

Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme: Ireland

BACKGROUND

The HSCL Scheme operates under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)¹, the Action Plan for educational inclusion run by the Irish Department of Education and Skills. All DEIS Urban and all DEIS Post Primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which involves 528 schools. The Department of Education and Skills allocates a full time HSCL post to participating schools or schools are grouped into clusters with the services of a shared HSCL post.

A qualified teacher from the participating school (or cluster) is assigned on a full time basis as a HSCL Coordinator for a five year period. It is a requirement that the HSCL Coordinator post be rotated among eligible staff in the school(s) every 5 years. This gives all eligible teachers the opportunity to apply to serve as HSCL Coordinators in order for them to gain insight and experience of educational disadvantage first hand. Furthermore, upon conclusion of their five years as HSCL Coordinator, the teacher returns to the classroom with a wealth of experience and knowledge of educational disadvantage. This is all done with a view to improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

The Department of Education and Skills funds the cost of the replacement teacher in the school. The HSCL Coordinator plays a critical role in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation and review of the school's DEIS Action Plan, particularly in the promotion of parental involvement. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, has responsibility for the management of the HSCL Scheme through an integrated service delivery, under the Educational Welfare Services (EWS)². Three Senior Managers, employed by Tusla, who are seconded teachers, have responsibility for the management, development and direction of the HSCL Scheme, in line with the Department of Education and Skills' policy. The Senior Management Team mentors, guides and advises schools and their HSCL Coordinators in the implementation of the HSCL Scheme locally and nationally.

1. Need/challenge addressed

- Attendance, participation and retention in education
- Family support around educational issues
- Empowerment of parents, so that they can support their children in education
- Involvement of parents in development of relevant school policies

¹ DEIS focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years), through the School Support Programme, which includes a suite of interventions, comprising in-school and out-of-school supports.

These supports include enhanced teaching resources in schools with the highest levels of disadvantage; additional financial resources for all DEIS schools; access to literacy and numeracy supports; curricular supports; planning and professional development supports, transfer programmes from primary to post primary and access programmes to third level (higher education). In addition, the School Support Programme includes two major interventions, namely, the HSCL Scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

² The EWS implements both HSCL and SCP, providing an effective service delivery through appropriate intervention, for children who have difficulties in relation to school attendance, participation and retention. The EWS works directly with the DES, in order to support and consolidate the work of DEIS schools in ensuring that children's participation in the educational system is maximised.

- Liaison with other family support services in the community
- Development of principal and teacher attitudes to partnership with parents and community services

2. Level of intervention

- The HSCL Scheme is a preventative and early intervention model, targeted at those children who are most at risk of failure in the education system.

3. Intensity of the intervention

- Students are supported on a continuum with higher levels of intensity, according to levels of need- preventative and universal support for all, targeted support for some and intensive support for few.

4. Target group and age group

- The HSCL Scheme is targeted at children who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the education system (primary and post primary level) because of environmental issues, which adversely affect pupil attainment and school retention.
- HSCL focuses directly on the significant adults in children's lives in order to attain better educational outcomes for the children.

5. Conditions and different steps necessary for the implementation of the HSCL Scheme

Schools, which are identified as serving areas of significant disadvantage are allocated extra supports through DEIS, one of which is a HSCL Coordinator.

School Principals, Care Teams and HSCL Coordinators compile a list of target pupils, based on identified risk factors for attendance, participation and retention. HSCL Coordinators work specifically with parents, schools and communities, in order to better support children to attend school, participate in and continue their education.

6. Identifying the appropriate type and level of support to suit the needs of the learner

School Management, Teachers, Care Teams and HSCL Coordinators initiate support. Parents/carers can also request support. HSCL Coordinators work in partnership with parents to determine the level and intensity of the support and also to empower the parents to develop their own capacity as a key resource in their children's learning.

They help identify and provide for the personal, leisure and learning needs of parents, so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence, which in turn, will have a positive impact on their children's educational outcomes. Communication, support, advice and direction are provided to parents, in order to bring about improved educational outcomes for children.

7. Stakeholders involved in the delivery of the HSCL Scheme

The measure is delivered by HSCL Coordinators, who are employed by the Board of Management (BOM) of their schools. They are supported, guided and directed by three Senior Managers, from the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Continuous Professional Development is provided for HSCL Coordinators on an annual or bi-annual basis. HSCL Coordinators

are organised into cluster groups, which meet regularly, to share best practice, work on common goals and offer peer support to each other. The HSCL Coordinator also accesses the support and expertise of EWS partner organisations and school personnel (Special Educational needs experts, Guidance Counsellor, etc), as well as external services.

8. Overall responsibility for implementation of the HSCL Scheme

At local level, the school's BOM has responsibility for implementing and supporting the measure. At national level, Tusla and the Department of Education and Skills have responsibility for funding and strategic direction.

9. Obstacles in introducing the HSCL Scheme

At the time of the establishment of the HSCL Scheme there was an initial resistance to change:

- Schools were very insular and autonomous and principals/ teachers did not welcome the idea of parents in the school/ classroom
- There was also limited liaison with family services in the community
- Limited value was placed on parental partnership- teachers were the professionals and often felt that parents had little to offer
- Lack of understanding of the barriers faced by marginalised parents, in approaching schools, led to misconceptions regarding lack parental interest in the child's education
- Parents were not accustomed to home visitation and initially HSCL Coordinators found it difficult to access homes as there was a lack of trust and a degree of apprehension
- Marginalised parents often had poor experience of the educational system and thus were uncomfortable at the prospect of accessing classes in schools and so attendance was poor

10. Overcoming obstacles

- Persistence, organisation and effective communication were key to breaking down resistance from schools and parents
- Building positive relationships with parents was key to the success of the HSCL Scheme
- Over time the value of parental involvement was established through improved outcomes for children
- Through the HSCL Scheme a 'Parents Room' was established in the heart of DEIS schools and it became commonplace to see parents in the school
- The idea of the 'School Community' emerged as comprising of students, parents, teachers, special needs assistants, HSCL, SCP etc.
- Schools collaborated more with outside services, Tusla, Health Service Executive, Department of Justice and Equality, Voluntary organisations etc.
- The Department of Education and Skills played a crucial role in highlighting the importance of 'Parental Involvement' through DEIS planning and Inspectorate requirements

11. Monitoring/assessing the HSCL Scheme

HSCL Coordinators record their own work, monitor outcomes for students and report to their Principal and BOM. The scheme is subject to Department of Education and Skills' inspections, as part of ongoing DEIS inspections.

HSCL Coordinators are also required to provide data on Key Performance Indicators to the National Management Team (Tusla).

12. Results of the HSCL Scheme

The HSCL Scheme was initiated as pilot project in 1990 and since 1993 has been put on a permanent footing. It continues to be monitored, as part of ongoing DEIS inspections.

Evaluations carried out by the Educational Research Centre (and available on www.erc.ie) on the HSCL Scheme include the following:

“Review of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme - Report to the Department of Education and Science” by Peter Archer and Fionnuala Shortt, published by the Educational Research Centre, 2003

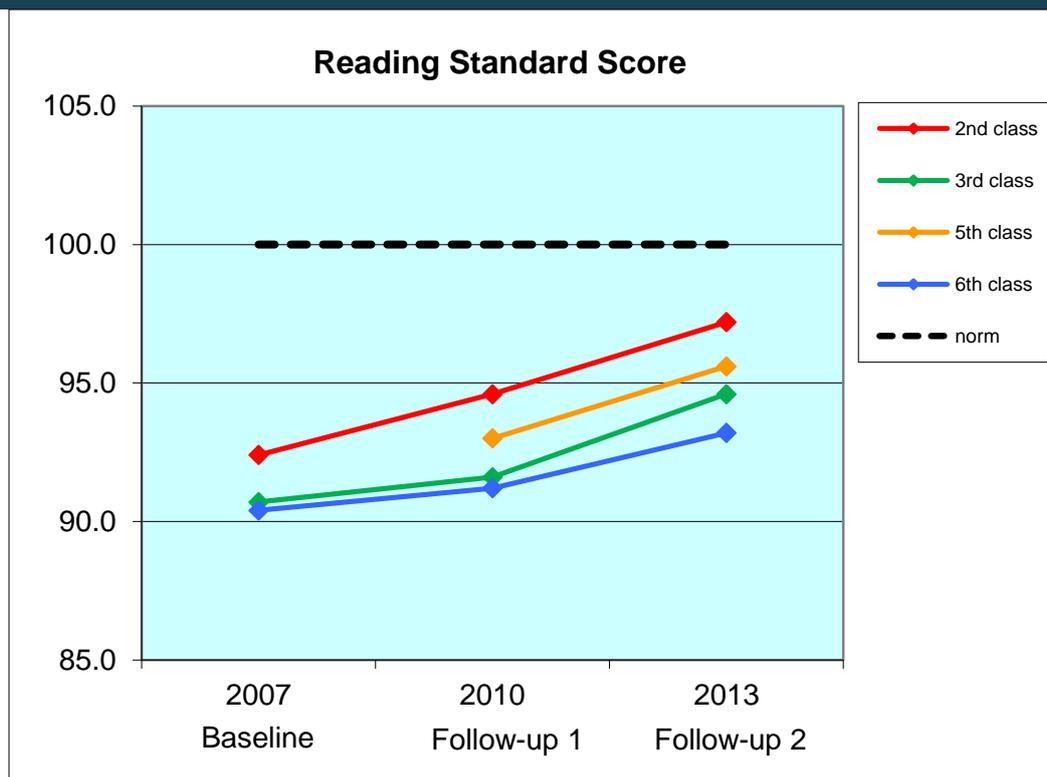
“The Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme - Final evaluation report” published by the Educational Research Centre, 1994

The DEIS programme is the subject of ongoing evaluation by the Educational Research Centre and the Department's Inspectorate. The focus of this research is to ensure the successful implementation of DEIS and that the best possible approaches to measuring progress and outcomes at both local and national level are being used. As a key component of DEIS, these ongoing evaluations assess the delivery of outcomes, which HSCL plays a key part in delivering.

The most recent Educational Research Centre Evaluation Report, in December, 2013 indicates that Reading and Mathematics achievements have continued to improve significantly in participating Urban schools since DEIS was introduced.. This means that the achievement gap between pupils in DEIS schools and national samples (particularly in the more junior grade levels such as 2nd and 3rd class) has narrowed significantly since baseline data were collected in 2007.

Figure 1 shows standard scores in Reading of pupils in 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th class in 2007, 2010 and 2013.

Figure 1. Reading standard scores of 2nd, 3rd, 5th* and 6th class pupils in 2007, 2010, and 2013.



*Data were not collected from 5th class pupils in 2007, but were included in 2010 and 2013 to create a second longitudinal cohort (2nd class in 2010 to 5th class in 2013).

13. Funding/resourcing the HSCL Scheme

The Department of Education and Skills remains responsible for the allocation and funding of 400 HSCL Coordinator posts to 528 DEIS schools and the payroll costs for the Senior Management Team who have overall responsibility for the management of the HSCL Scheme as part of its Educational Welfare Service

Schools included in DEIS are in receipt of an annual grant from the Department of Education and Skills. The DEIS Grant amount varies from school to school, depending on their percentage level of disadvantage as determined by their ranking under DEIS. It is a requirement that at least 10% of the annual DEIS grant allocated to DEIS schools must be allocated for use on HSCL activities

14. Current status of the HSCL Scheme

The HSCL Scheme continues to operate in 528 DEIS schools at primary and post primary level.

A recently published Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report titled "Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS" which was commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills consolidates the findings from the evaluations of DEIS that have taken place to date. A consultation process with education partners and interested parties will inform the development of appropriate measures to combat educational disadvantage. The outcome of this process will form part of an overall proposal for the delivery of future interventions to tackle educational disadvantage in Ireland.

15. Further information (e.g. website, contact details, etc)

The “Information Booklet for DEIS schools participating in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme” is available as an attachment. It includes, among other, HSCL key priorities, attributes and job description of HSCL coordinators, as well as their planning and reporting templates.

"Vision to practice" report has been written by HSCL coordinators and includes results of the scheme and a number of case studies and successful activities.