Boxes 23 and 24; details the responses received from the schools. The DEIS programme provided schools in the county with a rural co-ordinator. This person was of critical importance to the programme. A reduction in funding for DEIS schools will result in less availability of resources for pupils, larger class sizes, etc. It will have a negative effect on teaching, particularly for disadvantaged pupils as teachers will have less time to dedicate to pupils in need of additional support.

Box 23: Responses from primary schools by teaching staff when asked what the impact of the budgetary cuts to the DEIS programme

<i>Less resources leading to children losing out on swimming etc</i>
<i>No co-ordinating teacher</i>
<i>Children will miss out on extra activities, literacy and numeracy may not progress as the DES is expecting</i>
<i>Less trips and less resources. Also less money for helping/facilitating parents and activities</i>
<i>We lost our DEIS co-ordinator which had a drastic effect on the school</i>
<i>Huge cut in grant provided - less outings reductions in resources we will be able to purchase fewer outside facilities/trainers</i>
<i>We have already lost our DEIS co-ordinator</i>
<i>Cutting the post of rural co-ordinator has meant; no home visits, no overseeing and implementing of initiatives.</i>
<i>No liaison with pre-infant level parents. Less resources and initiatives due to funding cuts</i>
<i>It will make it more difficult to provide resources/training, up skilling for staff</i>
<i>It will have a negative effect on teaching and learning across all classes. Scores will fall in literacy and numeracy</i>
<i>Children will get lost in overcrowded classrooms. No resources as schools don't have the money to buy them</i>
<i>The loss of our rural co-ordinator has had a huge effect on our school - less support is available for those in most need of it</i>
<i>Loss of teachers - Resource hours, HSCL, language initiative, larger class sizes, loss summer work scheme. Cuts to capitation grant, no sub cover for uncertified days, abolition of grant for EAL</i>
<i>The impact is quite simple for our school which is run on a very tight budget. If a major problem arises e.g. boiler needing replaced we simply can't afford it</i>
<i>DEIS programme provides money which our parents do not have, so we can bring children on educational trips and also to have educational workshops/classes within the school</i>

Box 24: Responses from post-primary schools by teaching staff when asked what the impact of the budgetary cuts to the DEIS programme

<i>Reduced the level of resources, interventions & supports we can give students and families. PTR cuts means bigger classes and less subject options for students</i>
<i>Less support for targeted pupils</i>
<i>Will affect attendance and resources</i>
<i>Less resources at a time when more are required</i>
<i>More economic hardship for families. Fewer resources will be procured</i>
<i>Withdrawal of services, classes, resources, funding directed at risk students. Thereby potentially affecting SCP</i>
<i>Massive implications - more cuts to DEIS will seriously affect the quality of education available to students and their families</i>

7.3 RESULTS FROM SECTION 3 – State Funding For Schools

This section dealt with the issue of state funding or capitation that is provided by the state to the primary and post-primary schools. It was set down in the budget that there was to be a 6% reduction in capitation over a four year period in all schools. This section asked the teaching staff what they felt the likely impacts would be on their schools and pupils in light of such reductions in capitation. It is quite clear that the impacts are negative at both levels. Ultimately, these cuts to funding are going to result in less access to resources for pupils, for example, access to extra curricular activities. There are also cases noted by the teaching staff that these cuts are going to have an affect on literacy and numeracy levels in schools, to the detriment of the pupils. One of the main issues raised in the survey was the loss of the Rural Co-ordinator and the implications in terms of the vital link that this Co-ordinator was between the pupils, parents and the school. An alarming point raised by the survey was the schools inability to have the funds available for the upkeep and maintenance of the school building, quote;

“The impact is quite simple for our school which is run on a very tight budget. If a major problem arises e.g. boiler needing replaced we simply can’t afford it”.

For these reasons schools are having to source funding from parents in an attempt to provide the same level of education and support to their pupils. For parents, this places further pressure on them in a time when many families across the County are faced with the struggles and strains associated with a recession.



Box 25: Responses from post-primary schools by teaching staff when asked about the impact of the reduction in capitation funding

We could not pay for basic needs never mind additional resources. Parents will have to raise money or pay fees

School will be colder, not as clean, difficult to cover maintenance costs, difficult to meet expectations of teachers & pupils for adequate teaching resources

Funding is already inadequate

Less money to provide a rich educational experience - extra curricular activities will suffer

More funds required from parents etc

Finding it very difficult to cover heating costs and this coupled with water charges is having a major negative impact on being able to provide for teaching and learning resources and extra curricular activities

Fewer resources for classes and teachers. Possible increase of fees from parents. More restricted curriculum

Energy prices are increasing at a significant rate this together with the lower capitation grant will mean much fewer resources for teaching

Massive implications - it will involve passing on the effects of budget cutbacks to parents who are already under huge stress in coping with unemployment in a terribly disadvantaged area

7.4 RESULTS FROM SECTION 4 – Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)

The Pupil-Teacher Ratio; primary in Ireland was last reported at 15.8:1 in 2010, according to a World Bank report published in 2012. Primary school pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in primary school divided by the number of primary school teachers (regardless of their teaching assignment).

In post-primary schools the PTR is 18.25:1, for all DEIS post-primary (this improved from 19:1 in 2011/12). 19:1 for non-fee charging schools (no change from last year). 21:1 for fee-charging schools (change from 20:1 in 2011/12). From September 2012 guidance provision is no longer allocated separately from these schedules.

In primary schools in the county, the survey found that the average PTR was 22.67:1, with a maximum class size of 30 pupils and the smallest class size being 9 pupils. In terms of post-primary schools, the average PTR was 17.22:1, with the maximum class size being 33 pupils and the smallest class size being 12 pupils.

From the analysis by the teaching staff of the likely impacts of a reduction in actual teacher numbers in the classroom, in the future, it was found that the greatest impact would be in the area of 'subject choice' and on 'teacher's themselves'. Following on from this the next greatest impact would be on 'restricted time tables', 'results obtained by pupils' and 'mixed ability classes'. Finally, a majority also emphasised that there would be an impact on the 'type of graduates'.

7.5 RESULTS FROM SECTION 5 (Primary) And SECTION 7 (Post Primary) - Absenteeism and the EDUCATIONAL Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, a progressive piece of legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. The various strands of the NEWB are the School Completion Programme (SCP), the Home School Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). These work collaboratively and cohesively to secure better educational outcomes for children and young people.

In a report published in 2012 titled; “**Analysis of School Attendance Data in Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2009/10** “ by David Millar of the *Educational Research Centre* and published by the National Educational Welfare Board, it found that the percentage of student/days lost through absence is running at just over 6% in primary schools and around 8% in post-primary schools. The figures for 2009/10 are lower than for 2008/09 and are at the lower end for the five year period 2005/06 – 2009/10.

56,100 students miss school each day, consisting of approximately 31,400 primary and 24,700 post-primary students. This equates to a loss of 11 school days per student per year in primary school and 13 days per year in post-primary school in the state.

The figures for 20 day absences have remained fairly stable over the past five years, although the year-to-year variability in 20 day absences is greater than for general non-attendance.

About 12% of primary school students and 18% of post-primary students were absent for 20 days or more during the school year. Based on population numbers this is approximately 58,000 primary school students, and 53,000 post-primary students.

For Donegal primary schools, non-attendance was recorded at a mean percentage of 5.3 school days lost, 8.9% for absence over 20 days, and 0.1% of pupils were expelled in 2009/2010. For post-primary schools it was recorded at a mean 8.9% school days lost, 18.8% for absence over 20 days, 0.40% pupils were expelled and 4.6% of pupils were suspended in 2009/2010.

In the survey 63.6% of primary school and 66.7% of post-primary teaching staff stated that the current provision of the Educational Welfare Officer Service does not provide for the needs of the school. Boxes 26 and 27; outline the comments from the teaching staff when asked to elaborate why they answered yes/no to the question - does the EWO provision at present provide for the needs of the school.

Box 26: Responses from primary schools by teaching staff when asked if the provision of the Education Welfare Officer is providing for the needs of their school

<i>Don't know-we just put in the figures, usually only one/two pupils 20 days or less absent each year. Don't think they were ever contacted</i>
<i>When children who are absent for 20 or more days they are reported for NEWM, no action is taken - waste of principals time reporting</i>
<i>We refer absences over 20 days</i>
<i>There is a huge need for the appointment of an officer in this area. Many cases are not being dealt with. And we have no proper local point of contact. This is a major issue in big urban schools</i>
<i>EWO only able to deal with most severe cases i.e. pupil almost constantly absent due to lack of resources</i>
<i>Despite longstanding communication of concerns re: attendance, nobody has got in touch or initiated any prevention strategies or advice outside of our attempts to address the issue</i>
<i>Absolutely not - there isn't any EWO. We have a child with chronic absenteeism and no support</i>
<i>No contact with/from the EWO. Only one in Donegal - not sufficient to meet the demands of primary schools</i>
<i>Absenteeism is a big problem. Need to see officer in the school promoting attendance, meeting parents. Unknown to teachers - seems to take long time for any action - only extreme cases</i>
<i>Doesn't deal with absenteeism in the infant classes, therefore habits are allowed to develop</i>
<i>Referrals have been made in the past and no feedback/follow up has ever been provided</i>
<i>Donegal area - person on maternity and not replaced. Had to contact person in Sligo. Not adequate service</i>
<i>Children over 20 days nothing seems to be done about it</i>

Box 27: Responses from post-primary schools by teaching staff when asked if the provision of the Education Welfare Officer is providing for the needs of their school

<i>Only pick up cases at 60 days or over. This is too late. We need contact much sooner and to assist with prevention. Officer has too many schools and cannot possibly lower them all plus</i>
<i>Not enough EWO's</i>
<i>Insufficient hours available</i>
<i>Unable to meet the demands. They are restricted also by what they can do</i>
<i>Attendance rate is over 90%</i>
<i>Local EWO is on maternity leave and we are being supported out of the Galway office. When at it's best is not adequate, EWO does not engage until a child has 60 days absence this is nonsense</i>
<i>The EWO is totally over worked</i>

The schools when asked what other resources were currently available to pupils who are currently out of school or deemed absent. In primary schools, the use of the Educational Welfare Board was noted. Some schools also made reference to their own initiatives to encourage the pupils to attend school quote;

“Incentives for pupils - magnets/prizes/certificates to those with improved/full attendance. Principal contacts parents by phone and letter when 15 days are reached”

“We have certificates for attendance at weekly assembly.

We have assembly, golden time sport on Friday to ensure they see the week out in school.”

Box 28; sets down the responses received from the post-primary teaching staff.

Box 28: Responses from the post-primary teaching staff when asked what other resources are currently available to pupils who are currently out of school/deemed absent

<i>Social work services</i>
<i>HSL, DEIS, SCP</i>
<i>Attendance secretary (SCP funded) HSCL</i>
<i>We inform NEWB</i>
<i>Internal school supports which are decreasing yearly</i>
<i>Possible Youthreach Programmes for over 16's</i>
<i>We work closely with Daybreak and Youthreach</i>
<i>HSLO visits</i>
<i>HSCLO, pastoral team within the school</i>

7.6 RESULTS FROM SECTION 6 (PRIMARY SCHOOLS) AND SECTION 8 (POST PRIMARY) – Cost Of Education

In light of a 6% reduction in capitation for schools from the Department of Education and Skills, there is an ever increasing pressure on schools to seek funding from other sources. This section aimed to ascertain from the teaching staff where this additional funding is sought from. It is common practice in many schools at both levels throughout the County to seek voluntary contributions from the parents of pupils. This section of the chapter explores the level of contributions provided by parents and its use within the school. The survey indicated that 48.6% of families with pupils in primary school pay a voluntary contribution and 66.7% of families with pupils in post-primary schools do so. It was also noted that both levels of school anticipate an increase in the contribution in 2013/2014 in order to provide funding for the schools. The teaching staff stated that there has been a reduction in the number of families providing this contribution to the schools; 76.7% of post-primary staff indicating a reduction and 66.7% of primary school staff.

Boxes 29 and 30 detail the responses from the teaching staff when asked what the voluntary contributions are used for in the schools. On reviewing the responses it is evident that the contributions are used for basic day-to-day resources in the classroom, such as art supplies and photocopying. Some schools have even indicated that the funding is used to provide the very basics such as heat or to carry out maintenance work in the schools. Many schools use this money in an attempt to provide the pupils with activities that would have previously been affordable under the capitation, such as; school trips, swimming lessons and books.

Box 29: Responses from the primary teaching staff when asked what is the voluntary contribution provided by parents is used for

<i>This was covered by fundraising but this has dropped in recent years so we have to go to capitation for the shortfall. I anticipate hard times ahead and don't know how they will be overcome. This is why parents ask if we are a DEIS school because in school 'X' they don't have to pay for trips to matches, smaller classes and free lunches and a teacher who will link with home life. People are aware!</i>
<i>Art and craft, photocopying, extra copies and pencils etc</i>
<i>School trips, swimming pool</i>
<i>IT, library books, general running of the school</i>
<i>To provide art/craft, resource grants to teachers - maintenance of amenities</i>
<i>To provide resources for the children, pay for heating etc</i>
<i>Contribution of €45; €10 book rental, €4 water rates, €4 insurance, €7 PE/sports/transport, €2 homework diary, €18 art & crafts/shows</i>
<i>Paying for buses to events, extra curricular classes, IT equipment etc</i>
<i>Art and craft, photocopying</i>
<i>School Resources - books, maths equipment, PE equipment - Write books etc</i>
<i>Contribution towards book rental, art and craft etc - not voluntary as described</i>
<i>We haven't asked for contribution yet but we may need to introduce it</i>
<i>Ink paper copies, art materials (recently foot the heating bill)</i>

Box 30: Responses from the post-primary teaching staff when asked what the voluntary contribution provided by parents is used for

<i>Books, lockers, diary and photocopying</i>
<i>Extra curricular activities</i>
<i>Book rental, insurance, photocopying, mock exams, house exams</i>
<i>Practical material, book grand/rental scheme, transport</i>
<i>Everything to do with running the school</i>

Finally, this section asked the teaching staff, if there were other short falls in funding that the school has to make up (see Box 31). Again from all the schools surveyed this was an area of great concern to the teaching staff in the schools. The survey proved that there is reliance in schools at both levels across the County on their Parents Association to provide finance for the schools through fundraising. At the time this research was carried out the Department of Education and Skills had removed the Minor Works Grant provision from schools. This funding was provided for the up-keep and maintenance of the schools. As a result of this allocation being removed, principals are having to draw on funds from the Parents Association to cover the basic needs for the day-to-day running of the schools. A quote from a principal clearly sets the scene in terms of the pressure felt by many of our schools in the County.

**“We are very close to being in the “red” for day to day running costs of the school
- heating and electricity”.**

Box 31: Responses from the primary teaching staff when asked if there are any other short fall in terms of funding that the school have to make up

Yes we pay for assistant teacher out of BOM funding
Cost of transport to sporting events etc. Cost of swimming lessons e.g. PE curriculum rewards/treats for children, drama/concerts etc
Yes losing minor works grant will eventually be a disaster if we cannot repair windows etc
Yes - we no longer attend competitions as transport too costly
IT equipment funded by Parents Association
Unpaid book bills. buses, utility bills, maintenance
Parents Committee fundraise
We work within our budgets
We are very close to being in the "red" for day to day running costs of the school - heating and electricity
Book rental of text books

7.7 RESULTS FROM SECTION 5 (POST PRIMARY)

- Career Development & Guidance Councillors

The cuts have seen the absorption of Guidance Counsellors into the general teacher allocation for post-primary schools. These Counsellors had a two fold role within the school environment, to provide the pupils with career guidance and secondly to provide a pastoral care role for pupils. For pupils both these roles are of extreme importance and particularly for pupils in the adolescent years. In today's society, pupils in Ireland are very unsure what career paths to follow with the economic down turn. Pupils are also seeing the stresses and strains faced by their parents who may be facing unemployment concerns and many other socio-economic pressures. Therefore, to make the post of the Guidance Counsellor an ex-quota post for schools it is likely to have detrimental implications for pupils and schools throughout the Country. In the comments raised by the teaching staff it was noted that there is concern for the possible implications to the level of subject choices that will be available. This will particularly be the case where schools decide to continue to provide career guidance and have to make the choice to reduce subject choices to ensure adequate cover by the Guidance Counsellor.

Of the schools surveyed 91.7% of post-primary teaching staff have stated that having Guidance Counsellors classified as ex-quota will have an impact on their school. Box 32 details the responses from the teaching staff when asked to specify what they felt the impact of this would be. 36% of schools stated that they intend to provide the guidance counselling service full time with 54.5% stating that it would be provided part-time. However, a reassuring point raised by all the schools was that regardless of the cuts made by the Department, they intend to provide pastoral care on a full time basis to the pupils from within their own teaching resources in the school.

Box 32: Responses from the post-primary teaching staff when asked if given that Guidance Counsellors in schools are no longer regarded as ex-quota, do they think it will have an impact on their school

It has come from the main allocation, we are still legally obliged to provide numerous supports through guidance so now subjects loose out

Class size will increase if schools try to maintain guidance provision. If schools return guidance teachers to classroom then vulnerable pupils will be overlooked

Guidance counselling continues as usual but we are a teacher less as a result

Schools forced to make choice - counselling v's subject choice

Has hit other subjects as we have kept our guidance level the same

Less time (one to one) with pupils

Now that time for guidance has to be taken out of the general allocation this will become increasingly difficult as time goes on

Due to ongoing increase in enrolment we were able to absorb this impact this year. But we won't be able to continue with this if there are further cuts in 2013/14

Reduced contract time. Students at risk may be by passed/over looked

Unable to provide the quality of counselling that students, presenting with personal issues, now demand. A team cannot take the place of 2 qualified Guidance Counsellors.

7.8 RESULTS FROM SECTION 6 (POST PRIMARY) - Transition Year Programme

Transition Year is a one-year school-based programme between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. It is designed to act as a bridge between the two by facilitating the smooth transition from the more dependent learning of the Junior Cycle to the more independent self-directed learning required for the Senior Cycle. The Transition Year offers students an opportunity:

- :: To engage in independent, self-directed learning
- :: To develop general, technical and academic skills
- :: To mature and develop without the pressure of an examination.

It is considered to be an extremely beneficial year for many pupils, offering them many opportunities. However, budgetary cuts have brought about many reductions in the funding available to schools for this programme. Of the schools who responded to the questionnaire, 81.8% of schools stated that they currently provide Transition Year. 88.9% also stated that the budgetary cuts will have an impact on the Transition Year Programme. Box 33 outlines the responses from the teaching staff when asked to outline the likely impacts of the budgetary cuts to the programme. As has been clearly outlined in many other sections in this chapter, the main impact of cuts to funding for programmes such as this is the negative impact it will have on pupils in terms of their educational development and the additional strain it will place on parents who wish to encourage their children to participate in programmes such as Transition Year.

Box 33: Responses from the post-primary teaching staff when asked to specify the impacts which the budgetary cuts will have on the Transition Year Programme in their school

<i>The school cannot financially support the programme so students signing up must be able to pay €200 per year for it</i>
<i>Less finance will restrict breadth of Transition Year</i>
<i>Programme will continue as before but if funding to TY is cut it will impact</i>
<i>Possibly if only 12/14 students choose TY then it will become available</i>
<i>Less money to spend on trips, visiting speakers organised, activities etc</i>
<i>Less choice of modules, less resources available. More expense incurred by families. TY will become more expensive and therefore more exclusive thus disadvantaging the very students who can benefit from the programme</i>
<i>Less opportunities</i>

7.9 RESULTS FROM SECTION 7 - HEALTH AND HOLISTIC WELBEING OF CHILDREN

The provisions of the Public Service Agreement provides for an additional 36 hours per school year at primary level. The terms of the agreement became operative for primary schools in February 2011. Job-sharing teachers will be required to undertake an additional 18 hours per annum; a pro-rata requirement will apply in respect of part-time teachers.

The additional hours also apply to teachers at post-primary and third level. However, at post-primary level an additional 33 hours per annum is required which reflects the shorter school year. The purpose of the Croke Park Agreement was to provide a block of 36 hours to be allocated to non-class contact activities which would previously have necessitated a school closure / half day. Some of this time is to be used on whole school activities such as staff meetings; other hours to be used on activities affecting a group of staff such as the Special Education Team/infant teachers, etc. and some of the hours can be counted on an individual basis e.g. assembly time, supervision.

This section attempts to identify from teaching staff if they felt these additional hours have been a benefit to the health and holistic well being of the pupils within their schools. On average there was a relatively negative response received from the schools at both levels. Of the primary schools surveyed, 14 schools stated that these Croke Park hours are of “no help” or “very unhelpful”, 9 responses stating that they are “helpful” or “very helpful” and 11 stating that there was a “neutral” impact. Similarly, for the post-primary schools, 5 schools stated that the hours are of “no help” or “very unhelpful”, with 3 stating that they are “helpful” or “very helpful” and 1 stating that there was a “neutral” impact on the pupils.

Box 34: Responses from the primary teaching staff when asked to specify their ranking of the impact of the Croke Park hours on the health and holistic wellbeing of children in their school

<i>Croke Park hours don't impact on the health and well being of the children. Most hours are spent on administration and meetings or courses for teachers specifically</i>
<i>Teachers left in school doing paperwork - doesn't add to teaching</i>
<i>Allows for time to meet and plan relevant interventions/programmes. No money saved - teachers have always allowed for this overtime</i>
<i>Children have not experienced any direct benefit</i>
<i>Teachers have already put in extra hours - could be more negative towards work</i>
<i>Additional hours have gone on meetings with parents, planning meetings etc</i>
<i>Teachers spending time which could be used preparing for lessons on issues that could be dealt with at staff meetings or voluntarily - goodwill</i>
<i>We are taking the work home with us anyway - more time for planning now - it was being done</i>
<i>Staff have been able to avail of supports such as NEPS - Cyber Bullying talks, First Aid courses, IT instruction etc</i>
<i>Half days for staff meetings have been good</i>
<i>The hours impacted on the quality of planning and therefore enhanced the teaching and learning experience. I expect this to have had a positive effect of the holistic being of our pupils</i>
<i>It's still too early to say</i>

7.10 RESULTS FROM SECTION 8 (PRIMARY) AND SECTION 10 (POST-PRIMARY)

- Comments

To conclude, this section of the questionnaires gave the teaching staff an opportunity to add any comments they had regarding the budgetary cuts to the education system. In reviewing the comments made, it is very clear that Donegal is a unique case due to many factors such as levels of deprivation, educational attainment, unemployment rates, high rural population, etc. Levels of morale are low among the teacher population in the County. It is evident from their comments throughout the questionnaire that there is grave concern for the pupils in terms of the quality of education that can be provided in the County on the basis of the current funding provided by the Department of Education and Skills. Boxes 35 and 36 detail the additional comments made by the teaching staff.

Box 35: Responses from the primary teaching staff when asked for additional comments

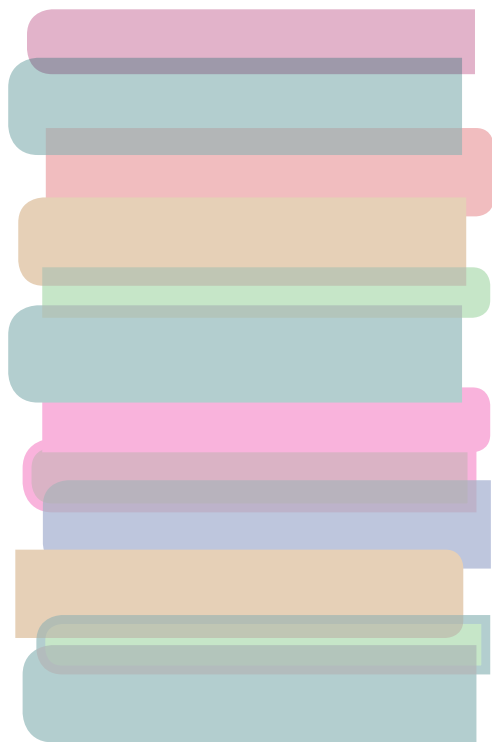
<i>As a four teacher school in 2011/2012 the shifting of goal posts meant that we lost a mainstream teacher due to the budget</i>
<i>Cuts to education are totally unfair. Croke Park hours causing resentment among teachers, we have always taken our work home anyhow. As a mother of three myself I have to employ a child minder to mind my children while I do the extra hours</i>
<i>As a school with speech and language classes, one of the biggest problems is the fact that Early Intervention Team no longer provides psychological assessments to allow children with specific speech and language disorder to gain access to these classes</i>
<i>PTR - major concern for us as a small rural school especially as we couldn't amalgamate due to ethos</i>
<i>Small schools are suffering the most due to all cutbacks</i>
<i>The appointment of an Educational Welfare Office is a priority. A proper home/school Liaison service is essential</i>
<i>The government is running schools into the ground, principals cannot deal with the stress of making ends meet and the merry go round of scrambling for resource hrs etc. Staff are demoralised, a total disgrace!</i>
<i>Teachers are been stretched to their limits - very little support in large school, problems have not gone away yet. Teacher who had time to talk to pupils in small groups settings have been reduced drastically</i>
<i>School self evaluation more work!</i>
<i>We are very pleased with 10hrs learning support - Resource hours are over 3 days instead of 5 days - work is too intense for child now every day</i>
<i>It is our experience that it is the children from middle income bracket who are experiencing the most hardship - book money, contributions to fundraising activities etc. is noticeably reduced</i>
<i>The reduction in capitation grants is the biggest problem we face regarding funds. Withdrawal of Minor Works Grant will also have a big impact when needs arise like replacing equipment (photocopier, computer etc)</i>

Box 36: Responses from the post-primary teaching staff when asked for additional comments

<i>Schools are short of finance and personnel in critical areas. The moratorium on appointments is crippling at clerical, caretaking and administrative levels. Less personnel</i>
<i>The cutbacks are only beginning to bite. This was the first year parents noticed any change in curricular provision at senior cycle. The real impact is only coming</i>
<i>The greatest stress in school at present is the expectation that matters will continue to get worse on a slow and ongoing basis</i>
<i>Education is a public service, it must be properly funded. Donegal is a deprived area with high unemployment and a population that feels neglected and abandoned. Education provides the only means for survival</i>

Chapter 8

Responding to The Challenges



The research detailed in *Chapters 1 – 7* was presented and discussed at a workshop to which members of the Economic Subgroup, Children’s Service committee and the Social Inclusion group were invited on the 17th September, 2013. A number of recommendations were formulated and were further refined at various meetings of the Economic Subgroup. This chapter presents them accordingly.

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the correlation between high levels of deprivation and the erosion of the skills and knowledge base within County Donegal and the need for appropriate interventions is recognised.

Different consultations carried out as part of this research have indicated that there is a need for a greater weighting to be applied in terms of funding allocations to more deprived local authority areas. An examination of the Haase & Pratschke Deprivation Index for 2011, attributes the second highest deprivation score to the Donegal Local Authority Area (-6.25) in 2011, while the highest was in Limerick City (-6.66). Therefore, applying universal cuts to education, like the 6% cut in capitation will have a greater impact on Donegal or Limerick than the more affluent local authorities areas like Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (+10.63); Fingal (+5.17) or Galway City (+5.09). Such cuts will further disadvantage the population in these local authority areas by reducing access to educational opportunities and integration within the education system, limiting career opportunities, perpetuating unemployment and poverty traps and undermining the social fabric that builds families. Limerick city was successful in attaining a RAPID programme that aims to address some of this disadvantage; Donegal does not have such a programme.

It is recommended that relevant government departments take account of the long term implications of such cuts on the development of the county’s skills and knowledge base. As the analysis in this research shows, the factors driving Donegal’s Deprivation Scores is the high proportion of the population with no formal or primary education¹, the percentage male unemployment² and the high level of youth unemployment³ thus strengthening the need for early interventions.

It is recommended that the evidence base for applying early intervention, which frequently offsets structural contributions to ongoing deprivation, be recognised and acted upon by local and national agencies, particularly in terms of those most excluded from society and who are most at risk in terms of ongoing cuts.⁴

1 @ 26.1 %

2 @ 31.4%

3 @ 50%

4 OPRE, December 5, 2013 , Volume 1, Issue 14

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that an 'Education and Rural Integrated Transport Strategy' is pursued and piloted in County Donegal

This research has shown that the new travel to school criteria is impacting financially on families in County Donegal. While the National Transport Initiative is welcomed, more needs to be done in the Donegal context. Donegal is the fourth largest county in terms of land mass and has quite dispersed settlement patterns. This coupled with changes to school transport calls for a new approach to transport strategies. This would take the form of an integrated strategy, mapping school provision in relation to settlement patterns and promoting existing strategies and resources, which are inclusive of road safety, cycle paths, walking routes, car pooling, etc. It is recommended that this is piloted in the Donegal context.

The consultations indicated a considerable level of confusion among parents over the new travel to schools guidelines. Therefore it is recommended that these guidelines are proofed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). Specifically, any changes to these guidelines should be communicated as and when they happen, the process should be simplified and information made widely available to parents and school principals.

In the 'Value for Money School Transport Scheme', March 2011 it was recommended that the school transport responsibilities of the VEC be absorbed into the functions of the national transport organiser (Bus Éireann). Through the consultations it was recommended that there was a need to raise the importance of this function, particularly for families of children's with additional needs .

Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that schools consider implementing practical measures regarding voluntary contributions, school books and school meals to reduce the financial burden on parents in Donegal

The research showed that there is a high level of anxiety and fear among parents in Donegal regarding the amount of voluntary contributions payable on an annual basis. It is recommended that the CSC liaise with the Department of Education and Skills to request schools to inform parents of the levels of voluntary contribution payable at the start of each year and to allow parents to plan their payments over the year. Furthermore a statement of accounts for this fund should also be made available to parents.

The profiling exercise carried out in this document indicated that Donegal had the lowest level of disposable income in the state. The consultations highlighted that families were finding it increasingly difficult to fund the annual book bill. It is recommended that the CSC approach all schools within the county to outline the hardships facing low income families and on how utilising books for a minimum of five years would greatly help.

Consultations showed that the School Food Programme contributes significantly to addressing economic hardships faced by families in County Donegal. However, to maximise the benefits of this programme it is recommended that the relevant departments⁵ review the content, costing and impact of the school food programmes.

⁵ Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Recommendation 4:

It is recommended that clarification is sought on how engagement between Traveller families and educational providers will take place without a designated Traveller Liaison Officer

Another theme running through the research was the importance of the Traveller Liaison Officer in providing a vital link to families in engaging with educational providers. This officer also had a major role in working directly with these families in the out-of-school setting. On the basis that the post of this officer has been suppressed, it is recommended that the CSC seeks clarification on how the Department of Education and Skills envisages that good communication channels between the Traveller community and educational providers can be retained and further enhanced in the future. In addition, particular consideration needs to be given to how the appeals process can fairly represent the voice of Traveller and Ethnic Minority Families. Consideration should be given to the promotion of an advocate when families with literacy difficulties are required to attend meetings with Senior Management and/or the Board of Management of schools.

Recommendation 5:

It is recommended that clarification is sought on how it is envisaged that children with special needs will progress through the educational system despite the cuts.

In County Donegal, 5.4% of all of the children aged between 0 -14 years have one or more disabilities. Through the research it was evident from many families that in-class supports⁶ are vital for the future progression of their child through the educational system. It was felt by families who participated in the consultations that the assessment process is tedious and cumbersome, with supports not guaranteed at the time when needed. Furthermore, parents who lost their in-class supports, spoke of the fear and anxiety which they now had for their child progressing further.

It is recommended that clarification is sought from the Department of Education and Skills on how children with special needs will progress further through the educational system if in-class supports are not provided in a timely fashion. In addition consideration needs to be given to how existing gaps in the services will be met.

Recommendation 6:

It is recommended that the Department of Education and Skills clarify who they envisage will carry out the crucial role of Career Guidance and Pastoral Care in schools.

Changes to the educational system have seen the provision of Guidance Counsellors no longer being regarded as ex quota within the overall staffing complement of schools. Therefore, the onus is on the school to decide whether to provide ample career guidance hours or to deliver other subjects. However, families and young persons who participated in this research indicated the need for focused guidance in selecting a third level course that will guarantee a job in the future. The research has indicated that there is a need to develop courses that match the skills required by development agencies, entrepreneurs, etc

⁶ Resource Teacher, Learning Support Teacher and the Special Needs Assistant.

In addition, the consultations identified the importance of the pastoral care that was previously provided by many guidance counsellors at a time when families are facing heightened financial, emotional and social stresses. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Skills clarify who they envisage will carry out this crucial role in schools.

Recommendation 7:

It is recommended that the Children's Services Committee in County Donegal explore new integrated models of working with schools.

Many small schools in Donegal find increasing difficulties in meeting the financial demands of providing for the day-to-day running of the school and the many extra-curricular activities including sporting, cultural, environmental and entrepreneurial events that enhance the school experience of children and young people. There is potential for savings if schools could be facilitated in clustering and the use of IT systems should be explored to this effect. EU funding opportunities to undertake such work should also be considered.

Recommendation 8:

It is recommended that the Children's Services Committee makes a strong case for the early assessment of borderline students in need of support services.

The economic case for early intervention has been widely proven in the international literature. It is recommended that the CSC together with the SEN (Special Education Needs) service and NEPS jointly explore the potential for earlier identification of need. Linked services such as Speech and Language, CAMHS and Psychology could provide training to teachers to enable them to address some of the lower level issues that could be hindering children and young people's progress in school.

Recommendation 9:

It is recommended that the CSC seek clarification from schools on whether they use the SOLAS, TUAS, CE Schemes, Jobs Bridge Programme etc and if so in what capacity.

Many schools avail of these resources to add to their complement of ancillary staff. However, many other schools do not appear to be aware of the opportunity to do so. The CSC could through their partner organisations inform schools about the various schemes and develop case studies of where workers have been employed to good effect in schools.

Recommendation 10:

It is recommended that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs immediately fill the second post of the Education Welfare Officer in Donegal.

The Economic Subgroup recommends that the Children's Services Committee requests that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs immediately fill the second post of the Education Welfare Officer in Donegal. In addition the Economic Subgroup requests that the Children's Services Committee highlight that the 20 day absence rule should immediately trigger a response and initiate the appropriate supports. Given the size of the county and the high rural dispersion rates the Economic Subgroup further recommends that the Department of Education and Skills take steps to make the Educational Welfare Officer more readily accessible to all schools.

Note: The second Education Welfare Officer position has recently been filled. While the Economic Sub-group welcomes this development, the recruitment of an additional post is required if all schools are to have equitable access to what is a very valuable resource in supporting schools to meet the needs of the most marginalised students.

Recommendation 11:

It is recommended through the CSC that an interagency approach is developed to address the education, welfare and economic needs of all vulnerable families in each School in County Donegal.

Through the consultations it was evident that a lot of families were suffering from financial and emotional hardships as a result of the recession, including a number of new families who are unaware of the supports available to them. It is recommended through the CSC that an interagency approach is developed to addressing the education, welfare and economic needs of all vulnerable families in each School in County Donegal. This approach would seek to identify in a sensitive manner vulnerable families at school level; coordinate information on services and supports provided by CSC partners; provide this information to families via the Home School Liaison Officer where such post exists or through other community based supports such as the Family Resource Centres. It is recommended that the CSC could develop a strategy to address the loss of the Rural Coordinators and the Home School Liaison Officer posts which has resulted in a gap between school, home and the support services provided by other agencies and organisations.

Recommendation 12:

It is recommended that the Children's Services Committee explore ways in which schools can be encouraged to integrate further into their local communities.

The research indicated that there is a need to explore ways to motivate schools to integrate further into their local communities in an effort to maximise the resources often available at the heart of the community. It is recommended that the CSC run a competition in conjunction with the different school networks to demonstrate how they are part of their community.

Profiling Challenges to the Education Sector in Donegal In 2012



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Donegal Children's Services Committee