



Country Report Ireland

Is parental involvement in the making of school laws and/or regulations a current topic?

National level

The Irish constitution

The primary role of parents in the education of their children finds its fullest expression in the Irish Constitution. (www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/Constitution%20of%20Ireland.pdf)

Article 42, Section 1 states that

'The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.'

Section 2 of the same article further grants parents the right to educate their children in the home or in schools established by the state:

'Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.'

National legislation

In terms of Education, the legislative background in Ireland was quite sparse until the enactment of the 1998 Education Act (www.irishstatutebook.ie/1998/en/act/pub/0051/index.html) Prior to this legislation, much of the interaction between central Government and education providers came by way of Circulars (directives) from the Minister for Education. The 1998 Education Act

gave legal articulation to these Circulars and directives.

The 1998 Act re-affirms the role of parents as the primary educators of their children, as set out in the constitution. It affirms the development of partnership between parents and schools in the management and everyday activities of the school. The Act also enshrines the right of parents to send their children to the school of their choice, enhancing parental choice and allowing parents the right to appeal against the decision of a school Board of Management to refuse to enrol a child (Section 29 of the 1998 Education Act.)

In so far as it relates to parental involvement, the 1998 Act provides for parental involvement in the life of schools at many levels.

All schools in first and second level are governed by a Board of Management. Boards are legal entities and have overall responsibility for the governance of schools, including employment of all staff, curriculum development and implementation, child protection, health and safety of employees, amongst other duties. The work of Boards of Management is done in a voluntary capacity. Boards are comprised of a Chairperson and representatives of parents, patron (usually the bishop), teachers and the principal. There are usually two parents on a Board of Management, one a father and one a mother. This is the first level of parental involvement in the management of schools

The 1998 Education Act also provides for the establishment of a parents' association (Section 26-1): *The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.*

The Act charges that the parents' association with promoting *'the interests of the students in the school in co-operation with the board, advising the Principal or the board on any matter relating to the school.'* The parents' association will also *'adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school.'*

Inspectorate of education

In recent years there has been a renewed focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. This has been a central theme of school Leadership Development programmes and Continual Professional Development (CPD) programmes in Ireland. The School Inspectorate has been assigned, under the 1998 Education Act, the function of evaluating the organisation and operation of schools and *'the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools ... including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers.'* (Section 13)

As part of this process of evaluation, the Inspectorate has engaged in a process of whole school evaluation (WSE). The evaluation process involves evaluation of individual schools under the following competencies:

- Quality of school management
- Quality of school planning
- Quality of curriculum provision
- Quality of learning and teaching in subjects
- Quality of support for teachers.

As part of that process, schools are evaluated in terms of the quality of the interaction and partnership between parents and teachers. The following indicators are used by the Inspectorate in evaluating this aspect of schools performance.

Management of relationships with parents

- The quality of partnership with parents, and the degree to which the school facilitates contact between parents and teachers
- The extent to which management of the school promotes and facilitates the involvement of parents in the school, and the quality of the flow of information between the school and the parents of each student
- The frequency of parent-teacher meetings, and the extent to which the school facilitates parents to attend
- Procedures by which individual parents can obtain access to school records relating to their own children and the awareness of these procedures among parents
- The extent to which the school engages in regular review, on a partnership basis, of its relationship with parents and the wider school community, including outside agencies
- The extent of awareness by parents of the procedures which exist, if difficulties arise, for processing complaints

Parental involvement – evaluation

- The extent to which parents are both informed and consulted in determining the range of subjects and programmes available to their children
- The range and quality of information and support available to parents, including parents of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to assist them in making informed judgements on the choices available to their children
- The degree to which the school supports active involvement by parents when their children are choosing programmes, subjects and levels

Extracted from looking At Schools, An aid to self-evaluation in primary schools, 2003, available at: www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/insp_looking_at_self_evaluation_primary_schools%20.pdf.pdf?language=EN

Which parents deserve special attention?

The Irish context

Ireland has undergone a rapid transformation in the last decade, both economically and socially. Perhaps the most dramatic change has been the demographic profile of the country. Irish society has been moved from being largely mono-cultural to culturally and ethnically diverse in less than a generation. The major ethnically distinct grouping in Ireland prior to this period was the Irish Traveller Community, consisting of some 25 000 members in Ireland and a further 15 000 in the United Kingdom.

Up until the 1990s, Ireland was a country of net-emigration, where people left the country to find work over-seas. However, economic progress, an acute shortage of labour and a major increase in the number of refugees seeking asylum in Ireland led to increases in the numbers of people from ethnic minorities in the country. The National Census conducted in 2006 illustrates this: the number of Non-Irish nationals resident in the State increased by 87% over the four year period from 2002 -2006. (224.000 in 2002 to 420.000 in 2006). In that census, 13% of respondents defined themselves as 'Other than White Irish.' Non-Irish nationals came from 188 different countries and the top ten nationalities were UK, Polish, Lithuanian, Nigerian, Latvian, US, Chinese, German, Filipino and French. (Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland. ↪ www.cso.ie)

One of the measures undertaken by the Irish Government, in recognition of the changing demographic of the country, was the creation of the office of Minister for Integration, a Junior Ministerial office, with responsibilities across a number of government departments. This role is perhaps unique in Europe and was welcomed by the European Commission as a progressive measure in ensuring that minorities are welcomed and integrated into Irish society.

One measure undertaken by the Irish Government was the development of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) 2005-2008. This four year programme was designed to provide strategic direction towards the achievement of a more inter-cultural inclusive society in Ireland. Under the Plan, support was provided towards the development of a number of national and local strategies promoting greater integration in our workplaces, in the police service, the health service, in our education system, in the arts and within our local authorities. Full information on this initiative is available on the website of the Minister for Integration. (↪ www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/index-en)

Irish legislation

While the issue of *interculturalism* has been brought to the fore in the national debate on diversity in Ireland, national policy in this regard is still in its early stages of development and implementation. No significant new legislation in relation to either parental involvement or the involvement of ethnic minorities in education has been enacted in recent years.

In the wider legislative framework, the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) provide a framework for people to challenge discrimination.

Ethnic minority families

In Ireland the term Newcomer has been used to refer to families of ethnic minorities. In this report the term newcomer is used to refer to children and young people both of whose parents originally come from outside Ireland.

A priority identified by central government for integrating newcomer families was ensuring that children in schools and their parents – through adult education services – were given access to the English Language training. This became the

central plank of integration policy in Ireland. In schools this led to the provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers, to work with and develop the English language competencies of newcomer children. The provision of information for newcomer families was also identified as a priority. The website of the Irish Department of Education and Science (➔ www.education.gov.ie) contains information on the Irish education system which is translated into a limited number of languages. The office of the Minister for integration also has a number of key documents on the Education system in minority languages. A recent initiative of this Ministry is discussed in detail later in this report.

Interpreters

The need for interpreters has been highlighted by school leaders and management authorities for some years. While there has not been a programme at national level to address this issue – and given the economic downturn that Ireland is experiencing, there is little possibility of such being developed in the short-term – however there have been individual initiatives around the country aimed at providing interpretation services to minority families. One such project is highlighted later in this report.

Initial teacher education

There is no formal indication that parental involvement, particularly in relation to minority families, is treated as a distinct module in the Irish Colleges of Education.

Are there measures to support certain pupils (im)migrants, ethnic minorities at the level of school?

Given that immigration into Ireland is such a recent phenomenon, schools had little experience in dealing with the challenges of cultural, ethnic

and linguistic diversity. Measures aimed at supporting immigrant pupils in Irish schools have, however, emanated from the National and local level.

Intercultural guidelines

The Department of Education and Science (DES) published intercultural guidelines for schools (*Intercultural Education in the Primary School*) in 2003. These guidelines were aimed at primary schools and sought to facilitate schools in creating an inclusive culture and environment. This included recommendations and advice for schools on the development of policies and practices which would create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere in schools, where all children and families would feel welcomed and validated. This document has proven a very useful resource for schools in developing intercultural strategies, and is available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at ➔ www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Intercultural.pdf.

School-based initiatives

Schools have also been pro-active in adapting to the changing realities in the context of the increasing ethnic diversity amongst students. Research has found that many schools reported being pro-active in re-evaluating their needs in the changed circumstances in which they found themselves, as the profile of their schools has changed. For some schools, this change has been as dramatic as it has been swift. It has, therefore, fallen to individual schools to re-assess their needs and re-visit their School-Plan in order that it better represent the changing circumstances of the school.

Some schools have used the support of the national School Development Planning Service to assist in the development of policy. Others have invited speakers to the school to talk to staff on

the language, learning and social needs of newcomer children. Such support, which has emerged as a result of schools clearly identifying their needs and following this with appropriate inputs from experts in the field, was seen by many teachers as a very positive development.

English as an additional language (EAL) support

A recent report found that the majority of newcomer children and young people in Ireland are from non-English speaking countries. Consequently, over half of both primary and second-level school principals reported language difficulties among 'nearly all' or 'more than half' of their newcomer students. This report, which was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science (DES), is a major source of material on the educational experiences of newcomer children. The report, which was published in 2009, titled *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students* is available at www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20090529124035/RS008.pdf?bcsi_scan_FC2E322A4AA2F5B3=LERb1BHdWT E785CfwdhEdREAAAORX0G&bcsi_scan_filename=RS008.pdf

School principals and teachers further indicated that language difficulties had marked consequences for the academic progress and social integration of newcomer students. This highlights the importance of providing English Language Support to newcomer children. As already stated, the provision of EAL teachers in schools has been the single biggest policy and spending initiative of the Irish Government in the area of integration.

Schools offer newcomer pupils English as an Additional Language (EAL) support. EAL teachers are employed to supplement the work of the classroom teacher in supporting the language development of pupils. The main methodology

used by EAL teachers is the withdrawal of pupils from their class for additional English language support. However, many schools also offer in-class support to newcomer children.

There has been much controversy in the past year, as Ireland has experienced a serious deterioration in public finances. There have been significant cuts in the number of EAL teachers allocated to schools, with calls for further cuts in the years ahead.

Basic structure of the Irish school system

The Irish Education system is very heavily centralised with authority vested in Minister and the Department of Education and Science (DES). There are no local government or local authority structures mediating between the Department of Education and Science and individual schools at primary or in the vast majority of second level schools. The only exception is the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) sector, which accounts for just 253 of the 732 second-level schools in Ireland.

The Department of Education and Science communicates with schools through the use of circular letters and through the inspectorate. These letters are sent when there are changes to Department policies, administration procedures and staff allocation.

The DES funds schools with grants to pay for resources, heating, insurance, electricity and other running costs. Teachers, though employed locally by Boards of Management, are paid centrally by the Department of Education and Science.

The structure of Irish Education provision, from Primary to Tertiary level, is shown in the table below.

Structure of Educational Provision in Ireland			
PRIMARY			
Years: 1-8, for children aged 4 to 12			
SECOND LEVEL			
Years 1-3 Junior Cycle, age 12 to 14 Year 4 Transition, age 15 Years 5-6 Senior Cycle, age 16-17			
TERTIARY			
<i>Universities</i>	<i>Colleges of Technology</i>	<i>Colleges of Education</i>	<i>Independent Colleges</i>
Primary Degrees Postgraduate Degrees Postgraduate Diplomas	National Certificate National Diploma Primary Degree Postgraduate Degree	Primary Degree Postgraduate Degree	Diploma Primary Degree Postgraduate Degree Professional Qualifications

Pre-school education

There is no formal state involvement in pre-school education in Ireland, meaning that the vast majority of pre-school education is privately provided, not-regulated by the DES and paid for directly by parents.

The only exception to this is that the state provides a number of targeted programmes for three year olds, including programmes for children with special needs, children of Travellers and children experiencing social and economic disadvantage. The largest of these initiatives is the Early Start programme which operates in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. This one-year programme, for children aged three years, aims to provide children who are most at risk of educational disadvantage with an educational programme that will enhance their development and

prevent failure at school. It is usually provided on the campus of the local primary school. However the vast majority of schools within the socio-disadvantaged category do not have this service – in fact only 40 schools of the 673 primary schools which are designated as disadvantaged offer the service.

A recent intervention by the state has been the introduction of a subsidy to provide parents with partial-funding for one year of pre-school education. This was introduced in the last year, and it is too early to say how/whether this affect the uptake of pre-school places, particularly for disadvantage communities.

Compulsory Education in Ireland begins at age six, but primary schools accept children from the age of four and most children attend primary school from that age.

Primary school

Primary schools in Ireland are called National Schools. The Primary school comprises of eight standards, including a two year Infant Education programme. Children in primary school from age 4 to 12. The school day for Infants is 4.5 hours long and for older children is 5.5 hours long. Primary schools are mandated by law to operate for 183 days in the year.

The vast majority of national schools are State-aided parish schools, which are established under the patronage of the local diocese. Almost 92% of National schools have been established under the patronage of the Catholic church. In recent years multi-denominational national schools have been established in response to local parental demand. A significant number of national schools have also been established in English-speaking areas in which pupils are educated through the medium of Irish. These schools are known as Gaelscoileanna.

Post-primary level

The Post-Primary level comprises of six standards. The first three years forms part of the Junior Cycle, which ends with the Junior Certificate State examination. This is followed, in many schools, by a one-year transition programme. The final two years form part of the Leaving Certificate, which ends with the completion of the Leaving Certificate State examination, which is an entry requirement for most Third Level courses. Second-level schools are mandated by law to operate for 167 days in the year.

Facts and figures

Number of students

The table below shows the total number of students engaged in full-time education in Ireland.

Sector	No. of students (2008/9)
Primary	498,914
Second Level	341,312
Third Level	139,134 (2007/8 figure)

Number of Newcomer students

The following information relates to the numbers of newcomer children in primary and second-level education in Ireland:

In 2006/2007, there were approx 30.000 pupils of different nationalities (other than Irish) attending primary school.

There were 21.000 newcomers in post-primary in 2007/08 – up 24% from 2006/2007. There were over 160 nationalities represented.

Adult Literacy classes

Funding for adult literacy was €30 million in 2007 and catered for 44.000 students, of which about 13.000 were ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students learning English. Approximately €10 million was spent on the English language classes.

Parental Involvement

At present there are no national statistics or figures concerning the involvement of parents in schools. The Department of Education and Science has not collated information on pupil attainment along ethnic divides. However, the ESRI research *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students*, published in 2009, contains interesting information on pupil attainment, as perceived by school principals (head teachers).

Research on the performance of newcomer children

Perception of academic achievement of newcomer students

School principals were asked the question: *Compared with other students in your school, how would you rate newcomer students on academic achievement: above average, average, below average.* The results are illustrated in the table below.

Principal perceptions of the relative rating of academic achievement of newcomers		
	Primary Level	Second Level
Above Average	14 %	28 %
Average	70 %	62 %
Below Average	6 %	10 %

At primary level, principals observed that 84% of newcomer children were perceived as being at or above average level. At second level, this rose to 90% with just 10% perceived newcomer children as performing less well than other students.

It also illustrates that the majority of both primary and second-level school principals indicated that newcomer students had 'average' or similar academic achievement to Irish students.

Perception of motivation of newcomer students

This rating methodology was also used to explore the motivation of newcomer students compared with other students. Principals were asked the question: *compared with other students in your school, how would you rate newcomer students on motivation in relation to schoolwork: above average, average, below average.* The results are illustrated in the following table.

Rating of newcomer students on motivation in relation to schoolwork		
	Primary Level	Second Level
Above Average	33 %	53 %
Average	59 %	42 %
Below Average	8 %	5 %

This illustrates differences in principal's perceptions of newcomer students relative to Irish students in relation to motivation regarding schoolwork. The majority (over half) of second-level principals perceive newcomers as having 'above average' motivation in relation to their schoolwork compared to Irish students and only a very small proportion (5 per cent) perceive newcomer students as below average in this respect.

At primary level, just one third of newcomer pupils are perceived as having above average motivation, which just 8% view newcomer children to be below average.

Projects and measures to foster parental involvement

The 1998 education act highlights a partnership approach to education, where parents are seen to have a key role as stakeholders in the education process. This seeks to involve parents at all levels in the life of the school; from the board of management, to parents' associations to parent-teacher meetings. The recent and rapid increase in cultural diversity has challenged schools to re-evaluate how they involve parents, especially newcomer parents in the life of the school.

National level

At national level, the Office of the Minister for Integration has been anxious to consult with and hear from the experiences of NGOs, community and voluntary groups working with newcomer families. Within the past year, the OECD has visited Ireland to carry out a thematic review of migrant education in Ireland. The report of the visiting delegation will be published within the next year. During the conduct of their review, the office of the Minister for Integration held a number of consultative meetings with stakeholders, including parent representatives, to ascertain their views. This process was viewed by all as inclusive and respectful, much to the credit of the staff of the integration unit.

School level

- Parents' Association: all parents of children in the school are automatically members of the parent's association. The activities of Parents' Associations (PAs) vary from school to school and from sector to sector. Some schools, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, report difficulties in organising and maintaining a parents' association. In schools with higher numbers of newcomer families, parents' associations have been anxious to include newcomer parents in their activities. Language difficulties and lack of knowledge of the role of the PA have been cited as barriers to the greater inclusion of parents in the activities of Pas.
- Home / School / Community Liaison Scheme. This operates in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, where a designated teacher does not have any classroom duties and works exclusively in building relationships between school, home and the wider community. This is a highly successful initiative, and has had very positive outcomes. The activities of the Home / School / Community Liaison Scheme scheme are highlighted later in this report.
- Parental representation at school level: parents are represented on the Boards of Management of individual schools, with two parents, one a father one a mother, sitting on the Board. There are no educational structures at local authority level.
- Parent volunteers working in the classroom.

Projects and initiatives linked to ethnic minority parents

Many schools have developed projects at school or community level aimed at promoting interculturalism and developing the role of parents in the school, particularly newcomer parents. Sample activities are listed below:

- Language classes for parents provided free of charge during the school day.
- English language classes for newcomer parents, funded by the local Vocational Education Committee (VEC). School also organize other classes, aimed at integrating parents, which do not require a knowledge of English in order to take part. Classes such as Yoga, flower-arranging, Keep-Fit, Art etc. have been a popular way of Irish and newcomer parents meeting and working together.
- Some schools have set up Parent and Toddler groups with a view to integrating Irish and newcomer parents, with some success.
- Newcomer parents encouraged to attend coffee mornings, to meet other parents
- Introducing parents of newcomers to one another to encourage communication
- Cookery demonstrations Social nights in refugee/dispersal center

- Encouraging interaction between parents waiting in yard to collect children
- Intercultural Committees have been established in some schools with higher numbers of newcomer pupils in order to explore issues of mutual interest. These committees have representation from across many of the ethnic minorities as well as Irish parents. They work together to develop intercultural policy and practices in the school.
- Newcomer parents are invited to talk to children in their classrooms, sharing their stories, culture and experiences. This has been found to be very successful.

Exemplary projects, measures or initiatives to foster parental involvement

1. The Home School Community Liaison Scheme

Introduction to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme

The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is national initiative of the Social inclusion unit in the Department of Education and Science in Ireland. The scheme is a preventative strategy which is targeted at pupils living in areas of acute socio-economic disadvantage. Such pupils are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of environmental factors which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention.

The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the salient *adults* in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves. Consequently, co-ordinators are appointed from amongst the teaching

staff of the school, but do not have any teaching duties. This frees up HSCL teachers to work with the significant adults in the lives of the children.

The Home/school/Community/Liaison Scheme was established in 1990 with the appointment of 30 teachers as liaison co-ordinators in 55 primary schools in large designated areas of urban disadvantage. Subsequent extensions to the scheme at both levels took place mainly on the basis of offering the scheme to designated primary schools in urban areas with high concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Currently, 278 primary schools and 188 schools at second level have joined the scheme.

Aims of the HSCL scheme:

The aims of the liaison scheme are:

- To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure
- To promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children
- To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.
- To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning
- To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

Basic principles of the scheme:

The Home/School Community Liaison Scheme is based on the principle of partnership between homes, schools and communities. This partnership may be defined as "a working relationship

that is characterised by a sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability". (Pugh, 1989)

General principles govern the operation of the liaison scheme:

- The scheme consists of a partnership and collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers.
- The scheme is unified and integrated at both primary and second levels.
- The thrust of the scheme is preventative rather than curative.
- The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviours impinge on the lives of children, namely, parents and teachers.
- The basis of activities in the scheme is the identification of needs and having those needs met.
- The scheme develops teacher and staff attitudes in the areas of partnership and the "whole-school" approach.
- The scheme promotes the fostering of self-help and independence.
- Home visitation is a crucial element in establishing bonds of trust with families.
- Networking with and promoting the co-ordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies increases effectiveness, obviates duplication and leads to an integrated delivery of service to marginalised children and their families.
- Home/School/Community liaison is a full time undertaking.
- The liaison co-ordinator is an agent of change.
- Community 'ownership' of the scheme is promoted through the development of local committees.

Structure of the scheme:

- The basic unit of the scheme is at local school level where a full-time co-ordinator, a teacher from the school, serves the liaison needs of one school or of a number of schools.

- "Family clusters" of co-ordinators in primary and second level catchment areas serve the families which have children from pre-school years to leaving certificate level.
- Co-ordinators in an area form wider clusters and meet regularly for mutual support and development.
- Co-ordinators from numbers of clusters are brought together for in-career development on two occasions in each school year.

Scheme activities for parents:

While the primary purpose of the scheme is the promotion of partnership in the children's learning, parents frequently identify needs which are not directly concerned with their children's education. Meeting those identified needs is a critical factor in the development of parents' awareness of their capacities and in fostering their self-confidence. Scheme activities which meet parent's needs include:

- home visitation with the objective of establishing bonds of trust with parents and families and supporting parents in the identification of their developmental needs
- provision of drop-in centres and parents' rooms in schools
- provision of childcare facilities so that parents can attend scheme activities

HSCL co-ordinators facilitate or organise courses and classes for parents on:

- curricular areas, so that parents can assist and support their children with their school work
- personal development, through parenting and assertiveness training
- leisure activities
- aspects of educational development which range from basic literacy to certificate examination subjects and diploma courses
- the development of parents as home visitors, facilitators and classroom aides.

Teacher development

Development for teachers in the liaison scheme is in the area of developing partnership and collaboration with parents in the interests of the children's education. This development includes:

- the promotion and establishment of a continuity in the children's transfer from home to school, and from primary to second level
- an understanding of partnership in the context of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children
- the development of attitudes and behaviours regarding the complementarity of parents' and teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences in the enhancement of children's' learning
- joint policy making between parents and teachers on issues such as homework, code of positive behaviour, study skills, attendance, substance misuse and home/school/community liaison.

Success of the scheme

The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, TD, underlined the importance of the HSCL scheme in her Foreword note to the DES 2005 Report on the HSCL scheme, entitled 'The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland, From Vision to Best Practice', by stating:

'Since its foundation in 1990 the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme has firmly established itself as one of the key factors in breaking down barriers to access, progression and attainment in our education system.'

2. Examples of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme in Inclusion of newcomer parents in Dublin 15

In 2007, a major piece of research was carried out in relation to the experiences of Primary schools in a district of Dublin where there were significant numbers of newcomer families. The report, titled *Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15*, is available at www.spd.dcu.ie/MAIN/news/documents/InterculturalEducationReport.pdf.

In the course of the research, the authors spoke to Home school Community Liaison Co-ordinators about their experiences of working with newcomer parents living in these areas of socio-economic disadvantage. A number of areas of interest were highlighted in the report:

Provision of course and training for parents through the HSCL scheme

The HSCL scheme has had a long tradition of providing courses for parents on the school campus which has had the effect of providing personal development for parents, building capacity within the parent body and helping parents to be more involved in the life of the school. This is a feature of the HSCL service that newcomer parents particularly warm to, and there has been a strong up-take of these courses from newcomer parents.

A broad range of courses are offered to parents, including:

- craft work,
- sewing,
- flower arrangement
- cookery
- first aid
- childcare

- parenting courses
- English Language training.

These courses are usually held on the school campus, and parents are recruited to the course by the HSCL co-ordinator. All courses are free and the tuition costs are met by the Vocational Education Committee. One co-ordinator noted that:

'a lot of newcomer families took these courses up straight. We have found it very difficult over the years to get the local (Irish) parents to do a parenting course, whereas now we had some local but more than half were foreign nationals.'

It was noted by co-ordinators that parents are very pleased to receive qualifications at the end of their courses, and that they are highly motivated to get certification at the end of each course or module in which they participate.

Parenting courses

HSCL co-ordinators organized parenting courses for Irish and newcomer parents alike. In the parenting and childcare courses, newcomer parents had the opportunity to discuss and explore different approaches to parenting, and also had the opportunity to learn about different and appropriate methods of discipline. This has helped schools address an identified concern of the use of corporal and physical punishment, which as a particular issue with some newcomer parents.

The parent room

Another feature of the HSCL scheme is the provision of a Parent Room which is used to support parent activities and parental development, as well as being a drop-in centre for parents within the school campus. This is another feature of the HSCL scheme to which parents are attracted.

'Newcomer parents love the idea of coming into the parent room. When they get there, and they are welcomed in by us and by other parents, they are trusting and they really love the idea of being there. They are comfortable and can let their guard down. It gives you the chance to sit down and to listen to what they have to say- they tell their stories and this helps us identify what they need.'

Improving language skills of parents

One aspect of HSCL which is of particular importance in relation to newcomer families is that of improving communication between home and school.

Clearly, where parents do not speak English at all, this places a barrier in the communication process for all concerned, including the HSCL co-ordinator. In these circumstances the focus for parental development lies in providing English language courses for those parents who wish to avail of it.

The HSCL co-ordinators have been successful in liaising with the local Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to secure funding from their adult education budgets to provide such English language courses on campus, with crèche facilities on site. This is a very strong example of schools being provided with the resources – human, physical space and financial – they require to identify the needs of their parent body and seek to meet those needs in a co-ordinated and targeted manner. As one co-ordinator put it, *'it is a very tight and integrated service'*.

3. The 'Dublin 7' school cultural mediation project

The Dublin 7 Schools' Cultural Mediation Project is an initiative to provide schools in the Dublin 7 School Completion Project cluster with a trans-

lation, interpretation and cultural mediation service, to facilitate better communication between minority language parents and their schools.

Dublin 7 is an area in the North Inner City of Dublin, which has a significantly higher than average number of minority ethnic residents in the area. The 2006 Census figures indicate that just over 34% of the population are minority ethnic nationals. That is over 3 times the national average.

The need for a translation, interpretation and cultural mediation service was identified repeatedly by a number of stakeholders in the community, including Intercultural Groups and organizations and school Principals. Having secured funding, the project activities began in June 2007.

Overall aim of the project

'To ensure that parents of minority language students of schools and after-schools in the Dublin 7 School Completion Project cluster can participate in the life of the school on the same basis as Irish parents and therefore become integrated in the school community.'

Project objectives

- To provide a translation service for minority language parents in schools and after school services in the Dublin 7 SCP area
- To provide an interpretation service for the main meetings between school staffs and minority language parents in schools/after-school services in the Dublin 7 SCP area.
- To provide a cultural mediation service for schools/after school services in the Dublin 7 SCP area
- To establish a working group on psychological assessment for children of minority languages or minority cultures enrolled in schools in the Dublin 7 SCP area.

- To promote mutual respect, good relations and frequent interactions between education services and minority language parents in the Dublin 7 SCP area.
- To create a more inclusive school environment and to mainstream the provision of translation/interpretation/cultural mediation within the educational services in the area.

Central activities

Thus far, the activities of the project have focused on:

Translation

Providing the translation and distribution of relevant information about the education system and schools, e.g., education policy, school policy, school notices and notes, etc. in a language understood by the parents/guardians of minority language students.

Interpretation

Provision of interpreters for oral interpretation during important school meetings such as parent teacher meetings, one to one meetings, etc.

In subsequent years of the project, it is intended focus on further actions, namely:

Cultural Mediation Service

Provision of cultural mediators to work with schools in regard to the orientation of new families, facilitation of dialogue between families and schools on education related issues, mediation in situations of crisis and conflict, etc.

Psychological Assessment

Collecting information and documenting international best practice in an attempt to devise and pilot an acceptable form of interpretive, culturally appropriate psychological assessment for minority language students.

Parent Impacts

These following impacts of the project from the perspective of parents are extracted from a draft review of the project:

- It created opportunities for parents to build trust with schools and to trust in their child's experience of education.
- There is an increased confidence in interacting with the school examples of which include the decision by parents to organize their own coffee morning in one school and parents cooking and providing international foods and dishes at a school intercultural event in another school.
- Familiarity with the education process is improved which was identified through the type of question that were asked of the schools at meetings, for the first time in some instances.
- There is a greater sense of involvement in their child's education. The experience of a parent crying at a parent teacher meeting assisted by an interpreter, with a sense of relief that for the first time she could ask questions and discuss her child's progress with the teacher is a clear indicator of this sense of involvement. This also happened at another meeting in another school.
- They are less isolated from the school and from their child's education. One Principal commented that parents of minority language students had in many cases tuned out, not by choice, but that this brought them back into the frame. Many parents are now requesting follow-up meetings. As one School Principal commented:

"... during this school year, with the launch of the Schools Cultural Mediation Project, we have seen a marked difference in our ability to involve newcomer parents more fully in our school community and in their ability to interact with the school on an equal footing with other parents."

- Many of the parent benefits were more difficult to capture as the majority of parents thought

the service was being provided by the school, not an external project. Therefore their feedback and identification was with the school, rather than directly connecting with the project. Thus many of the impacts were quickly integrated within the life of the school. For example, one of the parents who initially benefited from the translation service is now working in the Breakfast Club in the school due to a greater understanding of the school and the dialogue created with that parent.

Community impact

- An excellent database of interpreters are available to the community with intercultural training
- Principles of good practice for model development elsewhere within other communities are available.
- International good practice on cultural mediation is available to community projects for adaptation and/or re-modeling.
- Networking and linkages were created directly and indirectly through the project for community development at various levels and in various forms.
- The project created broader awareness of cultural issues and needs within communities.
- It put cultural mediation on the agenda for communities.

4. Accessing Intercultural Materials (AIM) Portal

Introduction

In the course of an OECD thematic review of migrant education in Ireland, the Integration Unit of the Department of Education and Science conducted a number of consultative meetings with key stakeholders in the field of integration and inclusion of migrants in Ireland.

In the course of these meetings, the difficulties associated with sharing resources and information was highlighted.

A recommendation emerged that a centralized on-line resource bank would be developed, which would bring together all the resources, materials, information and research from the many and varied stakeholders who work in the field. This would maximise the potential for sharing good practice and ensuring the widest possible access to the materials.

The AIM portal

As a response to this recommendation, the *Accessing Intercultural Materials* (AIM) database was developed as an information repository on migrants and education. It was developed by the Integration Unit of the Department of Education and Science. The database contains links to:

- Information on the Irish education system
- Resources available for intercultural education
- Organisations and institutions (in Ireland and abroad) conducting educational research on migration.

It is intended to be of interest to all sectors of education, from pre-school to third level, involved in newcomer and intercultural education. It provides information for policy makers, parents, teachers, researchers, and others who are interested in newcomers and their education here in Ireland.

Sections included in the portal are:

1. Resources for parents
2. Resources for students
3. Resources for educators
4. Teachers' unions and associations
5. Bookshops and examples of multicultural papers/journals
6. Further and Higher Education resources
7. Research resources
8. Government departments/bodies
9. European resources
10. International resources
11. NGOs/Community groups

The link to this portal is: ➔ www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/usefullinks-irish-DepartmentEducationportal-en

Glossary

In the Irish context and in this report the following definitions apply:

DES: Department of Education and Science

WSE: Whole School Inspection, a process used by the Inspectorate to evaluate the quality of individual schools.

VEC: Vocational Education Committee: these are regional local education authorities set up in 1932 with the purpose of establishing schools at post-primary level which would 'administer continuation and technical education for 14 to 16 year-olds'. There are currently 33 VECs in Ireland, covering the entire country. They now have responsibility for 253 Community Colleges at second level, out of the total of 732 schools. Community Colleges have expanded their brief beyond 'technical education' and offer students access to the full post-primary curriculum. VECs are also involved in providing continuing and Adult education. A number of VECs also have responsibility for Third level colleges, called Institutes of Technology.

Newcomer: This is the most recent term used in Ireland to refer to the families of ethnic minorities. The term newcomer is used to refer to children and young people both of whose parents originally come from outside Ireland.

Ethnic minority: Families with a first language / culture different to the host country.

EAL: English as an Additional language

HSCL: Home School Community Liaison Scheme

Integration Unit: The Integration Unit was established in 2007 under the auspices of the Minister for Integration, in response to the changing demographic in the country. The Integration Unit is mandated by government to develop, drive and co-ordinate integration policy across other Government Departments, agencies and services.

ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute. This is a state body with responsibility for conducting research on Social and Economic matters in Ireland.

Useful links

➔ www.integration.ie

This is the website of Minister for Integration. It contains information on the activities of the Integration Unit, information on supports for newcomers and has translated documents into many of the major languages of newcomer groups in Ireland.

➔ www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/usefullinks-irish-DepartmentEducationportal-en

This is the AIM Portal at the Minister for Integration. This portal aims to pull together the links to the many and varied points of information, research, translated documents and other related documents in the sphere of integration and inclusion in Ireland.

➔ www.education.ie

This is the official website of the Irish Department of Education and Science. This website contains information on the Irish education system, its structures and on initiatives across the education sector.

➔ www.ncca.ie

This is the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland. It contains information on all aspects of the primary and post-primary curriculum in Ireland. It also has a number of useful resources in relation to intercultural education and inclusion.

➔ www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Intercultural.pdf

This document has proven a very useful resource for schools in developing intercultural strategies.

➔ www.ESRI.ie

The website of the Social and Economic Research Institute. This is the website of the state body with responsibility for conducting research on Social and Economic matters in Ireland and has many useful reports of Social and integration issues.

Ireland



Mary Mother of Hope National School,
Littlepace, Ireland

Enda McGorman

✉ endamcgorman@gmail.com
