



Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe

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Evidence-based co-authored and open-access report of most promising pioneering policies and practices

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Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme [16]

Country	Ireland		
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Name of the policy / practice	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme [16]		
Short description and the main characteristics of the policy / practice	The government-led DEIS programme was adopted in 2005, bringing together a number of initiatives for Irish primary and secondary schools under the heading of educational inclusion. The identification of inclusion in the programme is based on the concentration of disadvantage at school level. In 2021/2022 school year there were 3106 primary schools (excluding the special schools) in Ireland, 967 participated in DEIS programme . There were 728 secondary schools, including 235 DEIS schools. The programme supports students by providing additional classroom teaching posts, Home School Community Liaison coordinator posts, DEIS grant funding and access to the School Completion Programme.		
Target group of the policy / practice:	Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; including Travellers and migrant children.		
Educational stage or transition phase of the policy / practice	Primary (4-5 to 11 year olds) and secondary level (11 to 18 year olds)		
Level of implementation	National		
MILC dimensions	<p>Multilevel: primary and secondary schools</p> <p>Intersectionalities: low socio-economic background; minority ethnic background</p> <p>Lifecourse: enhancing educational achievement throughout compulsory education to break the cycle of disadvantage in the families</p>		
Key dimensions of the identification procedure			
CONDITIONS: Foundational premise level	<i>Comprehensive</i>	The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme is the Department of Education’s main policy initiative to respond to educational disadvantage.	high
	<i>Coherent</i>	The DEIS programme focuses on targeting additional resources at those schools with the highest concentrations of students who are at risk of educational disadvantage.	high

	<i>Continuous</i>	In operation since 2005, the DEIS programme fosters continuity of education, learning and growth on individual and systems level over changing policy makers, stakeholders, and authorities.	high
ELEMENTS: Structural level	<i>Contextual</i>	DEIS programme operates within the parameters of guidelines. These guidelines ensure that the necessary resources available under the DEIS action plan are directed to support children at risk of underachievement and early school leaving, and help tackle those impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage.	high
	<i>Relational</i>	The programme is responsive to the characteristics and concrete needs of the target group.	high
TOOLS: Action level	<i>Autonomous</i>	The DEIS programme operates within the parameters of guidelines. However, school leaders have some autonomy in how to utilize the extra resources allocated to them by the Irish government.	medium
	<i>Reflexive</i>	Some level of reflexivity by policy makers and school principals, especially considering the results from the evaluation reports.	medium
Evidence backing the policy / practice:		<p>DEIS participation had resulted in the expected reductions in class size in Urban Band 1 schools (Weir and McAvinue, 2012; Kelleher and Weir, 2017). A survey of HSCL coordinators indicated that they saw the DEIS programme as having facilitated increased contact between the parents and the school and a greater awareness among parents of the importance of their involvement in their child’s education (Weir et al., 2018). Coordinators were more likely to report a positive impact on parents in 2017 than they had in 2002 (prior to the establishment of DEIS). The gap in retention rates between the two types of school has decreased since the 2005 cohort (when DEIS was introduced), from 13.3 per cent to 8.6 per cent, though the difference has remained stable for the past five years (Department of Education, 2020c). The gap in attendance rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has decreased somewhat over time, though this is largely related to a slight increase in non-attendance in non-DEIS schools rather than improved levels in DEIS schools. At secondary level, non-attendance levels are almost twice as high in DEIS as in non-DEIS schools. The gap in attendance rates increased up to 2008/9 and declined somewhat thereafter (Denner and Cosgrove, 2020; Smyth et al., 2015a).</p> <p>An evaluation of urban DEIS primary schools indicated an increase in reading and mathematics test scores between 2007 and 2010 (Weir et al., 2011). Average reading and mathematics achievement was poorer among students in schools in Band 1 than those in Band 2 at each class level; however, the improvements</p>	

over time in reading were more marked among students in Band 1 schools. There were further improvements in reading and mathematics scores between 2010 and 2013 (Weir and Denner, 2013). However, national assessment data from 2014 indicated that improvements in reading and mathematics test scores had been evident across all schools, both DEIS and non-DEIS, with the gap in scores between the two school types remaining stable (Shiel et al., 2014). Further increases in reading and mathematics test scores were evident between 2013 and 2016, though these were more modest in size than those between 2010 and 2013 (Kavanagh et al., 2017).

Analyses indicate that the effect of poverty and disadvantage on primary reading achievement was less strong in rural areas than in urban areas, with greater access to educational resources in rural settings (Weir et al., 2015). Using Growing Up in Ireland data, McCoy et al. (2014) found that nine-year-olds attending rural DEIS schools did not differ in reading achievement from their counterparts in non-DEIS schools, once parental education, social class and household income were taken into account.

Looking at secondary academic outcomes, overall Junior Certificate performance scores increased for all schools over the period 2002 to 2011, with non-DEIS schools having significantly higher performance than DEIS schools across all years. However, the increase in grades each year was significantly greater for DEIS than for non-DEIS schools and was significantly higher during the years following the introduction of DEIS (Weir et al., 2014). As indicated above, these analyses do not take account of individual social background. Using Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data, analyses indicate that those from the most disadvantaged social classes in non-DEIS schools receive significantly higher Junior Certificate grades than their counterparts in DEIS schools (McNamara et al., 2020).

No such evaluation has been conducted of Leaving Certificate (upper secondary) exam results, a significant lacuna given the role of these results in determining access to higher education and influencing employment chances. Controlling for exam fee waiver (a proxy for socio-economic disadvantage), students in DEIS schools achieved significantly lower grades overall and in English, Irish and Maths than those in non-DEIS schools (McCoy et al., 2019). GUI data indicate that those who had attended a DEIS school are significantly less likely to go on to higher education than those who went to a non-DEIS schools (50% compared with 76%), a pattern that was largely related to differences in Leaving Certificate grades (O'Mahony et al., 2021).

There has been less focus on evaluating the impact of the programme on socioemotional outcomes such as wellbeing. Using PISA data, Gilleece et al. (2021) indicate no mean differences in reported meaning in life or in feeling happy or sad between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Research by Smyth (2021) indicates

	<p>greater socio-emotional difficulties among those who had attended a DEIS primary and/or secondary school than among those in non-DEIS schools, even controlling for social background. However, those who attended DEIS schools in rural areas did not differ from those in non-DEIS schools. Distinguishing between the different types of socio-emotional difficulties, Smyth and Darmody (2015) found higher levels of internalising and externalising behaviour among those in secondary DEIS schools and among those who had attended Urban Band 1 DEIS primary schools; however, these groups also showed more prosocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour was also found to be more prevalent among those in DEIS secondary schools, even controlling for individual social background.</p>
<p>Brief concluding analysis of policy / practice in the context:</p>	<p>Evidence to date indicates that the value of the DEIS programme lies in the holistic nature of funding and supports and the focus on targeting the most disadvantaged students. The programme has been associated with a marked decline in early school leaving rates and some relative improvement in lower secondary education exam performance. Nonetheless, changes over time in exam grades in the high-stakes Leaving Certificate have not been monitored over time, a significant lacuna given their role in shaping later life-chances. The absence of a control group of disadvantaged students in non-DEIS schools represents a further limitation, though the Growing Up in Ireland study provides an evidence base for documenting the differential trajectories of young people across school types.</p>