

# PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

## Irish National Report





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## **PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION**

### **IRELAND**

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## Abstract

*The report starts with a description of the Irish education system. The second chapter focus on the main national trends. The third one on the main reasons and causes for leaving education. The fourth and fifth chapters analyze the national policies implemented for the prevention of early school leaving and the bodies in charge. The sixth and seventh chapters describe selected initiatives carried out at national level to prevent early school leaving, among them some best practices were identified in chapter eight. The ninth chapter describes case studies of students. Chapter ten and eleven provide the conclusions and recommendations.*

## 1. Introduction to the Irish Situation

Education has always been highly valued in Ireland. Through the centuries whenever opportunities for education were provided, Irish people were quick to use and take advantage of them. Education is now regarded as being central to the economic, social and cultural development of Irish society.

Currently The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) provides for collective Cabinet responsibility for education in Ireland. Ministers are thereby collectively responsible for all Government Departments and Offices. The Minister for Education and Science, who is a member of the Government and responsible to Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) has specific responsibility for education policy issues ranging from pre-school education, through first level, second level, third level, adult and further education.

Irish children are legally required to attend school from age six to sixteen - or until they have completed three years of post primary tuition. Schooling, however, is offered from age four through to 18 and the majority of students partake in it.

The typical first level, or Primary School, teaches children in eight classes – junior infants, senior infants, followed by first to sixth class. The vast majority of schools are State funded, catering for pupils from 4 to 12 years of age. The curriculum followed is child-centred and it allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods. Most children move from primary to second level education at about 12 years of age.

Second level education aims to provide a comprehensive, high-quality learning environment which enables students to live full lives, appropriate to their stage of development, and to realise their potential as individuals and as citizens. It aims to prepare students for adult life and to help them proceed to further education or directly to employment.

Second level education comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. The trustees of the majority of these schools are religious communities or Boards of Management. Vocational schools are administered by Vocational Education Committees while community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions. Each of these schools has common elements. All are largely State funded. Students In each school study the same State prescribed curriculum and sit the same State public examinations – The Junior Certificate, The Leaving Certificate, The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. In 2003 340,078 students studied in Second Level schools throughout the country.

Second level education is generally a six year cycle. Schools, or individual students, can opt for a five year cycle. Junior cycle comprises of three years and Senior cycle two or three depending on a student's choice of Transition year – immediately following the Junior Certificate Examination.

The Junior Certificate examination is taken following three years' study of the Junior Certificate programme. The principle objective of the Junior Cycle is for students to complete broad, balanced and coherent courses of study in a variety of subjects relevant to their developmental age, enabling them to progress into the senior cycle.

The Leaving Certificate is the traditional examination undertaken by students on completion of second level education in Ireland. It is the basis for entry into Third Level education and a basic requirement for certain employment and further education

In 1989 The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was introduced. It is a modification of the traditional Leaving Certificate. Its focus is on technical subjects and those with a particular vocational focus.

A new two-year person centered programme was introduced to students in 1995 known as The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. Rather than being subject centered it has a cross-curricular approach. It focuses on educating students and developing areas of human endeavour e.g. spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical. The programme aims to prepare students for adult and working life.

The Department of Education and Science indicates that education has a crucial role to play in addressing social exclusion. The government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and the Social Partnership Agreement address educational disadvantage. The aim of the strategy is that young people leave the education system with high quality education and qualifications to ensure full participation in society and the economy of the country. Aligned with that is the aim to ensure that early school leavers have an opportunity to address lack of education and qualifications that work against them participating fully in society and the economy and employment. Specific measures are funded to address educational disadvantage from early childhood to adults, including preventative strategies, community responses and educational programmes for disadvantaged students.

## 1. Main national trends

According to the Annual Schools Survey 2004 82% of school leavers attained the Leaving Certificate. The trend in educational attainment show little change in previous and subsequent years. In the same year 15% of students left school with the Junior Certificate as their last official second level examination. In 2004, 85 per cent of females left with the Leaving Certificate compared to 79 per cent of males. A significant tendency is that male students are more likely to leave school early than their female counterparts. The report ascribes that 53% of early school leavers are male and 47% female i.e. 3.9 per cent of males of total males as compared to 3.4 per cent of females left school without any qualifications. In 1999 2,400 young people or 3.2 per cent of students left the formal education system with no recognised qualification. A further 10,600 young people left after Junior Certificate but before the Leaving Certificate.

An estimated 1,000 children do not transfer from primary to secondary school annually. Traveller participation in education is extremely low. During the 2001-2002 school years only 1,381 Travellers attended post-primary schools. Twelve per cent of that number participated in the Senior Cycle – Transition Year, Fifth and Sixth Year. Of that figure just over three per cent studied the Sixth year syllabus, with the intention of taking the Leaving Certificate Examination.

The trends in recent years indicate a relationship between employment status and qualifications - the higher the level of qualification the less likely a young person is to be unemployed. The 2004 data points out that the number of school leavers with no qualifications who are unemployed – 68 per cent - has risen sharply by 13 per cent from 2002 which was 55 per cent of early school leavers. Of those who attained the Junior Certificate three per cent remained unemployed, while of those who attained the Leaving Certificate five per cent experienced unemployment.



In 2004 school leavers with Leaving Certificate were less likely to become unemployed, while those without any qualifications were 4.6 times more likely to become unemployed. This shows a slight fall from the 2002 statistics which indicated that those without qualification were 5.6 times more likely to become unemployed than those with a Leaving Certificate qualification. Also in the 2002 report a levelling of genders was recorded in relation to unemployment. Only a one percent difference was noted between males and females with males recorded at 15 per cent and females recorded at 16 per cent. In the 2004 report males unemployed – 22 per cent compared with females 21 per cent.

A higher proportion of those who leave early come from households with unskilled or manual traditions. The percentage of students from the Unskilled Manual group, who left with no qualifications (9.1 per cent) contrasts with less than 1 per cent from the Higher Professional, Lower Professional and Salaried Employees groups. This point was raised in many of the submissions received by the Team:

*“What is most disturbing in the available research is the extent to which social class of origin is so strongly related to the participation and performance of a child within the Irish education system ... [There are] substantial class differentials ... despite the overall increase in participation rates”.*

## 2. Main Reasons and Causes for Leaving Education

### PROGRESSION FROM PRIMARY TO SECOND LEVEL SCHOOLS

THIS progression is recognised as a critical time of change in a child's education. Children who do not transition easily and successfully are at risk of underachievement and early school leaving. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) carried out a study in 2004 entitled, Moving Up -The Experiences of First Year Students in Post-Primary Education (2004). It studied the transition of students from primary to second level education which indicated the importance of the progression from primary to second-level, and recognised it as a crucial transition. It stated that students who fail to make this transition successfully are more at risk of early school leaving or educational underachievement.

### TRAVELLER CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Members of the traveller community have a great interest in education. However, it is clear that the involvement in traditional schooling is lacking and the custom of early school leaving is prevalent. This is due somewhat to the low-levels of attainment of Traveller children in primary school and the withdrawal from core subjects such as Irish, which has an implication both on the integration into post primary subjects and the difficult transition from primary to second level schools. Within Traveller culture there is a great emphasis on marriage from the age of about 15 years. This was indicated clearly by Christina who said “I'm 17 now and Travellers leave when they are 17”. Another critical point is that Traveller culture is rarely valued within the second level schools system. This can impact on Travellers feeling isolated and excluded with a tendency to hide their identity to avoid bullying and discrimination. This encourages Travellers to leave and to explore alternative education centres where they can feel included and comfortable with peers who are part of their culture. The Visiting schools Traveller Support teacher indicated that a boy of 13 is already ‘matched’ to a girl and therefore feels it is time to leave school. The Education Welfare Officer indicated the difficulty for Travellers to break from cultural traditions and what it is like for a Traveller to break the ties and remain in school when it opposes the traditional role.

### A FAMILIAL HISTORY OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Research indicates that where there is a family history of early school leaving, children are more at risk of leaving. Denise in Ballinrobe indicated that her mother and her aunts left school early, and Maureen in Ballina indicated that two older sisters had already left. This creates a parental attitude of disinterest as indicated by a number of teachers and principals in the interviewing process

#### FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

Family circumstances can have a profound effect on the student's well being which can be affected by a myriad of circumstances: substance misuse in family or young persons; experience of trauma - bereavement or separation; member of a minority group; economic stress; lack of family and/or emotional support.

#### POVERTY

Poverty is a multi dimensional problem centered on low income that has a ripple effect on life and lifestyle. Children can come under great pressure if they cannot afford to conform to their peers. The result can be in bullying and stigmatisation, impacting negatively on a child's education and emotional wellbeing.

A girl who left school because of bullying said "Being poor. That's what I'd change... All the kids have brand names...we haven't. We stick out and we're picked on. Look at what I'm wearing, these crap runners. You get picked on for wearing these". The principal of one school indicated the early exit of students due to health reasons

#### EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Studies show that a greater proportion of early school leavers who take up employment are from semi-skilled or manual households. There are substantial class differentials

#### RURAL LIVING

Rural Ireland had some issues that differ from urban areas. Rural schools are smaller and consequently are able to offer fewer subjects to pupils due to teacher/pupil ratio constraints. Rural transport is also an issue as the transport scheme insists that transport is provided to the nearest school irrespective of the needs of the pupil. And in rural and coastal areas students often leave school early to assist with farming and fishing needs. These family needs are often seasonal and therefore can be hugely disruptive to education and the young person is needed to keep the business going.

#### TEENAGE PREGNANCY

A number of female students leave school early due to teenage pregnancy. This is a difficult area to deal with and only a few schools are dealing specifically with this problem by providing special education and tuition for such students. The Neighbourhood Youth Project for example provides a special support and homework group for teenage mothers.

#### WORK

Some students leave early to work and earn an income. Others leave mainstream education in order to enter the state projects of Youthreach and the Traveller Training Centres and are lured by the fact that they are paid while training. This is evidenced by the students in Youthreach in Ballinrobe who were interviewed.

#### STRESS, ANXIETY AND DISCOMFORT WITH SCHOOL

Many early school leavers are simply unhappy in school and are uncomfortable with big classes, lots of energetic young people, making friends and with teacher relationships. Terry G stated in his interview that certain students feel that they are picked on by both students and teachers and that others are suffering from depression.

### 3. National Bodies in Charge of the Prevention of the Problem

The Department of Education and Science provides education for all children at primary and second level, and those who pursue college and third level education also. It is the body responsible for prevention of early school leaving in Ireland and has responsibility for a number of policies and schemes to address educational disadvantage.

It is assisted in this by a myriad of departments, services and organisations.

The Department has an association with the following:

- Department of Education – DEIS
- Education Welfare Board
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- National Centre for Guidance in Education
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- National Council for Special Education
- Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
- Vocational Education Committee
- Joint Managerial Boards
- Religious Education Boards of Management
- The Presidents Awards / Gaisce

Health services and initiatives:

- Health Services Executive
- Child Psychiatry Service
- Public Health Nurse
- Social Workers

Department of Justice and Law Reform

- Garda Schools Liaison Inspectors
- Juvenile Liaison Officer

Anti Poverty Strategies and initiatives:

- National Development Plan
- National Anti-poverty policy
- Combat Poverty Agency
- Traveller strategy

Youth Support organisations

- Foroige – National Youth Body
- Neighbourhood Youth Project
- Rainbows Programme
- Intercultural Organisations
- Irish Refugee Council
- Mayo Intercultural Association
- Traveller Support Groups

FAS – Training and Employment Body

## 5. National Policies Implemented to Combat School Early Leaving

A number of government departments are responsible for policy responses to improve the wellbeing of children, including The Department of Education and Science, The Department of Health and Children and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The establishment of the National Children's Office and the office of the Ombudsman for Children alongside the development of the National Children's Strategy are all aimed at improving children's wellbeing and reducing child poverty - thus improving levels of inclusion, learning and school completion.

A number of policy initiatives provided and funded by The Department of Education and Science specifically designed to enhance school attendance and reduce early school leaving are detailed below:

### Disadvantaged Areas Scheme

In Ireland 203 post-primary schools have been designated as disadvantaged. They subsequently get a greater level of support in terms of pupil-teacher ratios, special grants and extra support for pupils. Currently the maximum class size is 15 pupils for senior classes, giving students a greater learning opportunity.

### Book Grant Scheme

A grant scheme for schoolbooks for disadvantaged pupils in second level schools has operated since the introduction of free post primary education in the 1967/68 school year. This provides grant assistance to schools in order to provide free school books to disadvantaged students on a loan/rental basis. A necessitous pupil, for the purpose of this scheme, is defined as a pupil from a family in which genuine hardship exists because of – unemployment, prolonged illness of parent, large family with inadequate means, or single parent family.

### Educational Psychological Services

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an initiative and plan for social inclusion, was established in 2005. The Department provides an integrated approach and brings together a number of programmes under this framework. The aim is to provide 'A standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together and build upon the existing schemes and programmes'.

### School Meals Programme

The School Meals Programme aims 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. The Local Projects Scheme gives funding directly to national and secondary schools, local groups and voluntary organisations, which operate their own school meals projects (the meals may be hot or cold). Some 41,000 children in 450 schools partake in the programme annually. Funding for school meals comes from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In many schools this has been a great success and has been channelled into a Breakfast Club that encourages children to come to school. According to some teachers who were interviewed, it has positive implications for the engagement with education of some at risk early school leavers. The enjoyment of education of some at risk early school leavers is generated and resulting in certain pupils remaining in school and feeling nurtured and nourished.

### The School Completion Programme

This programme, introduced in 2002, aims to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds to remain in school until Leaving Certificate level. It incorporates the "8 to 15 Early School Leaver Initiative" and the "Stay in School" Retention Initiative. The Programme recognises that a wide variety of home, community and school-based factors can contribute to low school attainment and early school leaving. As part of the scheme, schools compile a Retention Plan that is a statement of intent regarding both the in-school and out-of-school actions that are aimed to make school a more meaningful and attractive experience for the students at risk of leaving school.

early. Funds are provided on the basis of these plans and the continuation of funds depends on the execution of the plans and certain targets being achieved. Since the programme began 300 second level schools have been facilitated.

#### Education of Non-nationals

Post-primary schools with an enrolment of fourteen or more non-national students with English language deficits are entitled to an additional teacher to address the needs of these students. An individual student is entitled to a maximum of two years language support. These teacher appointments are temporary, due to the transient nature of the non-national student population. In the case of a school having twenty-eight or more non-English speaking non-nationals, the school is entitled to a second additional teacher.

#### Special Needs

Children of second level age with milder forms of disability are generally catered for on an integrated basis in mainstream post-primary schools. Such students are supported by special support teachers and/or special needs assistants. The level of need is based on the assessed needs of the individual student.

#### Support Teachers Project

The Support Teachers Project aims to co-ordinate a whole-school approach to discipline that will help to prevent the occurrence of disruptive behaviour. Typically, the support teacher targets the twelve to fifteen most disturbed or disruptive children in the school and works with these pupils on a one-to-one basis or in small groups.

#### Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme

Established in 1991 the scheme aims to improve co-operation between home, schools and communities to advance the educational interests of disadvantaged children. Currently, 211 designated schools are participating and endeavouring to maximise active participation of the children's learning process - particularly those who are at risk of failure. Alongside the documented value to children, this scheme has had significant success in raising awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. The success is noted in adult education for parents that has encouraged them into the school and re-engaged them with the staff, school ethos, and the importance of their children's education. Thus it has encouraged greater involvement with their sons and daughters educational process and directly influences parents to encourage their children to stay in school and complete formal education.

#### 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.

#### Traveller Education

Traveller children have exactly the same rights to education as settled children. They are also bound by the rules in relation to school attendance. While Traveller children may attend mainstream schools there are also some special schools allocated to them. Certain support services are also available to Traveller children. There are 40 visiting teachers appointed throughout the country. They consult with Traveller families and advise and assist them in arranging school placements for their children. The service is overseen by a National Education Officer for Travellers.

#### Traveller Specific Measures in Post-Primary Education



For each Traveller child enrolled in a post-primary school, an enhanced capitation grant is provided; namely €427 for each Traveller child in addition to the €286 standard capitation grant. Ex-quota hours are also allocated to schools on the basis of the number of Travellers enrolled. The posts are calculated as 1.5 hours per week for each Traveller child enrolled. At present, this equates to 140 whole-time equivalent posts in place throughout the country to provide specific educational support and pastoral care for Travellers attending post-primary school.

#### Junior Education Centres for Travellers

There are currently three Junior Education Centres for Travellers which cater for 80 students aged 12 – 15 years. These are funded by the Department of Education and Science.

#### Senior Traveller Training Centres

These Centres provide a programme of integrated general education, vocational training and work experience and guidance/counselling/psychological services for some 769 Travellers annually in the 15+ age group. A National Co-ordinator promotes and monitors the development of the network. Programmes are provided in an out-of school setting, and feature integrated personal development, literacy, numeracy, ICT and communications and a range of vocational options and work experience. Trainees are paid a training allowance. Guidance, counselling and childcare services are available for participants. Certification is provided through the FETAC (Foundation and Level 1) and participants are encouraged to sit the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate or Leaving Cert Applied.

#### Youth Reach

This initiative aims to provide education, training and work experience to young people aged 15-20 who have left mainstream second level institutions with no qualifications. It is an inter-Departmental initiative for early school leavers that operates through a number of different strands – YOUTHREACH centres, funded by the Department of Education and Science and managed by VECs; Community Training Workshops funded by FAS; and Justice Workshops funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and FÁS. Programmes are provided in an out-of school setting, and feature integrated personal development, literacy, numeracy, ICT and communications, counselling, guidance and psychological services, and a range of vocational options and work experience. Trainees are paid a training allowance. Guidance and counselling and childcare services are available for participants.

Youthreach, the Senior Traveller Training Centres and the FAS funded Community Training Workshops form part of a joint early school leavers programme catering for some 7,162 participants in over 130 centres (30 Traveller centres, some 77 Youthreach centres, both provided by the VECs, and a network of 35-40 Community Training Workshops provided by FAS.). There are approximately 3000 VEC Youthreach places available nationally.

## 6. Strategies Developed at National and Local Level to Prevent Early School Leaving

#### Junior Certificate Schools Programme

Training is provided by the Department of Education and Science for Principals and teachers in post primary schools on a national basis. From September 2008 it is planned to offer this in-service training for principals and teachers on a Regional basis at local Education Centers. The programme JCSP targets weaker students and those who are at risk of dropping out of the education system. The main thrust of the programme is to affirm all progress made by students however small and at the end of the programme students receive certification of all achievements.

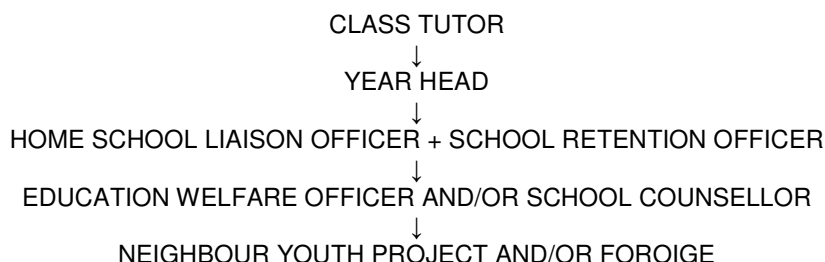
#### Training Content:

- Overview of the programme

- Types of modules to be taught
- The setting up of a homework club and Breakfast club
- After school activities
- Mentoring programme
- Counselling and guidance
- The Partnership Programme with parents, students and teachers
- Sporting activities
- Special literacy classes
- Results

Other useful initiatives within local schools:

- Closer communication with parents teachers and students and clearer understanding of the reasons the child wants to drop out of school
- Easier to make an effort to prevent drop out levles – Collaborative approach to preventing drop-out. Evidence of this is seen at local post primary school – Davitt College, Castlebar
- An awards night is a successful way of affirming the student's participation and recognition of their efforts however small
- Close monitoring of student's interaction and participation in mentoring programme activities is an excellent way of determining the difficulties students very often experience in school. It is often possible to address and prevent these difficulties at an early stage and thus avoid exccallatin and progression which could lead to eventual drop out. Examples of interactive activities would be: quizzes, sports, treasure hunts and a variety of team-building activities.
- Through The Partnership Programme parents and their children meet with teachers at least twice during each year. This has led to very positive support between teachers and parents, which in turn has helped the adjustment of students to school life. It has also had a positive influence on their behaviour in school.
- School initiative training to assist teachers Davitt College, Castlebar, County Mayo
- Staff training to familiarise each staff member with the structure in place to address the needs of all students and in so doing help prevent early school leaving. All staff members are made aware of the responsibilities each of the following people have and how they interact in a collaborative way to help prevent school drop out.
- Each class has a class tutor and each year has a year head. Tutors and year heads meet weekly to discuss progress and any difficulties individual students may have. Issues/difficulties experienced by students are addressed by year heads and if necessary the Hone School Liaison Officer, counsellor or school retention officer are consulted. If the student is absent for more than 20 days the Education Welfare Office is notified. The local Neighbourhood Youth Project is often consulted for students to receive opportunities for out of school and leisure activities.



#### Key competencies to tackle early school leaving

Be able to identify at risk students in the classroom  
 Be pro-active in addressing the needs of students at risk  
 Be familiar with local and national agencies that are available to help students  
 Be familiar with the in-house structure that is in place to address the needs of all students  
 Have the ability to praise and affirm all efforts of students  
 Awareness of possible difficulties that students may be experiencing in their personal or home lives

## 7. Identification of Best Practices

In general the best results were reached through the implementation of the School Completion Programme, Mentoring programme, homework clubs in schools and with Traveller, Breakfast programme, Youthreach programme, holiday supports and out of school activities, specialised classes

#### Best practises identified

Provision of funding under the DEIS - Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools – initiative

Provision of The Junior certificate Schools Programme because it offers subjects with a more practical approach to learning

- Flexibility in the provision of curriculum in addressing the needs of all students including those at risk
- Local Education Centres provide training opportunities for teachers which include training for identifying and responding to early school drop out
- Individualised education plans for students at risk
- A caring environment established within schools where students feel welcomed, supported, valued, and secure because it creates a better learning environment
- Induction programme for first year students at the beginning of the school year to assist the transition from primary to second level school
- Information night for parents of first year students
- Computer training for students and their children in the first year of second level
- Close association with local agencies – community groups and statutory bodies – in order to enhance collaborative approach to student learning and development
- Small class groups which maximises student performance and enable an alternative learning experience

These initiatives can easily be adapted nationally and internationally. Networking and collaborative approach might be the key to this success.

## 8. Case Studies

The integral part of the research that required five case studies were carried out in different settings. Two case studies are of young people at risk of leaving school early. Three are of young people who have actually left school.

The case studies concurred with the general findings of early school leaving. The causes concurred with those found in several of studies in Ireland.



School approaches differed somewhat. However the common denominator was the encouragement and enhancement of students to give them every possibility to continue their second level education and reach their full capacity – both as students and young people.

Two case studies were carried out with members of the Travelling community – a male and female student, both at risk of leaving. Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority who have been part of Irish society for centuries. They have a shared history, value system, language and customs. Their nomadic tradition sets them apart from settled people and have a tradition of leaving school early.

According to the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, the transfer rate for Travellers to the post-primary level was 85 per cent in 2004. There were approximately 1,850 Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools, out of a possible 4,000, that is, 46 per cent of all Traveller pupils of post-primary school age. The majority of those who transfer to second level education, leave school prior to completing the Junior Certificate.

Tom, a male Traveller of 14 years of age, is absent from school very regularly and considering leaving. While the school indicates that Tom exhibits low literacy levels and behavioural problems it offers every opportunity – both inside and outside of the classroom - to assist Tom to remain in the school.

Christine, a Traveller girl aged seventeen years, however, has completed and passed her Junior Cert. She has reached the age when many Traveller girls leave school to consider marriage. She is presently unsettled at school following Transition year. Despite encouragement from her mother and the Visiting Teacher from the Travellers she wants to leave finish second level school.

The other three case studies were carried out with 'settled' people – two in rural town – Ballinrobe – in County Mayo and one in Limerick city. These students left mainstream education in the past three years and are presently attached to a vocational type training centre.

The Mayo students transferred to a Youthreach Training Centre in Ballinrobe before completing their Junior Cert. Youthreach is an integral part of the national programme of second-chance education and training, directed at unemployed early school-leavers aged between fifteen and twenty. It offers trainees a change to identify personal goals and to acquire certification in state exams and a variety of skills. They both are very pleased that they changed to the Training Centre. They value the learning of small groups and the individual attention offered in a more relaxed learning environment. Both are pursuing personal goals and have clear vision for the future.

Shelly resides in a high unemployment estate in Limerick city. She left school following her Junior cert. While she did not expect to do well, she was surprised by her favourable results.

She experienced life with little confidence and found the Training Centre a homely place where she pursued certification in catering. She is presently considering a study programme to attain the Leaving Cert Applied.

## 9. Conclusions

Many national initiatives have been generated by the Department of Education and Science and other Government department to tackle school inclusion difficulties. All the various projects are to be lauded individually and collectively as an effort to deal with Early School Leavers and Inclusion. However there are a number of weaknesses in such an approach. Various initiatives can become disjointed and separated from the overall view of the problem. It would be helpful if there were one dedicated national body or organisation to draw together all the strands dealing with inclusion and thus create a concentrated and concerted effort with a dedicated team to focus all energies on tackling the issue.

It also becomes apparent on examining the issue of inclusion that all the initiatives are focused on the students and families involved or at risk. This is laudable but it leaves one glaring gap in the approach. There is little or no engagement with teachers on a professional or personal basis to encourage them to engage with the issue. It should be a part of inservice training that encourages direct engagement with inclusion in all its guises. If all teachers were professionally and personally aware of the deeper nuances of the inclusion issues then the overall approach to early school leaving and general inclusion would be integrated into all classes and would be an invisible yet strategic tool in encouraging continuing engagement with education. A process and package should be developed and delivered to teachers to further this aim.

One issue in particular emerges as being the most in need of further attention. The issue of Traveller engagement with continuing education is an issue that obviously requires more attention. There are many sub initiatives, all essential and worthwhile but they need to be drawn together constructively and comprehensively. It is also an area where teachers again need to be educated. There is a group of dedicated teachers dealing with the issues but significant positive results could be achieved if all teachers were more aware and sensitive to the cultural and traditional values within the Traveller culture and tradition.

There is a defined need emerging for the sensitive and genuine inservice training of teachers so that they can empathise and engage more fully with all aspects of inclusion and yearly school leaving.

Though there are almost no figures available to date, Ireland is dealing with a large influx of foreign national students. Historically our education system has not had to deal with such diverse needs. There is now a huge need for the Irish Educational System to engage and learn from the European experience that has been involved with such influxes into their education systems as we are seeing now. We need to learn from the mistakes of the European experience and to build on the positive experiences and concepts of the educational systems in those areas.

In particular we feel that a number of specific areas of the Irish situation need to be examined more closely so that the positives of these areas can be built upon and their weaknesses explored, re-examined and attended to. The areas referred to are LCVP as a subject area (it may need to be expanded as a concept), the Applied Leaving Certificate and the Youthreach Initiative.

## 8. Recommendations

### Recommendations to public education authorities

- Make funding available to finance initiatives and programmes to prevent early school leaving e.g. DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
- Decrease the pupil: teacher ratio
- Raise the awareness of Traveller Culture
- Increased availability of psychological services to address the needs of a growing number of young people
- Provide continuous professional development / training / in-service for all teachers in relation to early school leaving in identification and preventative strategies
- Develop specific policies to be incorporated into all second level schools
- Partnership between schools and the non-formal sector e.g. community groups/business organisations
- Expansion of the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers

### Principals

- Lobby for adequate funding to incorporate the best preventative measures
- Create a balance in resource allocations
- Attend specific in-service and training programmes
- Implement preventative programmes in their schools e.g. School Completion Programme as outlined earlier in the document
- Ensure flexibility in curriculum and assessment
- Ensure certification of achievements for all students e.g. Annual Awards night
- Establish links with local, regional and national agencies e.g. National Educational Psychological Services, Neighbourhood Youth Project, Health services, visiting Traveller Scheme
- Enhance co-operation between primary and second level schools
- Implement in the school a partnership Programme whereby parents, students and teachers all meet twice a year to monitor the progress of the student
- Aim to create an integrated and holistic variety of activities including academic, sporting and creative activities
- Care Team that meets weekly in the school comprising the deputy principal, Counsellor, Home School community Liaison officer, School Retention Officer and Year Head
- Ensure that an anti-bullying policy is in place in the school and that all teachers are familiar with it and competent in implementing it

#### **Teachers**

- Use varying teaching methodologies to address the needs of all students in the class
- Reaffirm and praise every effort by all students
- Continued professional development with specific focus on addressing the needs of at risk students
- Communicate with parents through homework journals
- Establishing a positive atmosphere in the school to build student engagement
- Providing students with access to subjects with a more practical orientation
- Be mindful of children with special needs by being sensitive in setting appropriate targets for them
- Encourage students to attend homework and organised activities
- An understanding of educational inclusion issues at a whole school level
- Be flexible with timetable of students at risk of leaving school e.g. awareness of poor attention span for particular subjects
- Ensure that all students feel safe and secure in their school environment by creating a comfortable class environment

#### **Recommendations to the students**

- Choose subjects that are suitable to their abilities e.g. some students are more skilled in practical subject areas
- They should familiarise themselves with all the facilities and activities available in the school e.g. Breakfast club, homework, mentoring programme, counselling and guidance services...
- Discuss school experiences regularly with family / guardians
- Ensure that difficulties are always discussed openly with family, tutor and/or year head
- Be aware of the anti-bullying policy and how it can protect each student
- Endeavour to establish friendships within their class year
- Include and respect Traveller Culture and students from the Traveller Communities

#### **Recommendations to the families**

- Attend preparatory meeting to prepare students for the transition from primary to secondary schools

- Participate in activities organised through school initiatives e.g. School completion Programme, computer classes,
- Establish contact with the child's year head
- Assist child with homework on a regular basis
- Attend regular student / parent /teacher meetings
- Be prepared to get involved in the Parent's Council or Board of Management
- Attend talks for parents on drug abuse, alcohol abuse, healthy lifestyles
- Inform school personnel of any circumstances in the child's life which may influence their progress and/or behaviour in school e.g. bereavement, family separation, illness...

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