THE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE'S STRETCH TO LEARN PROGRAMME

Baseline Evaluation in primary schools in the Dublin Docklands

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Abbreviations

ABI	Area Based Initiative
ASESP	After School Educational Support Programme
CBI	Children's Books Ireland
CRC	Children's Research Centre
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DDDA	Dublin Docklands Development Authority
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DS	Docklands School
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
ESL	Early School Leaver
ERC	Educational Research Centre
GUI	Growing up in Ireland
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCI	National College of Ireland
NEPS	National Educational Psychology Service
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCHP	Parent Child Home Programme
PEIP	Prevention and Early Intervention Programme
PICL	Parental Involvement in Children's Learning
SCP	School Completion Programme
TAP	Trinity Access Programme
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

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Summary

Stretch to Learn has operated in seven Docklands primary schools since 2007. During the period March to June 2011 we undertook a mixed-method study involving qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to provide baseline data on the contextual, socio-demographic, attitudinal and educational performance indicators of the schools that participated in the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme. The study involved school principals, 2nd and 6th class students and parents. This information is intended to guide the ELI in future programme development and in the assessment of programme impact.

Background

The ELI Stretch to Learn programme aims to promote better educational outcomes for children and young people in the Docklands. It operates in seven local primary schools. A range of educational supports and activities are provided to students in-class and at the National College of Ireland (NCI). These include literacy, numeracy and educational guidance programmes, activities that celebrate student achievement and initiatives that aim to enhance parental involvement in children's learning.

This study provides baseline data on the schools, students and parents involved in Stretch to Learn to inform the future direction of the programme. It will also support future evaluation. The baseline data provides the educational and social context in which Stretch to Learn operates. It provides socio-demographic information about the students and parents who participate in the programme, attitudes to education and key educational performance indicators of 2nd and 6th class children.

Key characteristics of the primary schools involved in Stretch to Learn

All schools were designated as disadvantaged under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. Survey and interview data indicated that the schools operated in a complex and changing environment:

- They availed of educational supports from the Department of Education and Skills and from other private and community based organisations

- They reported innovative practices in how they used these supports, primarily in raising literacy levels. This varied across the schools

- Principals were generally satisfied with teacher allocations. Average pupil-teacher ratio was 10:1. Variation in satisfaction with structural resources was noted, with two schools rating their school building as poor and one rating theirs as excellent.

Schools' experience of Stretch to Learn

Principals reported high levels of collaboration and positive professional interaction with the ELI team. Overall they felt Stretch to Learn was a positive resource that:

- Worked well with existing programmes and supported efforts to tackle educational disadvantage

- Was flexible and adaptable to the needs of each school

- Supported increased parental involvement

- Facilitated further training and development opportunities for teachers

- Stimulated greater collaboration across the Docklands primary schools, helping to build a collaborative learning community.

Some schools felt that if Stretch to Learn ended it would undermine this progress and have a negative effect on schools.

Docklands primary school students

The majority of students in 2nd and 6th class were faring well in term of educational outcomes and in their attitudes to education:

- The majority liked school and were positive about English, maths and Irish. Their results on standardised tests in maths and English were, for the majority, within national norms

- Students' attitudes to reading were also measured. The majority of students in the Docklands (64%) had a positive attitude to reading. This compared favourably with students surveyed nationally in 2002. In that survey only 55% of students felt positive about reading.

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Student aspirations

Students in 2nd and 6th class scored well above national norms in terms of their educational aspirations:

- 77% of the total sample (n=143) indicated they would like to go to college or university

- 84% of 6th class students indicated that they hope to go on to college or university.

Principals viewed the ELI's connection with the NCI as important in raising students' educational aspirations.

Parents in the Docklands

Four-hundred-and eighty-two parents completed a questionnaire (68% response rate). This strong response may indicate positive parental engagement at primary school level. Other measures of parental engagement showed:

- The majority of parents reported that they spoke to their child's teacher about maths and English during the school year, 89% and 91% respectively

- Principals indicated that 86% of parents attended parent teacher meetings. While the figure is high, it falls short of the national average of 97%[2]

Student performance indicators

Schools provided performance indicators in maths and English for 2nd and 6th class students. Although other evaluation conditions need to be met, these may serve as a benchmark to measure Stretch to Learn's impact on student literacy and numeracy:

- In maths, 43% of 2nd class students had an average score compared with 36% in 6th class; this compares with (33%) nationally. In English, 34% and 35% of students in 2nd and 6th class respectively were rated as average compared with 33% nationally[1]

- There was a higher proportion of 6th class students in the Docklands that performed well-below average in English and maths than found in the national population: 24% and 20% respectively, versus 17% nationally.

These results present a positive picture for students in the Docklands yet the challenges of educational disadvantage remain for some.

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1 Sten scores for students in this study were collected from schools. These scores allow student performance to be measured against student performance in all primary schools. A Sten score of between 5 and 6 is considered average meaning that the middle one third or 33% of students nationally scored in this category (NCCA (2007) *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* Section 2, p63)

2 Williams, J., Greene,S., Doyle, E., Harris, E., Layte, R., McCoy, S., McCrory, C., Murray, A., Nixon, E., O'Dowd, T., O'Moore, M., Quail, A., Smyth, E., Swords, L., Thornton, M. (2009). Growing up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children: The Lives of 9-Year-Olds. Dublin: ESRI, TCD, OMCYA

Parents and reading

In general, parents favoured on-line reading material, magazines and newspapers to fiction or non-fiction books. The majority had between 11 and 50 books in their home. This data provides the ELI with information on some aspects of the home literacy environment of children taking part in Stretch to Learn.

Parents' educational attainment

The baseline data provides indicators of educational attainment for the parents with children in the seven Docklands primary schools:

- The highest level of education for just over a quarter (28%) of parents was the Junior Certificate. Almost a quarter (23%) had completed the Leaving Certificate only

- Just over a fifth (22%) of parents reported that they had achieved a third-level qualification

Conclusion

This study provides the ELI with important baseline data about Stretch to Learn. Key themes and indicators from the study are outlined below:

Table 1: Key themes and indicators

Key themes	Indicators
Collaboration and partnership	Positive relationships with schools facilitated the roll out of Stretch to Learn and created opportunities for professional development among teachers.
Parental engagement	High response rate to survey. Parents were also engaged with teachers and positive about *Stretch to Learn.*
Parental educational attainment	Over a quarter of parents were early school leavers and nearly a quarter have a third level qualification.
Student aspirations	A large proportion of students indicated that they wanted to go to university/college. Awareness of third-level, even among the younger students is notable.
Schools' responses to educational disadvantage	All schools are DEIS designated and involved in numerous initiatives aimed at reading, numeracy and tackling educational disadvantage. While *Stretch to Learn* is part of this complex mix, schools welcome the supports provided by the ELI

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Programme development and future evaluation

This baseline study highlights areas for consideration for the ELI in the further development and evaluation of Stretch to Learn. These include:

- The complexity of the school environment in terms of current resources, programmes and needs

- The range of other non-ELI programmes in schools that also address literacy and numeracy

- The flexibility of delivery mechanisms is welcomed by schools but makes it difficult to account for the critical success factors within a programme

- The fluidity of delivery makes it difficult to know who received the programme, how this happened and how much of it was received

- Baseline indicators in educational aspirations and attitudes to learning do not indicate widespread deficits among the student population. Moreover, the majority are performing within national norms. However, the challenges of educational disadvantage remain for some

- Low levels of parental educational attainment are evident amongst a considerable proportion of parents. This is an important consideration in the context of how these parents will support their children during the secondary school years

- The ELI should continue to support all parents already engaged in their child's education at primary level but there is a need to consider how to further involve parents, particularly those who did not complete secondary school, during their child's transition to and progression through the second-level system.

CHAPTER 1

**BASELINE EVALUATION OF THE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE'S STRETCH TO
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Introduction and evaluation aims

Introduction

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at the National College of Ireland (NCI) is a community based educational initiative that seeks to address educational disadvantage in the Dublin Docklands. The ELI promotes life-long learning and has developed programmes aimed at children and families through pre-school, primary, secondary and third-level. At the pre-school level the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) aims to improve children's school readiness and language skills by supporting parents to provide a home environment that is conducive to learning. The ELI also supports early childhood care and education in community settings through its professional development programme for community childcare workers. More recently the ELI has extended its support to these centres in the roll-out of the Síolta and Aistear frameworks.

The PCHP and the childcare professional development programme have undergone evaluation and are two key elements within the Children's Research Centre's (CRC) overall evaluation of the ELI[3].

This report focuses on the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme that operates in seven primary schools in the Dublin Docklands. The programme aims to promote better educational outcomes for students in the Docklands. This is done through a range of activities designed to increase parental engagement in their child's education, improve literacy levels and to promote the concept of life-long learning among students in the community (NCI, 2004).

The Stretch to Learn programme is implemented at primary, secondary and third level and aims to support schools and other stakeholders in providing children with a 'first class educational start and the opportunity to avail of on-going support to reach their full potential' (NCI, 2007). In the long-term the programme aims to:

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3 Share, M., et al (2011) Early Years Professionalism: An evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative's Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands. Dublin: National College of Ireland.

- Increase the literacy and numeracy levels of the children in the local primary schools

- Encourage and develop a learning rich environment in the inner city Docklands community

- Increase parental educational capital and ongoing involvement in their children's education and learning

- Raise children's educational and career expectations

- Enable children to develop the skills they will need to achieve their educational and career goals[4]

The Stretch to Learn programme provides a range of activities for schools, students and families in the Docklands. Table 2 provides details on these activities in terms of their objectives and how they are implemented. For the purposes of this evaluation only the primary level strand of the Stretch to Learn programme is reviewed.

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4 National College of Ireland (2008:26) Early Learning
Initiative: Programme Overview 2008.

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Table 2: Stretch to Learn programme

	Programmes	Objectives	Action
Primary	Jolly Phonics	Phonics programme designed to enhance children's development of literacy skills.	ELI provides support, training and teaching materials to schools interested in the programme.
	Family Celebration Awards (Stretch to Learn Awards)	Encourage parental engagement in children's education.	Awards ceremony held in NCI annually that recognises children's efforts and commitment to education and encourages family members to share in the event.
	Zoom Ahead with Books	As part of the Community Reading Partnership Programme the ELI seeks to improve literacy levels and foster an enjoyment of reading in families and children in Dockland Schools.	6 week programme where children and family read and discuss a book every night and draw pictures together in response to the book. These pictures are then displayed in the NCI as part of an annual ceremony for children and their families.
	NCI Challenges	Encourages parents to participate in their child's learning and also creates learning opportunities for children in literacy and numeracy.	Children take part in "challenges" at the NCI in Monopoly, table quizzes and Scrabble. Parents are encouraged to take part in in-class practice sessions prior to the main event and also to attend the finals in the NCI.
	Educational Guidance Programme	A project based learning initiative that takes place at 5th and 6th class level. It aims to highlight to children and families the value of higher education and explores the process of making informed choices throughout the education cycle.	The children take part in a research project on an aspect of higher education and a project on careers. The projects are displayed in the NCI. Parents are also invited to information evenings around issues relating to secondary and third level education.
Secondary	Family Celebration Awards	As with the Awards at primary level, the aim is to encourage parental engagement in children's education.	1st, 2nd and 5th year students are eligible for awards at the annual awards ceremony at the NCI. Families are invited to celebrate student achievement and commitment to learning.
	After School Tuition Programme	Provide extra support to students in the area of maths and English	Tuition groups are run by experienced tutors for Junior and Leaving Certificate students at the NCI and other community based locations.
	Discover University	Provide students with skills to help them at both secondary and third level and to support students in their objectives and their progress to third level.	Mentors from NCI work with secondary school students for one week during the summer. Students are exposed to aspects of academic life in university and visit companies in the Docklands to better understand how higher education translates into employment.
Third Level	Personal Development Programme	Aimed at students from the Docklands secondary schools who are now at third level.	The ELI facilitates a support network for students through workshops on self-esteem, time management and career planning.
	Visiting Local Schools and Acting as Role Model in the Community	Aimed at students from the Docklands secondary schools who are now at third level.	Encourages NCI students from the Docklands to visit secondary and primary schools in the area and to encourage other students to follow in their footsteps.

Evaluation aims

The Stretch to Learn evaluation focused on the collection of baseline data. This data is beneficial to the ELI in its assessment of stakeholder needs and for the future direction of the programme. It is also beneficial in providing indicators that may be useful for future evaluation.

The evaluation focused on the school environment, children in 2nd and 6th class and parents.

At the school level the evaluation sought to gain an understanding of the supports currently available to schools, their relationship with the ELI and their views on educational disadvantage in the Docklands.

The evaluation also aimed to understand children's attitudes towards learning and how they were performing in comparison to national indicators on numeracy and literacy.

As the ELI aims to support parental engagement in their children's early learning the evaluation aimed to get an understanding of the educational profile of parents in the seven schools, their attitudes towards their children's education and how they support their learning.

Report structure

This report presents the findings from surveys and interviews conducted with principals, students and parents in seven Docklands primary schools during the period April to June 2011.

Chapter 2 that follows places the Stretch to Learn programme in a national and local context through a brief review of literature on educational disadvantage and other comparable school-based literacy initiatives.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach and research methods used to undertake the baseline evaluation of Stretch to Learn.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the surveys undertaken with students in 2ndand 6thclass across the seven schools and the parent survey. This chapter also provides a contextual profile of the schools involved in the evaluation, their perspectives on the Stretch to Learn programme and how they address educational disadvantage.

Chapter 5 discusses the evaluation findings. It considers the strengths of the Stretch to Learn programme for schools, students and families. The programme challenges are discussed in the context of the programme's audience, future implementation and evaluation.

CHAPTER 2

Educational Disadvantage- National and Local Context

Literacy in Ireland

Since the publication of the PISA (2009) results by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the fall in literacy levels among Irish students has been high on the national agenda. In 2009 the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) published a report that examined children's literacy in the context of social inclusion. The NESF noted that an interventionist approach in disadvantaged schools is necessary if literacy rates are to improve. The report advocated measures for tacking educational disadvantage that would link schools, parents and the community through a range of parental engagement activities (NESF, 2009b).

The Department of Education and Skills (DES), in response to concerns about falling literacy levels has published *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020*. The Strategy addresses government concerns about falling literacy rates in schools and highlights particular concerns about poor literacy levels among students in disadvantaged communities. It sets out strategies to enable schools to target these students under the current DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme (DES, 2011).

Both of the above reports acknowledge the important role played by parents in enhancing children's literacy.

The Department of Education and Skills promotes parental engagement in their child's education through provisions in the current DEIS programme. These include but are not limited to school-based reading and numeracy programmes designed to bring parents into the classrooms and encourage their engagement. The DEIS programme also provides for a family literacy programme orientated around the concept of parents as the primary educators of their children (DES, 2005a). Currently there are 15 family literacy projects funded under the DEIS programme that aim to enhance the family literacy environment.[5] These projects are delivered by the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and in collaboration with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (DES, 2005a).

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5 Figure obtained from DES Further Education Section on 23rd August 2011.

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In addition, the DES literacy and numeracy strategy (2011) has pledged to support other family literacy initiatives in areas where DEIS schools are located. The Department will support such community based initiatives once they have been subject to evaluation and have been shown to have a measurable and positive effect on the communities in which they operate (DES, 2011;21).

Literacy in the Community

TIn 2007, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)[6] established the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP). The programme targets three communities designated as disadvantaged in Tallaght, Ballymun and North Dublin. The objectives of the programme are informed by the *Agenda for Children's Services* (OMCYA, 2007) and are concerned with ensuring that children are:

• Healthy, physically and mentally

• Supported in active learning

• Safe from accidental and intentional harm

• Economically secure

• Secure in the immediate and wider physical environment

• Part of a positive network of family, friends, neighbours and the community

• Included and participating in society.[7]

To this end, the three community projects have devised strategies with the statutory, voluntary and community agencies operating within the respective areas. These strategies target, among other things, literacy and numeracy in both school and community settings.

Unlike the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme, the PEIP initiatives have been established on statutory basis with the DCYA and operate on the basis of an initial five-year strategy. They are co-funded in a partnership between by the Government and the Atlantic Philanthropies. Thirty-six million euro has been invested in the three projects with a contribution of €18 million from each partner.

Another comparable school-based literacy intervention can be seen in the Bridging the Gap educational initiative in Cork. Under the directorship of Professor Áine Hyland with University College Cork, its mission is to address educational needs in disadvantaged areas of Cork city. The project has been running since 2001 and involves over forty primary and secondary schools and education centres in Cork city. It is described as a community development project funded in part by the Department of Education and Skills and through private donors. The project has carried out evaluations throughout its operation and reported that schools "strongly believe" that the project has succeeded in raising student aspirations and has improved their motivation to stay in school (Deane, 2007). In 2005 the project liaised with the Dublin Docklands Social Regeneration Unit to facilitate collaboration between teachers in both communities. The project also advocated increased links between it and other community agencies as a requirement for addressing educational disadvantage in urban settings (Deane, 2007).

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6 Formerly the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)

7 DH&C (2007) The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook: OMCYA

The ELI and literacy

The ELI addresses educational disadvantage in the Docklands community and targets literacy through a number of its programmes. It works with children and families through the child care centres and through its PCHP programme. The ELI also provides continued learning support for families and children through its Stretch to Learn programme. As part of this programme the ELI collaborates with schools and, like Bridging the Gap, is flexible in its approach to working with schools in the community. This type of collaborative and flexible approach is one that was commended by the Educational Disadvantage Committee. In its report on tackling educational disadvantage, the Committee argued that an integrated approach to educational disadvantage is preferred to approaches that operate within the formal school setting only (DES, 2005b). The ELI has adopted this approach to addressing educational disadvantage with the Stretch to Learn programme, collaborating with schools at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. Chapter 4 of this report provides baseline data on the primary schools, children and families that have participated in the Stretch to Learn programme. Chapter 3 that follows describes the approach to the data collection and analysis, and limitations for consideration when interpreting the results.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The evaluation focused on students, families and seven primary schools that participated in the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme. Following negotiations between the Children's Research Centre (CRC) and the ELI and its Review Board, the aims of the evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme were identified:

1. Describe the school context within which the Stretch to Learn programme is delivered

2. Describe how schools experience the Stretch to Learn programme

3. Provide the ELI with baseline data on students and families that participate in the Stretch to Learn programme in seven Docklands primary schools

4. Inform the ELI in terms of the development, sustainability and future evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme

To achieve these aims the evaluation objectives were to examine:

1. The school context for the Stretch to Learn programme in terms of pupil population, supports available to the school, attendance rates, teacher numbers and other data relevant to the profile

2. Schools' experiences of the Stretch to Learn programme in terms of assessment of the programmes, their perceptions of the programme impact and the relationship between the schools and the ELI

3. The attitudes of 2nd and 6thclass students to school, reading and their future

4. Parent educational attainment levels, attitudes to reading and to their child's education

The CRC provided written invitations to the seven Docklands primary schools to participate in the evaluation. Preliminary meetings were held with each principal to explain what involvement in the research would entail. Following negotiations with the schools regarding the logistics of the data collection process, data was collected during the period April to July, 2011. The objectives focused on three strands of data collection and are outlined in Table 3:

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Table 3: Evaluation objectives and methods

	Objective	Sample	Method
Schools	To gather baseline data on schools in relation to student numbers, attendance, supports, etc	7 school principals from 7 participating schools in Docklands (n=7)	Self-administered questionnaire
	To explore experiences in schools of the Stretch to Learn programme	7 school principals from 7 participating schools in Docklands (n=7)	Semi-structured interviews
Students	To gather baseline data on students in terms of attitudes school, reading and the future	All 2nd and 6th class students from 7 participating schools in Docklands (n=143)	Researcher administered questionnaire completed by students in classroom setting with teacher present
Parents	To gather baseline data on families/ parents in Docklands	All parents from 7 participating schools in Docklands (n=482)	Self-administered survey completed and returned to school

Ethical considerations

In April 2011, ethical approval for this phase of the evaluation was granted by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin. All research staff had complied with Garda clearance requirements in relation to work with children. As there were three groups for the evaluation consent was required from:

• Parents – on behalf of their children

• Children–children who had obtained parental consent were invited to provide their own consent to participate in the survey

• Schools – for their school's involvement overall and for participation in the

principal interview and survey.

Parents

For the student questionnaires consent was sought from both parents and students. Schools were provided with informed consent forms for parents to read, sign and return. The forms included contact details for the research team should they wish to receive further clarification on any issue of concern. Included were letters of endorsement from the schools indicating that they were working in partnership with the research team.

Students

Once parent consent for their child's participation was received we provided information and consent forms to 2nd and 6th class students. The study team was keen to ensure that the information distributed to the children was clear and accessible. To this end we adapted information and consent forms used by the Growing up in Ireland Study for use in the Docklands' study. As some of the participants were as young as seven years there was a need to ensure accessible language. To further ensure that the children were giving their informed consent the researcher explained the study to the children in the classroom. They were reminded that their participation was voluntary before being invited to sign the forms and give their consent. Only children who had received parental consent and had consented themselves were provided with a survey.

Schools

Informed consent was also obtained from school principals in relation to the survey and the semi-structured interviews.

Research Instruments

Schools

Principal Questionnaire

The evaluation sought to understand the context within which the Stretch to Learn programme is being delivered at school level. Information on a number of key variables was required and a survey was designed to gather this data. The survey was an adaptation of the Growing up in Ireland principal questionnaire and was self-administered. Data on key indicators such as pupil numbers, teacher numbers and resources were collected. Schools were also asked about their engagement with the Stretch to Learn programme and the ELI.

Principal Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the seven principals were conducted to explore their experiences of the ELI and the Stretch to Learn programme and to further illustrate the context within which the ELI programme is being delivered. These interviews took place within the schools and explored the relationship between the schools and the ELI, how schools felt about the programmes and the challenges they faced in terms of educational disadvantage. Interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants.

Students

The evaluation aimed to elicit 2nd and 6thclass students' attitudes to school, reading, education and career aspirations and awareness of the Stretch to Learn programme. A questionnaire was designed that was informed by national and international questionnaires[8] and comprised single response questions and attitudinal measures. Researchers were concerned with accessibility and two questionnaires were designed to account for differences in comprehension

8 ESRI Growing Up in Ireland Study (2007) *"Main Questionnaire for 9 Year Olds"* OMYC

National Literacy Trust (2008) *"Young People's Self-Perception as Readers"* NLT, UK

Educational Research Centre (2009) *National Assessments Questionnaire: 6th Class* DES, Dublin

Educational Research Centre (2009) *National Assessments Questionnaire: 2nd Class* DES, Dublin

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levels in the two cohorts. Questions in the 2nd class survey were modified and where possible, illustrations were used to ensure that younger participants could better engage with the material. At the analysis stage, where necessary, data were transformed to accommodate the variations between the two surveys so that the overall response rates to certain questions could be obtained. The final questionnaires were administered in the classroom by a researcher. The students completed the surveys themselves with support where needed from the study researcher and/or the class teacher.

Parents

Data on parent educational attainment, attitudes to reading, and their child's education and their relationship with the ELI were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. Questions were taken from national and international surveys for comparative purposes and the design took into consideration the variations in literacy among parents. The schools distributed the surveys and these were returned by parents to class teachers. A book token was offered to the class that returned the greatest number of completed surveys within a defined period. This method of administration was effective as a high response rate of 69% was achieved.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

The school, student and parent survey data were entered into SPSS. Following initial descriptive analysis the data was further analysed by gender and, in relation to the student data, by year group. As the analysis continued patterns began to emerge and these were discussed within the research team. Further statistical analysis explored these patterns.

Qualitative data

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach and open questions. The interviews were transcribed and initial manual coding carried out. The research team then discussed the transcripts and further identified emerging patterns and themes. The transcripts were transferred to NVivo qualitative data analysis software where they were coded according to the broad patterns and themes identified. The research team met again and undertook further analysis of the data that had undergone broad category coding in NVivo to look for more insights and patterns in the data and to agree the outcome of the data analyses. The research team was then able to further discuss the research findings and draw conclusions about the evaluation.

Limitations

The results of the evaluation should be considered in the context of a number of limiting factors experienced in the conduct of the evaluation:

- There was a high level of missing data from the parent surveys and this is taken into account when discussing results. It is also worth noting that as many parents have more than one child across the seven schools there is a high probability that some parents are counted more than once on some responses

- When administering student questionnaires some teacher guidance was observed. This occurred mainly with students in 2nd class who were more likely to seek clarification on certain questions they were unsure of. The researchers noted that in relation to questions about ELI programmes children received the most guidance and results may, in some cases, not reflect students' own awareness of these programmes

- One school operated as a junior school only and therefore had no 2nd class pupils. First class pupils from that school were included in the 2nd class survey. This was taken into account during data analysis

- The Stretch to Learn programme forms part of the overall ELI educational disadvantage intervention. Children surveyed as part of the evaluation are unlikely (due to age) to have participated in other educational interventions delivered by the ELI.

Difficulties in evaluating complex area based social interventions such as the ELI have been documented (Fahey, 2011; Rhodes, 2005; Meadows, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007). For this evaluation, the difficulties related to the variation of programme delivery within schools, the lack of a known target group and the difficulty in controlling for additional factors in terms of educational attainment. Such factors relate most specifically to the availability of multiple literacy and learning supports to the schools under the DEIS programme. These will be discussed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the data collection undertaken with principals, students and parents. Here we consider:

- How primary schools in the Docklands operate, how they are addressing educational disadvantage and their experience of the Stretch to Learn programme.

- How students in the Docklands feel about school, reading and the future. Data was also gathered on key performance indicators for students in 2nd and 6th class. These maths and English scores were aggregated across all seven schools. Data is also presented in relation to student awareness of the Stretch to Learn programme.

- The levels of education attained by parents as well as their attitudes towards their child's education. Parent awareness of the Stretch to Learn programme and the ELI in general is also presented.

The Schools

Docklands Primary Schools

In this section data gathered from both the survey and the semi-structured interviews with seven primary school principals is included. Survey data is aggregated across the seven schools and every effort has been made to ensure the anonymity of participants. The evaluation aimed to describe the primary schools in the Docklands in terms of their student population, their supports, and their relationship with the community.

School Profile

Seven primary schools participated and all seven principals completed a survey that was used to create a profile of the schools in the area. Principals were also interviewed to ascertain their experiences of the Stretch to Learn programme and to better understand the context in which the programme is delivered.

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The mean number of students across the schools was 119 (Range=114, Min=64, Max=178, SD=42) though there was considerable variation across the schools in this regard. Five of the schools were single sex.

The student population was relatively homogenous with an average of 15 (Range=35, Min=5, Max=40, SD=13) migrant students in attendance across the seven schools. However, as the figures suggest there was variation with two of the larger schools having 25 and 40 migrant students enrolled respectively. The average number of students with intellectual or learning disabilities was 15 (Range=27, Min=8, Max=35, SD=10).

The average student attendance rate was 93% (Range=4, Min=91, Max=95, SD=2) which is comparable to the national attendance rate of 94% (Eivers, 2010). Attendance rates at parent teacher meetings were also measured. This indicated an average attendance rate of 86% (Range=40, Min=60, Max=100, SD=15). As the range indicates there was variation in attendance figures with one school indicating an attendance rate of 60% and two schools a rate of 100%.

Principals completed rating scales about levels of staffing and physical and educational resources available to the school. There was considerable variation across schools on some measures and commonalities on others.

Commonalities

Principals (n=7) were asked about their satisfaction rates in relation to staffing numbers. All schools were relatively happy with teaching staff numbers with the majority (57%) rating the levels as good and 29% rating them as fair. To place this in context the average number of teachers across the schools was 12 (Range=4, SD=1) giving a pupil teacher ratio of 10:1 which compares quite favourably with a national average ratio of 16:1 (DES, 2011). Satisfaction levels with learning materials were also positive across schools with 71% rating these resources as good.

Differences

There was considerable variation in levels of satisfaction with structural resources. Two schools rated their school building as poor while one school rated theirs as excellent. Other responses varied from good to fair. Satisfaction with sports facilities varied as Table 4 illustrates:

Table 4: How schools rated sports facilities

Rating	Number of Schools
Poor	2
Fair	2
Good	2
Excellent	1
Total	7

DEIS and other school supports

As mentioned earlier, all schools in the baseline evaluation held DEIS status and participated in the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison Programme (HSCL). In practice this means that the schools have available to them a number of supports. Schools varied in terms of their uptake of these supports.[9] Table 5 shows some of the educational support programmes available to schools in the Docklands:

Table 5: Supports available to schools in Docklands

	DEIS	School Completion Programme	HSCL	Primary Curriculum
Reading Recovery	✔			
Maths Recovery	✔			
First Steps	✔			
Magic of Music		✔		
Future Kids		✔		
Maths for Fun			✔	
Discovering Primary Science				✔

Interviews with principals revealed that schools were also availing of non-Department and non-ELI educational support. Programmes of support were generally specific to one area of learning. Two schools were involved with programmes of support in literacy while another referred to a support programme for students learning French:

I mean another programme we run which is very successful too is the Toe by Toe phonics programme but that links in with Citigroup who provide 12 volunteers throughout the year and every volunteer is assigned a pupil and they come over for 15 minutes every day of the week and do 15 minutes of phonics with that pupil...

[DS-1]

we tagged on a new innovative programme this year where a group of volunteers from a local company come in and peer read with the kids [...] once a week in one class

[DS-7]

Then we also have a French teacher who comes in and teaches French to the older children [...] and it was actually the Docklands who began that, so it's [Name of Organisation] now who have continued it and have provided the funds for it to continue

[DS-3]

9 For example, the Reading Recovery programme could not be implemented in some schools due to practical limitations such as the loss of a teacher for training purposes.

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Schools also received funding for some of their programmes from additional sources with one school receiving multiple funding supports for their literacy programme:

Citibank are very good to us [...] they fund our literacy hour, they help fund our literacy hour [...] they fund our play hour [...] and we have a toy library where parents come and they take a toy away for a week [...]

Interviewer: And that's Citibank as well?

That's Citibank *.+ They also fund our medal ceremony and they fund some of our football leagues by providing jerseys and also the equipment

[DS-2]

It's the Dublin Corporation Fund, they give us some funding [...] you have to apply for it every year [...] it was again for the literacy hour [...] we use so many books

[DS-2]

Proactivity was also noted in the way that schools approached funding. There was a sense that schools were active in looking for funding and support for their students:

You were in with the Docklands [...] you know you went to their meetings because if you missed out you could miss out on something and there could be something nice going, literally a few bob, you might actually get money for something here in the school

[DS-6]

One school related that where supports were needed for students with learning difficulties they were able to use funding through the DEIS programme to privately assess students so that resources could be put in place more speedily. They stated that the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) system for securing this support was slow and that the time taken to have children assessed was protracted and undermined the school's ability to best meet the needs of those students:

I suppose, well we worked very hard to generate the resources, like a lot of pupils would have had [...] learning difficulties and we had them privately assessed so that we could generate the hours that they would have needed, the additional support and that took a lot of work and it cost a lot of money because obviously going through NEPS it's a much longer process, it can take up to 2 years so the school spent money on these pupils to generate the hours that they needed that we knew they needed but would take too long to go through the departments procedure and so we were kind of able to earn teachers or get teachers that we needed and so we could put them into the classes-

[DS-1]

The schools in the Docklands are availing of a number of educational support programmes and additional funding as part of their efforts to address educational disadvantage. From discussions with principals it became clear that the approaches taken by each school in relation to the use of these resources were varied.

Schools and Innovation

As we have seen, the primary schools in the Docklands are involved with a range of programmes and supports geared towards tackling educational disadvantage. How these supports are utilised varies across schools. Teaching staff in some schools amend programmes to better meet the needs of the students and to better utilise the resources available to them. In relation to the Reading Recovery programme schools acknowledged that it was a good programme but it was not practical to implement due to staff requirements and its approach of removing students from the classroom:

> *The problem with some of those schemes is that while they're excellent schemes, it means releasing a teacher for a year to be trained [...], and then she would work with only a very small group, so it's a balance then between some kids getting really high-quality, and a lot of kids getting nothing.*
>
> *[DS-7]*

To address these impracticalities schools developed innovative ways of working with students that afforded better utilisation of staff and programmes:

> *I think it was like an off-shoot of a programme called Reading Recovery, and it brought Reading Recovery from a one-to-one into a class setting, it adapted the best parts of Reading Recovery to suit a classroom situation.*
>
> *[DS-5]*

Schools also acknowledged the importance of increasing the amount of time they spent on literacy and again demonstrated innovative measures to achieve this with the staff available to them:

> *But novel to this school *[...] we've used the resource teachers that we have in a paired teaching structure so each morning from 8.50 until 10.45 there are 2 classroom teachers, 2 teachers in one classroom so there's 2 teachers in 2nd, 2 teachers in 3rd, 2 teachers 4th, 5th and 6th and then along with the SNA who's not a teacher but who can accommodate or supervise a small group so you have 3 groups in every classroom working at a level that's appropriate to their ability*
>
> *[DS-1]*
>
> *we started our literacy Power Hour in 2008 *[...] It's hot-housing for want of a better work, in senior infants where the kids-they work around four bases, the parents are heavily involved, the children are introduced to a new book every day, and then the new book moves on the next day so they have like four books on the go at a time, and they could cover in the region of seventy to eighty books within the year*
>
> *[DS-5]*

One school reported that they had originally piloted the Zoom Ahead with Books programme as an in-school initiative prior to the involvement of the Stretch to Learn programme. The ELI had then incorporated the programme into their Community Reading Partnership Programme:

> *we always had the Zoom Ahead with Books, it's the big project that we have with the ELI at the moment and we've always had that in the school. That was our project *[...] [a]nd the ELI kindly offered [...] to support it and promote it*
>
> *[DS-2]*

Schools actively addressed parental engagement. The idea of fostering an 'open-door policy' along with acknowledging the importance of including parents was evident in principals' accounts:

> *really the school has kind of implemented, not so much implemented but begun to present itself with an open door policy and parents are comfortable to come in now so there's no apprehension about coming into the school and kind of engaging with members of staff*
>
> *[DS-1]*
>
> *Now I don't want to be promoting too much, but you know what I mean, so it would have been central to my views on how to kind of build things up a bit and improve situations but like it's -, as I often say to the parents 'we have them for 15% of the time, they have them for 85%*
>
> *[DS-5]*
>
> *Well, [...] one of the big challenges from the DEIS is to make parents more involved and more aware of their children's education, so yeah we do a lot of stuff –*
>
> *[DS-7]*

Student needs were addressed with innovative activity. However, as mentioned earlier, the level and type of innovation varied between schools.

Schools and community projects

The Docklands primary schools are a central part of the local community and have a relationship with organisations within the Docklands. In the questionnaire principals were asked to indicate any involvement they had with community organisations and this was further explored during the interview. It emerged that schools were involved in a number of projects and programmes that were based in the Docklands community.

Some of these activities can be classed as civic or social citizenship projects and do not have a specific educational focus. However, they do help to highlight how active the schools are within the greater Docklands community:

> *there's an inter-generational activity that we do with NASCADH, they're the state body, and they are running an inter-generational, so yesterday at 2.30 we had the bingo with the sixth class and the senior citizens*
>
> *[DS-4]*
>
> *Localize is, I think they were Peace Corp, they're working in the community, an initiative, a government or state funded initiative, they come in they work with the school, generally 6th class and a local business and the three bodies come together to discuss some project that they can work together on that would make some difference in the community*
>
> *[DS-1]*

While some schools provided homework clubs to students, it appeared that most students availed of after schools support within the local area. In one community an after-schools project was used by students from three primary schools where children could do their homework and avail of activities:

well we have a number of after school clubs here but then you have the after school educational support programme which is on [Docklands 1], the ASESP [After Schools Educational Support Programme] I think it's called [...] and they provide an area for the kids to do their homework after school if they like but then it's a community hall as well and they take them away on trips and they do games with them and art classes and things like that

[DS-1]

Schools were not involved in how these after schools projects were run and some interesting points were raised:

it could be a little more targeted and more specific, but because it has in some ways -, the funding comes from outside, our input into it [...] could possibly be greater

[DS-6]

they wouldn't be educationally trained professionals [...] like they'd be more youth workers

[DS-1]

There was also a considerable amount of community-based supports and activities available for children and families in the Docklands:

This community has more things than any community [...] the kids in [Docklands 4] have a beautiful library in the middle of [Docklands 4], they have a community centre, they have sports clubs to beat the band

[DS-6]

For the older ones there's another club and it begins at 5pm [...] and in that club they do dancing, they learn knitting, cooking, it's just really a chance for the kids to get off the streets into the community centre where there's different activities happening

[DS-3]

The school profiles supported by the principal interviews situate the seven schools within an active and well-resourced community with a high number of supports available to them in both the school and in the community.

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Schools' experience of the Stretch to Learn programme

Introduction

This section illustrates how schools engage with the Stretch to Learn programme. Survey data indicated the schools' level of uptake in terms of specific Stretch to Learn programmes while the schools' experiences of the Stretch to Learn Programme were explored through interviews with the principals.

School engagement with the Stretch to Learn programme

All seven schools were actively taking part in the Stretch to Learn programme. The majority (80%) was participating in the NCI Challenges programme while 67% indicated that they were involved in Zoom Ahead with Books, Jolly Phonics and Educational Guidance. The lowest uptake was with the Stretch to Learn Awards at 60%.[10]

There was also evidence of a high level of communication between the schools and the Stretch to Learn programme coordinator. On average, schools reported in the survey that they had contact with the coordinator on a bi-monthly basis. However, in interviews more frequent informal contact was also indicated. In terms of programme development there was a strong sense that schools felt included in that process and they spoke positively on this:

> *when the guidance programme ran initially they held three or four meetings throughout the year which were very informative and they listened intently to feedback in terms of well what people believed could only make the programme better...I would only have good things to say about the ELI in that respect*

> *[DS-1]*

Schools differed in how they delivered the ELI programmes. One school opted to use their own books for the Zoom Ahead programme but availed of art materials and participated in the ceremony at the NCI.[11] Two other schools used the Zoom Ahead with Books as part of their literacy hour approach to reading. Jolly Phonics was also integrated into a literacy hour approach in some schools but not all. This flexibility in delivery was supported by the ELI and was applauded by schools:

> *Oh, absolutely, it's not prescriptive in any way from NCI, they merely offer their services for the programme and then leave it to the teacher to amend or deliver the programme if you like, in what suits the teacher or the school best [...] it is very flexible so that's part of why it works*

> *[DS-1]*

---

10 It should be noted that one school only catered for students up as far as 1st class while another school catered for students from 2nd class to 6th class. As a result some programmes were not appropriate for these schools and they were not participating in them.

11 The ELI provided a grant to schools in 2007/08 to buy books for the Zoom Ahead with Books programme. Researchers noted that some schools may refer to these books as their own books and others as ELI books.

Schools' experiences of the Stretch to Learn programme

In interviews, participants were asked to describe their relationship with the ELI and how they felt the programme impacted on students, the school and parents. The survey also asked participants to indicate the effectiveness of the programmes. Schools generally felt that the programmes were effective with most schools (67%, n=7) indicating that the Jolly Phonics programme was 'very effective'.

Nevertheless, it was noted that the specific impacts of programmes were hard to measure given the variety of initiatives that are on-going within the schools:

Well, you see it's hard to kind of -, like there would be so many threads feeding into the one things

[DS-5]

the whole programme [literacy programme in the school] is very, very wide and [has] an awful lot attached to it

[DS-7]

Although specific outcomes of the Stretch to Learn programme cannot be measured the experiences of schools in relation to the programme, its delivery and its perceived impact were explored. Principals talked about the Stretch to Learn programme in relation to students, literacy and parents as well as their own working relationship with the ELI. These findings are presented in the next section.

Stretch to Learn and Students

Principals pointed to how the programme benefited students in areas such as confidence and self-esteem. One principal spoke about students presenting their Educational Guidance project while another spoke about the effects of younger children presenting at the Zoom Ahead ceremony at the NCI:

it gives a definite project for the kids to work towards, they get to present it, they have their, like open hour [...] in there where they present it to their parents or anybody who wants to come along, so that's going to [...] give them a bit of confidence as well in presenting stuff in the college

[DS-5]

the NCI and the initiatives and the programme [...] will make a difference to children's education and their confidence and their self-respect and their self-esteem

[DS-4]

There was also a sense that students enjoyed the activities as part of the Stretch to Learn programme and the events at the NCI. Participants were also keen to highlight the fact that students had positive experiences of the NCI and that this had the effect of making them more aware of third level education in general:

they certainly like attending the NCI, I mean it's obviously not school [Laughter] so it's a treat in that respect but that they look forward to the table quizzes

[DS-1]

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*they're brought in to see a college environment, they get to sit in [...] seating
arrangements that they might experience in college themselves later, it shows
them at least they know where it is and [...] that it might be possible for them to
go for that later on*

[DS-5]

Awareness of third level education was a recurring theme in the interviews
with principals and in the surveys with students. The significance of this will be
discussed later in the report.

Stretch to Learn and literacy

One of the key objectives of the Stretch to Learn programme is to promote life-
long learning opportunities for young people in the Docklands and to support
schools in achieving this. Both the Jolly Phonics and the Zoom Ahead with Books
programmes are more specifically geared towards students' literacy improvement.
Principals were asked about their perception of the impact of these programmes
on student literacy levels. Schools were generally positive about the programmes
and felt that there had been noticeable improvements:

*one of the good things I can say [laughter] – is that our test results are
improving so you know, we take that as a positive–*

[DS-7]

*but I would say that [...] the Jolly Phonics was the first element of it that came
in, and that we could see the effects of*

[DS-5]

The Zoom Ahead with Books programme was taking place in all but one school.
Schools were generally very positive about its impact on attitudes to reading and
the sense of enjoyment that was created by the programme:

*because you're getting children to read more, you're getting parents to
read with their children and read to their children and you're emphasising
it is a pleasure*

[DS-4]

However, one school felt that the programme was too long and that it was not
focused enough on literacy:

*it ran on for a long time, I felt, and I felt that the enthusiasm and the, I suppose,
maybe parental involvement started to dwindle the longer this programme ran
on for [...] [a]nd we felt here in our school that the reading was neglected, and
more of the focus went on the pictures*

[DS-3]

Stretch to Learn and engaging parents

For the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme parental engagement in their
child's learning is a key element in fostering better outcomes for children in
disadvantaged communities. To this end its programmes are designed to create
opportunities for parents to become more actively involved with their child's
learning. Principals were asked about the role that the Stretch to Learn programme
had in this regard. Generally schools felt that the programmes did facilitate

parental engagement and they described this as positive. However, as mentioned earlier, schools noted that they are actively engaged with bringing parents into the school. Parental engagement is also supported by the HSCL programme:

So in that respect, getting the parents to come into the school and to go to the NCI to see the pictures, that definitely would show that there was a huge interest in the whole Zoom Ahead with Books, and pictures and that kind of thing.

[DS-3]

like a lot of DEIS schools we have a designated home-school liaison teacher here who's - well we share her with other schools - so we have her two and a half days a week, but, so yeah we have a designated Parents' Room where we try to encourage parents to come into

[DS-7]

Parental engagement was also encouraged through the Family Celebration Awards. Schools felt these created a positive experience for parents and children and gave families an opportunity to participate in their child's education:

I think there's nothing as good for a parent than to see his or her child getting an award for something, I think it's very motivating really.

[DS-7]

it's a lovely night for the parents to get out and enjoy themselves with their kids and see their kids achieving something

[DS-5]

The NCI Challenges were also seen as successful in promoting parental engagement. Principals considered that these created opportunities for teachers and parents to meet in the school in an informal way:

They might have attended the monopoly so now they [teacher] know the parent and can have a small informal talk with them so then if there's an issue later in the year it's no problem to speak with them.

[DS-1]

And of course it helps us in here in the school too, in that with discipline, if we're meeting the parents, we have a good relationship with the parents, then the children will respond to that relationship and discipline issues then would not be a problem.

[DS-3]

it involves parents so they at least have to go over and be seen, and I mean I think they become happier about doing it, you know.

[DS-7]

One respondent said that without the Stretch to Learn programmes there would be less opportunity to involve parents in the school:

Well, you would have fewer activities maybe that you could have parents and children involved in together, you know

[DS-5]

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Schools generally reported that the Stretch to Learn programme supported and facilitated their approach to increasing the level of involvement of parents in their children's education.

The relationship between schools and the Stretch to Learn programme

Principals were asked about their working relationship with the ELI in terms of the Stretch to Learn programme. Participants spoke very positively about the administration of the Stretch to Learn programme and the ELI team:

> *I mean I would be very positive generally about ELI and that's the bottom line for me really*
>
> *[DS-7]*
>
> *I'd say too that it's [ELI] always had good people in it*
>
> *[DS-6]*
>
> *I suppose from the beginning the ELI gave a feeling to people that they were wanted and that our views were appreciated*
>
> *[DS-6]*
>
> *I mean personally speaking [coordinator] is fantastic I mean nothing seems to be too much trouble for her and she puts a huge amount of effort into the presentations when the kids go for the monopoly and that kind of thing*
>
> *[DS-1]*

Principals considered that key component of the Stretch to Learn programme was the collaborative working relationship they had with the ELI during programme development. A number of participants referred to the lack of collaboration they had experienced when working with the Dublin Docklands Development Authority and how this had made schools wary of engaging in another initiative:

> *the Docklands just gave you what the Docklands had decided you wanted*
>
> *[DS-6]*
>
> *It was around the time of the Dublin Docklands initiatives as well, so at first it was with some sort of scepticism I greeted the things*
>
> *[DS-4]*

Participants' experiences of dealing with the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme were more collaborative and they were keen to emphasise the importance of this approach. Principals also spoke about how the ELI collaborated with the teaching staff. They were quick to note that the absence of consultation between teachers and ELI staff about the Stretch to Learn programme would impede the roll-out of the programme in classrooms:

> *I suppose from the beginning the ELI gave a feeling to people that they were wanted. They gave a feeling to us that we were wanted and that our views were appreciated*
>
> *[DS-6]*

you just had to be very, very careful when you were asking over-worked teachers to take on something extra because [...] in this school [...] there were too many initiatives and they really weren't [...] responding to what the teachers were looking for

[DS-4]

at that stage [...] the staffs are brought on as well, which was great for all us principals because we weren't making a decision, I mean we can think it's great but at the end of the day it's the people in the classroom who are going to implement, so they were fully briefed right through the process and I mean ultimately it was their decision

[DS-7]

Reflecting on their experiences as a class teacher one principal spoke of the negative consequences of not consulting with teachers in relation to the Zoom Ahead with Books programme:

if I'm honest with you, it felt like it was all just thrown on our shoulders, we had no say as to whether or not we wanted to go ahead with it [...] and then all this, all the resources landed and it was now the time to do the Zoom Ahead with Books so it was a case of actually we either get on with this now, we have to do it now, or not do it at all.

[DS-3]

While the lack of collaboration was within the school itself it is important to note that the absence of direct consultation with teaching staff can impede the roll out of ELI programmes and this should be a consideration for programme delivery.

Another perceived benefit of working with the ELI in rolling out the Stretch to Learn programme related to staff morale and professional development. Teachers working in disadvantaged school can experience a sense of isolation with some of the challenges they face:

I would think they've [ELI] given a boost to staff really. I think [...] sometimes teachers-particularly in disadvantaged schools- maybe feel a bit [...] insular and kind of nobody understands them

[DS-7]

Principals noted that as part of the Jolly Phonics programme staff had been able to avail of fora and training facilitated by the ELI. They also reflected on the increased contact and collaboration that now took place between schools in the area as a result of the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme:

I would put it down to the Jolly Phonics downstairs, getting teachers, like teachers went off to the course [...] and they came back and they had really converted to it and also they did show us a film about it, sometimes these films look very stilted but it was I think two teachers from Ballymun but it was like you'd watch this film and think, yeah that's a real class

[DS-6]

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in the early days of Jolly Phonics there was a sort of a self-help group set up where people used to just meet to discuss, and maybe any problems that they were having they could just throw out within the group [...] so I think people found that very good as well at the start because they realised [...] they weren't [...] the only people experiencing a particular problem with something or its implementation

[DS-7]

Interviewer: So in terms of contact through the programmes, there would have been increased contact as a result of engaging?

Participant: Yeah, and kind of an understanding and I suppose a sharing of knowledge and sharing of experiences

[DS-5]

The development of innovative literacy programmes within the schools was also attributed to this increased level of contact between schools. One teacher acknowledged that their literacy 'Power Hour' was born out of a sharing of ideas between them and another local school that had been facilitated by the ELI and the NCI:

it also broadened out in that we had [...]support within the schools, [...] I know from my own perspective that I contacted [Docklands School 2] to see their literacy programme, their literacy 'Power Hour' in action, and I suppose that would've started through the NCI, discussing it with the then principal [Principal 2a].

[DS-5]

Through promoting collective engagement the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme facilitated increased levels of innovation in the Docklands primary schools. Integrated approaches to tackling educational disadvantage have been hailed as being the most effective by the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005) and is promoted under DEIS (DES, 2005a).

Summary

In this section, the context in which the Stretch to Learn programme is delivered has been described. The schools in the Docklands are diverse, innovative and well resourced. Their relationship with the ELI and the Stretch to Learn programme is characterised by high levels of collaboration and positive professional interactions. The schools reported that the Stretch to Learn programme was a positive resource that worked well with their existing programmes and supported their efforts to tackle educational disadvantage. With this in mind the next section examines the educational profile of pupils in these Docklands schools.

Students in the Docklands

Demographic characteristics

One hundred and forty three students completed a questionnaire that explored their attitudes to school, reading and their aspirations for the future. The response rate was 68%. Students who did not complete the survey were either absent on the day of the survey or parental consent had not been received. Of those who responded approximately half were in 6th class (51%) and the remainder (49%) were in 2nd class.[12] Students in 2nd class had an average age of 8 years (Range=3, Min=6, Max=9, SD=1) while those in 6th class had an average age of 12 years (Range=2, Min=11, Max=13, SD=1). The sample was almost evenly divided between boys and girls (54% and 46% respectively) (Table 6):

Table 6: Characteristics: student sample

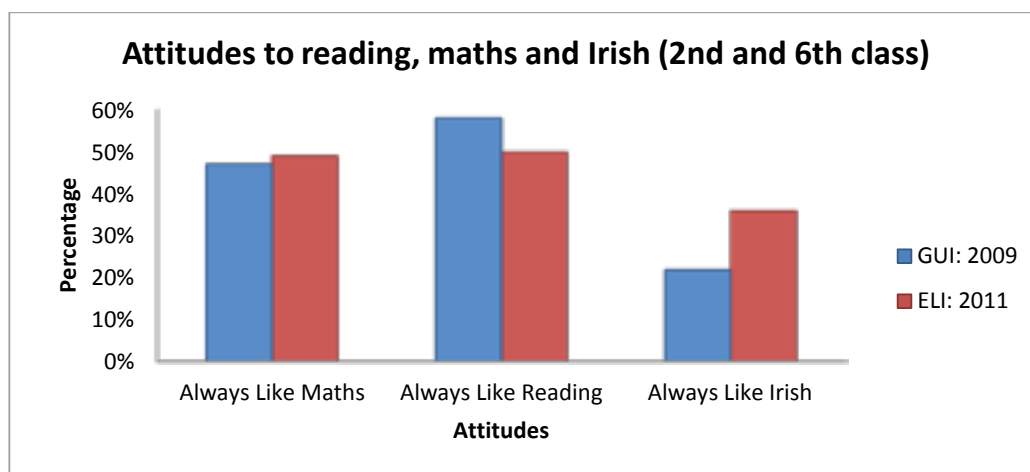| Student Characteristics		
Pupil Population 2nd and 6th Class		209
Completed Surveys among pupil population		143
Response rate		68%
Gender	Male	77 (54%)
	Female	66 (46%)

Attitudes to School

Students in the Docklands reported a positive attitude to school with only 3% of students saying that they never like school. Second class students tended to be slightly less positive than their 6th class counterparts with 99% of 6th class students reporting to at least liking school 'sometimes' compared with 96% of 2nd class students. When compared to national data students in the Docklands have more positive attitudes to school than students nationally. The national longitudinal study on Irish children, Growing up in Ireland (GUI) (Williams et al, 2009) found that 93% of Irish 9 year olds had a positive attitude to school and liked school at least 'sometimes'. The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading carried out in 2009 showed that 79% of students in 2nd class had a positive attitude to school with 21% saying that they did not like school (Eivers, 2010).

Students were also asked about their attitudes to specific subjects. Again, the students in the Docklands compared favourably with students nationally (Figure 1). Students in the Docklands were positive generally about reading, maths and Irish: 51%, 49% and 36% indicated that they 'always' liked reading, maths and Irish respectively compared to the GUI study where 58%, 47% and 22% indicated that they 'always' liked reading, maths and Irish. Interestingly we can see that attitudes to Irish were considerably more positive among Docklands students than students nationally. However, when we looked at the two cohorts separately the older students tended to have less positive attitudes to all three subjects with the majority of students indicating that they 'sometimes' like reading (50%), maths (59%) with 56% of them 'never lik[ing]' Irish.

12 As noted earlier, one participating school did not cater to
2nd class students and so 1st class students were included.

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Figure 1: Attitude to school subjects

Attitudes to reading, maths and Irish (2nd and 6th class)

Overall the attitudes of Docklands students are comparable to those of students nationally. Though we are not able to make any inferences from these results they are promising for students in the Docklands as other Irish national studies have shown a positive correlation between attitudes to school and academic performance (Eivers, 2010).

Attitudes to Reading

We examined students' attitudes to reading. In the Docklands, students reported positive attitudes to reading: 64% indicated that they liked reading while 36% did not really like reading. Only 8% of children indicated that they 'hated' reading. Students were also asked to indicate how often they read for 'fun'. One third (33%) indicated that they read for fun every day while a further 25% indicated that they read for fun a few times a week.

Girls and boys were similar in their attitudes to reading with 64% of girls indicating that they liked reading compared with 63% of boys. This is in contrast to national and international evidence which identifies a gender gap in terms of reading enjoyment in favour of girls (Clark & Foster 2005; Haslett, 2002; OECD, 2003).

A national survey on children's attitudes to reading was carried out in 2002 by Children's Books Ireland (CBI). Only 55% of those students indicated that they enjoyed reading, considerably less than students in the Docklands. Both studies reported similar results for the proportion of students who did not like reading (8%).[13] These are positive results for the students in this study as research has consistently shown that there is a positive correlation between attitudes to reading and literacy levels (Clark & Foster, 2005; Clark & Hawkins, 2010; Clark, Osborne & Akerman 2008). It is notable that Docklands boys' attitudes to reading were positive. This is generally not found among student male samples elsewhere.

---

13 The survey from the CBI (2002) study was disseminated to 56 primary and post-primary schools in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A total of 2114 surveys were returned to the study team. 1050 of those were from primary schools. This is worth noting in light of the results as negative attitudes to reading were noted in the post-primary sample by the CBI study team (Hasslet, 2002: 31). CHECK SPELLING

Students and the Stretch to Learn Programme

The survey administered to 2nd and 6th class students examined students' levels of awareness of the Stretch to Learn programme and its various components. Students were given a list of activities and asked to tick those in which they had participated during the year. As Table 7 shows Zoom Ahead with Books, the NCI Challenges and the Jolly Phonics were the most frequently mentioned programmes. The Family Celebration Awards were only selected by 13% of students but these awards are also known as the Stretch to Learn Awards and so may not have been recognised by some students.

Table 7: What activities have you been involved in this year?

	Frequency	Percentage
Zoom Ahead with Books	49	34%
NCI Challenges	51	36%
Jolly Phonics	53	37%
Family Celebration Awards	19	13%
Education Guidance Programme	23	29%
Don't Know	35	24%
Other	32	30%

While the number of students participating in the Stretch to Learn programme appears low one school did note that students were not necessarily aware of the specific programmes but rather associate them as part of the overall school curriculum:

I'm not sure really because they would just see it as something, for example, you do the table quiz in 4th class because it's been in-situ for a while like that some of the 3rd class then realise 'Oh yeah, I do the table quiz when I'm in 4th class
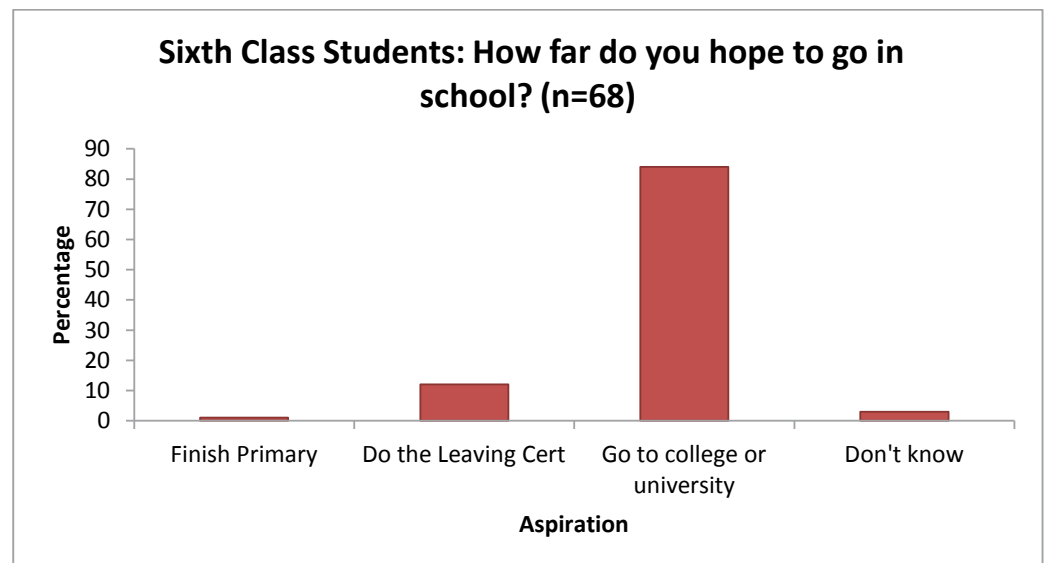
[DS-1]

Student awareness of the ELI itself was also low. Students were asked to indicate whether they had heard of the ELI and the NCI. Of the 143 students surveyed, 82% reported that they had heard of the NCI while only 29% had heard of the ELI.

Educational Aspirations

To gauge the aspirations of young people in the Docklands students were asked to indicate how far they would like to go with their education. For the combined sample of 2ndand 6th class students 77% indicated that they would like to go to college. If we look at second class students separately a high proportion (69%) indicated that they would like to go to college or university. This suggests a high level of awareness about third level at this early primary stage.

The results for students in the Docklands compared favourably to national studies. As part of the 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading 6th class students were asked how far they wanted to go with their education and 69% indicated that they wanted to go to college (Eivers, 2010). Sixth class students in the Docklands were also asked the same question and 84% indicated that they wanted to go to college as illustrated in Figure 2.

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Figure 2: How far do you hope to go in school?

Sixth Class Students: How far do you hope to go in school? (n=68)

In terms of aspirations, the responses of Docklands students mark a considerable

As shown above, 82% of students had heard of the NCI. In interviews with principals, creating student awareness of the NCI as a third level institution was described as key feature of the Stretch to Learn programme and one which had the potential to increase the numbers going to college from the area.

> *they're also making the children in our school aware of the college-the National College of Education [Ireland]-it's just on their doorstep and by inviting us into that-the NCI [...] the children are more aware of third-level, and they're more aware of what a college is [...] so maybe it may influence them when they get to Leaving Cert to [...] hopefully go on to college*
>
> *[DS-3]*

In terms of aspirations, the responses of Docklands students mark a considerable and positive divergence from those of students nationally. This is promising for students in the Docklands as the *2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading* demonstrated positive correlations between student aspirations and educational attainment (Eivers, 2010).

Student Standardised Scores

As part of the baseline evaluation the CRC collected standardised test scores
from the seven participating schools in relation to student performance in reading
and maths. The schools provided standardised test results for 2nd and 6th
class students (n=209). Student scores in maths (Sigma) and reading (Micra-T)
were aggregated across all schools (n=7) and the results are presented below.
Standardised tests such as Sigma and Micra-T are used in schools to measure a
student's achievement compared to children nationally who are at the same class
level or age level. Table 8 refers to the interpretation of student scores.

Table 8: Sten score range, category and coverage in the national population[14]

Sten Score	What the score means	Proportion of children who get this score
(Sten score 8-10)	Well Above Average	Top 1/6
(Sten score 7)	Above Average	1/6
(Sten score 5-6)	Average	Middle 1/3
(Sten score 4)	Below Average	1/6
(Sten score 1-3)	Well Below Average	Bottom 1/6

14 *"Your child and standardised testing: Information Leaflet
for Parents"* National Council for Curriculum Assessment
Accessed at **http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_
Assessment/Parents/Primary/Standardised_Tests/
Standardised_testing_Standard_score.pdf**

Maths

Table 9 shows that 43% of 2nd class students were rated as 'average' in terms of their mathematical ability. Fourteen percent were ranked 'below average' while a further 16% were rated as 'well below average'. There was a relatively high number of students who were ranked as 'above average' and 'well above average' at 12% and 14% respectively.

Table 9: Sten scores on Sigma test for students in 2nd class (maths)

Category of Sten Score	%	Frequency
Well Above Average (Sten score 8-10)	14	15
Above Average (Sten score 7)	12	13
Average (Sten score 5-6)	43	45
Below Average (Sten score 4)	14	15
Well Below Average (Sten score 1-3)	16	17
Total	100	105[15]

In 6th class 36% of students were rated as 'average' in maths. Fourteen percent of students were deemed 'above average' and a further 10% as 'well above average'. However, a high proportion of students were ranked 'below average' and 'well below average' at 19% and 20% respectively as shown in Table 10:

15 Data missing for 3 students.

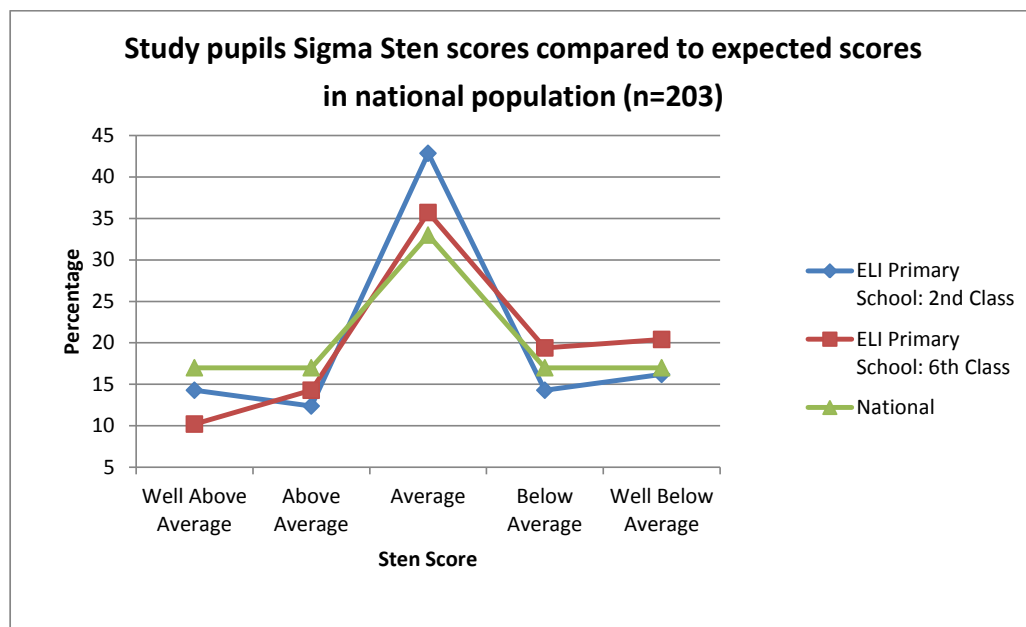**Table 10:** Sten scores on Sigma test for students in 6th class (maths)

Category of Sten Score	%	Frequency
Well Above Average (Sten score 8-10)	10	10
Above Average (Sten score 7)	14	14
Average (Sten score 5-6)	36	35
Below Average (Sten score 4)	19	19
Well Below Average (Sten score 1-3)	20	20
Total	100	98[16]

Figure 3 below plots the data in relation to performance in maths from Tables 9 and 10 against the national norm as derived from the guidelines presented in Table 8. From the graph we can say the following:

- Students in 2nd and 6th class performed well in maths when compared to the expected scores in the national population.

- The percentage of students in 2nd class who ranked as 'average' for maths was higher than the expected score for students nationally (33%).

- The percentage of students in 6th class who were rated as 'average' compared well in relation to the expected scores nationally.

- Results for students who scored 'below average' in 2nd class were lower than the expected scores for students nationally, while the percentage of students who were ranked as 'below average' in this study were fairly approximate to the national expected scores.

- In 6th class, the proportion of students who were rated as 'below average' and 'well below average' in maths was higher than the expected national score.

- In terms of scores 'above average' and 'well above average' students in both cohorts did not perform well with students in 6th class very unlikely to be ranked as 'well above average' compared with the expected proportion of students nationally.

16 Data missing for 3 students.

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Figure 3: ELI primary schools' Sigma Sten scores compared to expected national norms population

Reading

Table 11 details the 2nd class students' Sten scores in reading. As shown, 34% were ranked as 'average' while an additional 27% were ranked as 'above average' in reading. Fifteen percent of students were rated as 'below average' with a further 10% rated as 'well below average'. A total of 15 students, or 14% scored 'well above average' in reading.

Table 11: Sten scores on Micra-T test for students in 2nd class (reading)

Category of Sten Score	%	Frequency
Well Above Average (Sten score 8-10)	14	15
Above Average (Sten score 7)	27	29
Average (Sten score 5-6)	34	37
Below Average (Sten score 4)	15	16
Well Below Average (Sten score 1-3)	10	11
Total	100	108

Students in 6th class were also scored in reading. Table 12 details the results. A total of 35% of 6th class students were rated as 'average' and 13% as 'above average'. Twenty two percent of students were deemed to be 'below average' and a further 24% 'well below average'. A small percentage (7%) of 6th class students were ranked as 'well above average' in reading.
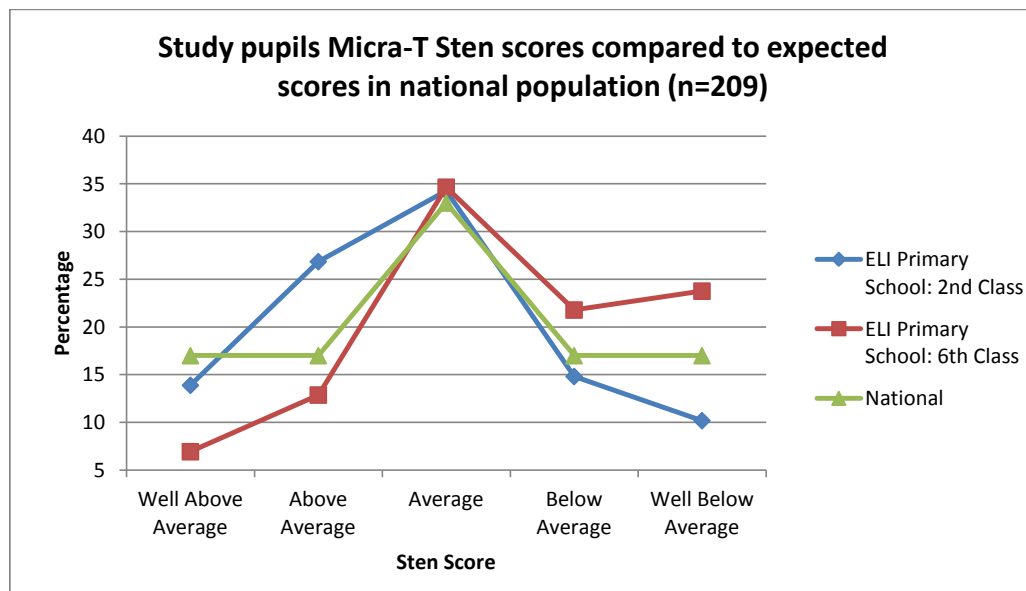
Table 12: Sten scores on Micra-T test for students in 6th class (reading)

Category of Sten Score	%	Frequency
Well Above Average (Sten score 8-10)	7	7
Above Average (Sten score 7)	13	13
Average (Sten score 5-6)	35	35
Below Average (Sten score 4)	22	22
Well Below Average (Sten score 1-3)	24	24
Total	100	101

Figure 4 plots the data from tables 11 and 12 and compares them with the expected national scores for students in reading. From the graph we can say the following:

- Students in 2nd class reported higher than expected 'average' and 'above average' scores in reading compared with students nationally. However, in relation to 'below average' and 'well below average', students in 2nd class performed above the expected national norm.

- The proportion of 6th class students who ranked as 'average' in reading is comparable to the expected figure for students nationally.

- Students in 6th class were least likely to score in the 'above average' or 'well above average' category for reading compared with the expected national figure or in comparison with students in 2nd class in this study.

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Figure 4: ELI primary schools' Micra-T Sten scores compared to expected scores in national population

The results support the sentiment expressed by schools in relation to improvements in student performance. One principal described the improvements that they had witnessed in their time in the school. They felt that the children in the school had improved over the years and associated that change in part with the Stretch to Learn programme:

> *well we didn't have WSE (Whole School Evaluation) years ago but something this school has never, this school hasn't had good reports, the last one was 18 something and I would put down the work like the Jolly Phonics that's been brought into this school had a huge part in it"*

> *[DS-6]*

ELI primary schools and DEIS

In 2012 the ERC released summary findings on the first phase of the evaluation of the DEIS programme.[17] The report provided summary data on achievements in reading and mathematics across 120 DEIS schools between 2007 and 2010. The report concluded that overall, performance in reading and maths had improved in DEIS schools during that period. The greatest improvement occurred at the junior grade levels.[18] The report also acknowledged that results varied between schools and that the reasons for greater improvements in some schools and not others could not yet be accounted for (Weir, 2012; 91).

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17 A Report on the *First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS* (Weir et al, 2011).

18 The ERC tested pupils in 2nd, 3rd and 6th class in 2007. In 2010 the ERC carried out follow up testing with pupils from the same schools (n=120) at 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th class level.

All primary schools in the CRC evaluation participated in the DEIS programme. For the purposes of this baseline study it is worth noting that 6th class students in the ERC study reported a mean Sten 4 (below average) for reading and mathematics. In contrast the mean for sixth class students in schools participating in Stretch to Learn was Sten 5 (average). As the ERC report notes, these results cannot be correlated to participation in any particular programme, including DEIS. However they provide important baseline data for the ELI.

Summary

The students surveyed as part of this evaluation can be said to be doing well. Indicators for attitudes to school and reading among students in the Docklands compare favourably with students nationally. Aspirations toward college were striking among those in the ELI sample and these were above national norms. Data from standardised tests in maths and reading indicated that students in the Docklands performed well in these areas. Yet closer inspection of these data showed differences between the two classes. Students in 6th class were *less likely* to score above the national average in either maths or reading. These students were also *more likely* to be ranked as 'below' or 'well below' the expected national average in both subjects. In contrast, students in 2nd class were less likely to be below average in reading and maths though were also below the expected national score in the above average range. The data in this section provide useful information on primary school students in the Docklands and can be used to inform the future development of the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme.

Parents in the Docklands primary schools

Introduction

A key objective of the baseline study was to provide demographic and attitudinal data on the parents with children in the seven schools involved in the Stretch to Learn programme. This section examines demographic data including parental educational attainment figures. The evaluation was also interested in measuring parental attitudes toward reading and parental engagement with their child's education. Data was collected using a self-administered survey. A total of 700 surveys were distributed and 482 were returned giving a high response rate of 69%.

Demographic characteristics

As shown in Table 13, the majority of parents that returned the survey (85%) were women. Parents were asked to indicate how many children they had in their care. Thirty-eight percent of parents had 2 children in their care while 27% had 3. It is important to note that some parents have more than one child attending a primary school in the Dublin Docklands. Almost all respondents (98%) reported that they were the parent of the child/ren attending the school while the remainder listed themselves as an Aunt/Uncle, grandparents, Guardian and 'Other'. Those that listed themselves as 'Other' indicated that they were foster parents.

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Table 13: Parent demographics

Demographics		
Parent Sample Population		700
Completed Surveys		482
Response rate		69%
Gender[19]	Male	71 (15%)
	Female	400 (85%)

Parental Educational Attainment

The baseline evaluation examined parental educational attainment. Parents were asked to indicate their highest level of education. In order to place the data within a local context the results were compared with those of adults in the Docklands area in 2006.[20] The ELI sample of parents generally had higher levels of education than adults in the Docklands (2006). Only 12% of ELI parents indicated that they had no formal education compared with 29% of adults in the Docklands area (2006).[21] In relation to third level qualifications, 22% of parents in the present study indicated that they had a third level qualification compared with only 18% of those in the local population (2006) (Figure 5).

While these figures are positive for those in the ELI sample, it was also noted that a large proportion of ELI parents (28%) listed the Junior Certificate as their highest level of education. This compared with 18% in the Docklands area (2006) and is indicative of a high proportion of early school leavers within the ELI parent sample. The results suggest that in general the population of parents in the ELI sample have higher levels of education than adults in the greater Docklands area. However, there are still a significant number of parents who did not go on to complete their Leaving Certificate and can be considered early school leavers.

19 11 people did not state their gender.

20 Docklands (2006) refers to data aggregated for the Electoral Divisions of North Dock A (076), North Dock B (077), North Dock C (078) and Pembroke East A (125) and is taken from the CSO (2006) SAPS data set.

21 'No Formal Education' here includes responses for both 'No Formal Education' and 'Primary'. The two responses were amalgamated for the purposes of comparisons between the data sets.

Figure 5: Parent educational attainment

Adult educational attainment (n=474)

The results of from the survey suggest that the parents of children in Docklands primary schools are not a homogenous group. The level of educational diversity reported by parents could be the result of displacement.[22] In interviews with principals, displacement of local Docklands families was said to have occurred as a result of the regeneration:

it would be fair to say that when people in the area looked to be re-housed they built a lot of apartments that aren't suitable for families so if a parent has [...] two young children there might only be a one bed-roomed or two bed-roomed apartment offered and so they end up moving out of the area
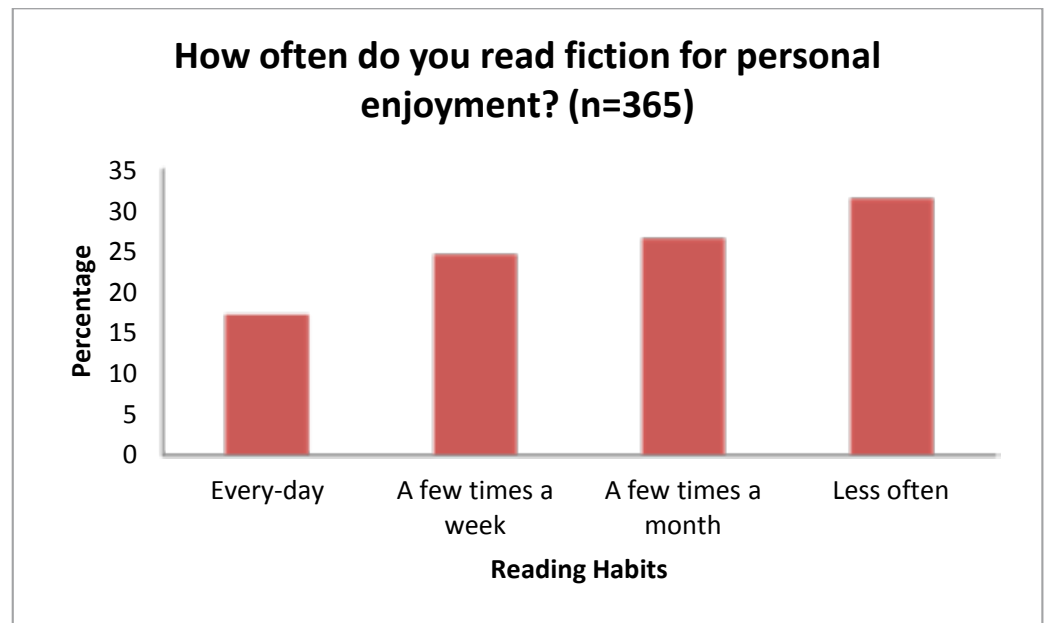
[DS-1]

22 While this is one explanation for the diversity in the sample it should be noted that 31% of the parent population did not return surveys and are therefore not included in the data analysis.

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Attitudes to reading

Parental attitudes to reading have been shown to have an impact on children's attitudes to reading (Eivers, 2010). The survey sought to establish how parents felt about reading and what their reading habits were. As shown in Figure 6, 17% reported that they read every day for enjoyment while around a third (32%) read fiction for fun 'less often'.

Figure 6: How often do you read fiction for personal enjoyment?

How often do you read fiction for personal enjoyment? (n=365)

Parents were also asked how often they read non-fiction, emails/internet and newspapers or magazines. The responses are illustrated below. As we can see in Figure 7, almost half, (49%) indicated that they read non-fiction books 'less often' with only 7% indicating that they read non-fiction every day.

Figure 7: How often do you read non-fiction for personal enjoyment?

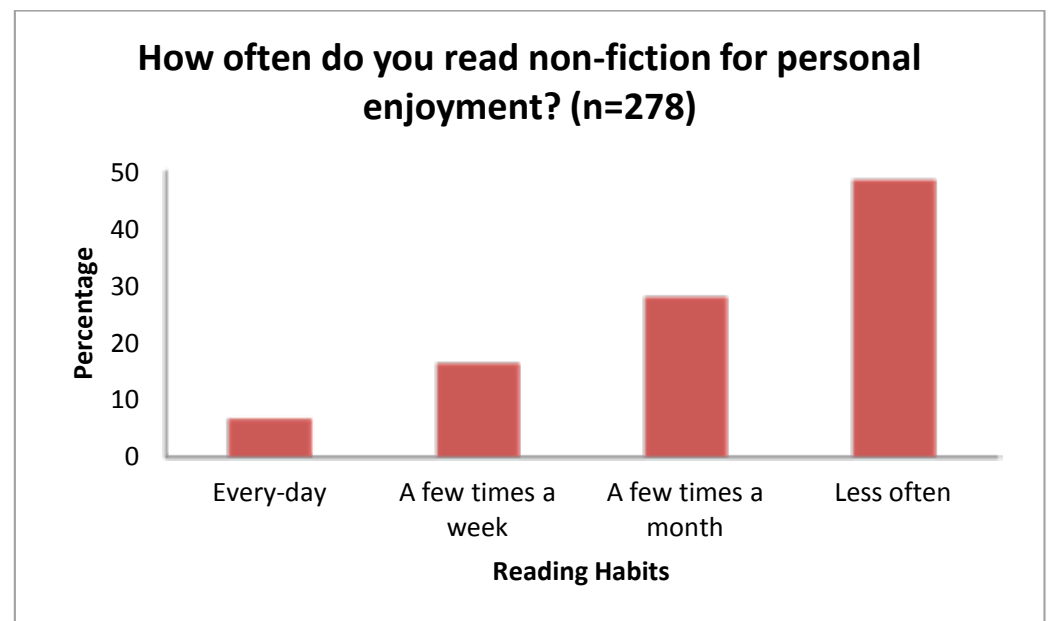**How often do you read non-fiction for personal enjoyment? (n=278)**

Figure 8 illustrates how often respondents read internet and email content. Just over half (58%) indicated that they read this type of material 'every day' compared with only 7% who stated that they read this type of material 'less often'.

Figure 8: How often do you read the internet or emails for personal enjoyment?
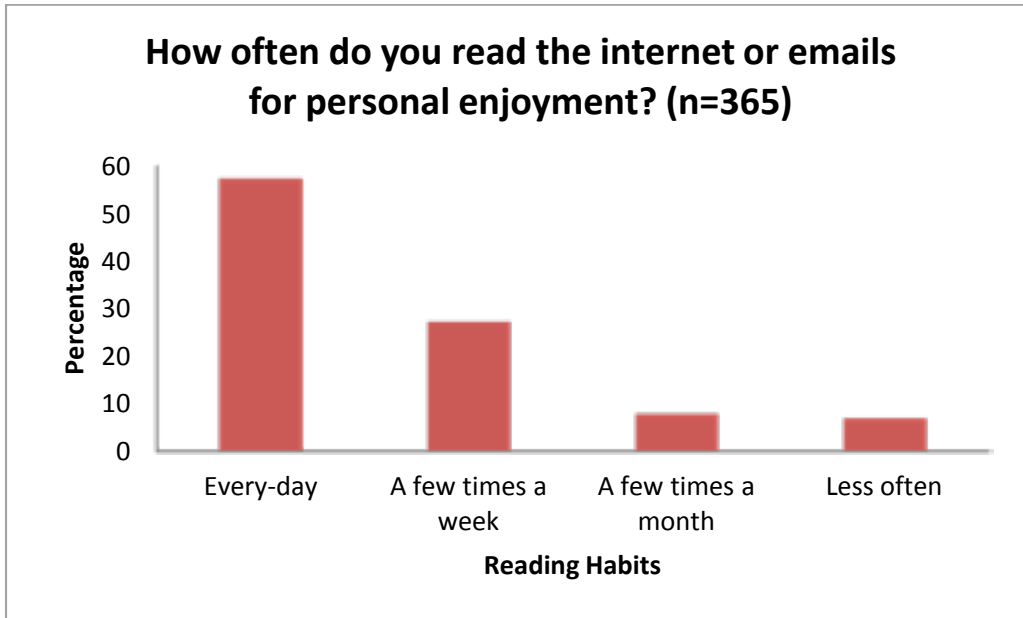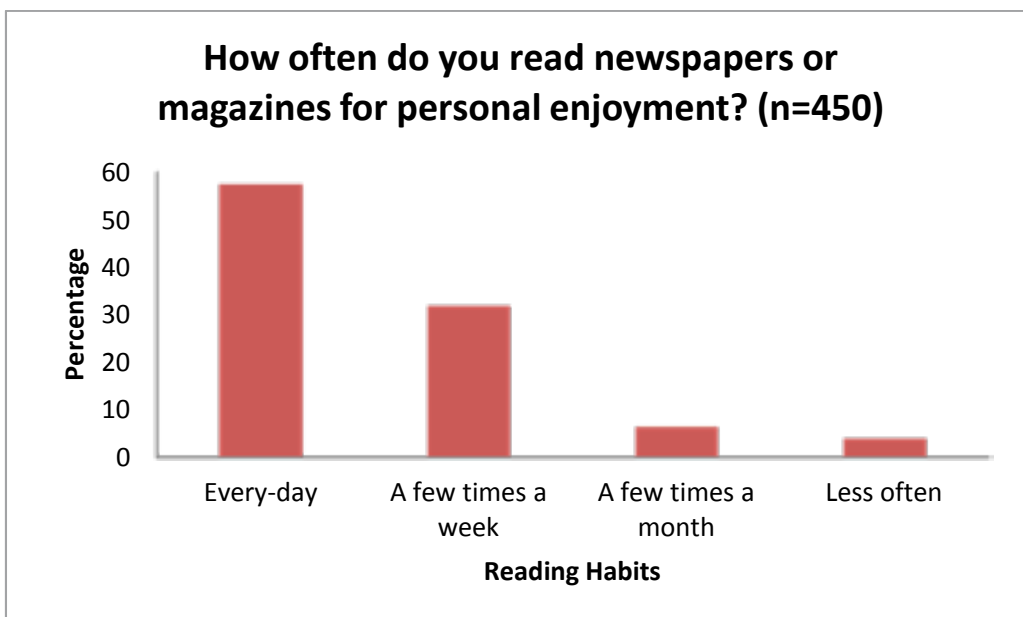
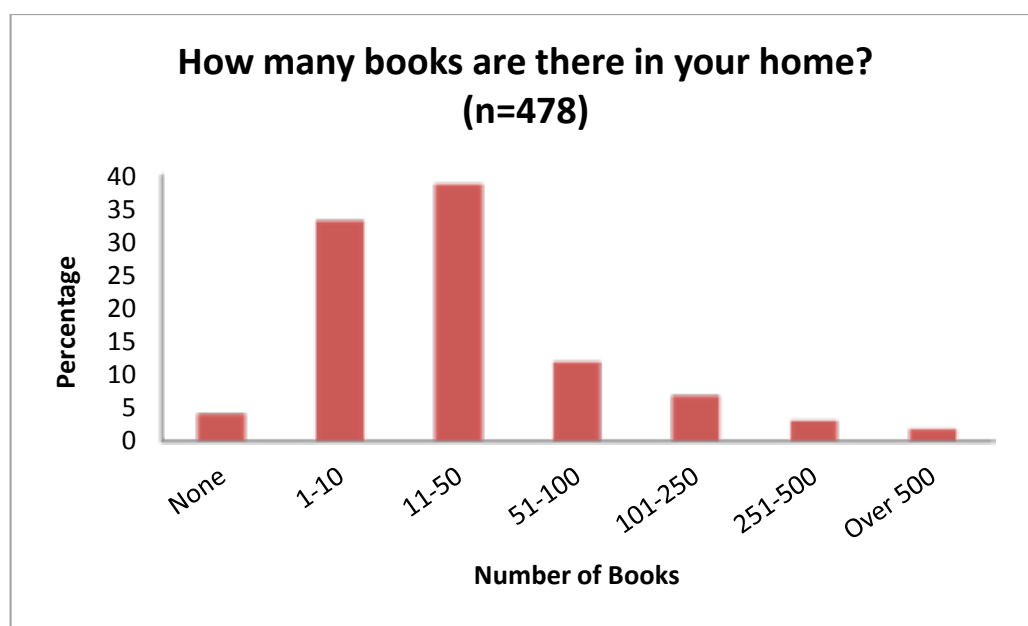**How often do you read the internet or emails for personal enjoyment? (n=365)**

Figure 9 highlights how often participants indicated they read newspapers or magazines for personal enjoyment. Just over half (58%) indicated that they read such materials 'every day while only 4% indicated that they read newspapers or magazines 'less often'.

Figure 9: How often do you read newspapers or magazines
for personal enjoyment?

How often do you read newspapers or magazines for personal enjoyment? (n=450)

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Parents were asked to provide an estimate on the number of books in their home, not including school books, magazines or comics. Of those that responded to this question (n=478) 39% indicated that they had between 11 and 50 books. Just 2% indicated that they had over 500 books in the home while 4% indicated that they had none (Figure 10). The *2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading* found a positive correlation between the number of books in the home and students' performance in both maths and reading (Eivers, 2010). In another study of 27 countries[23] on average, students who came from families with a large number of books completed 7 years more education than those who came from book poor families (Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010).

Figure 10: How many books are there in your home?

23 Data gathered from the World Inequality Study (Kelley, Evans & Sikora, 2007) included poorer countries such as the Philippines and China and the wealthier nations of Northern and Western Europe, North America and Japan. Also included were Russia and Eastern Europe and South Africa and Chile.
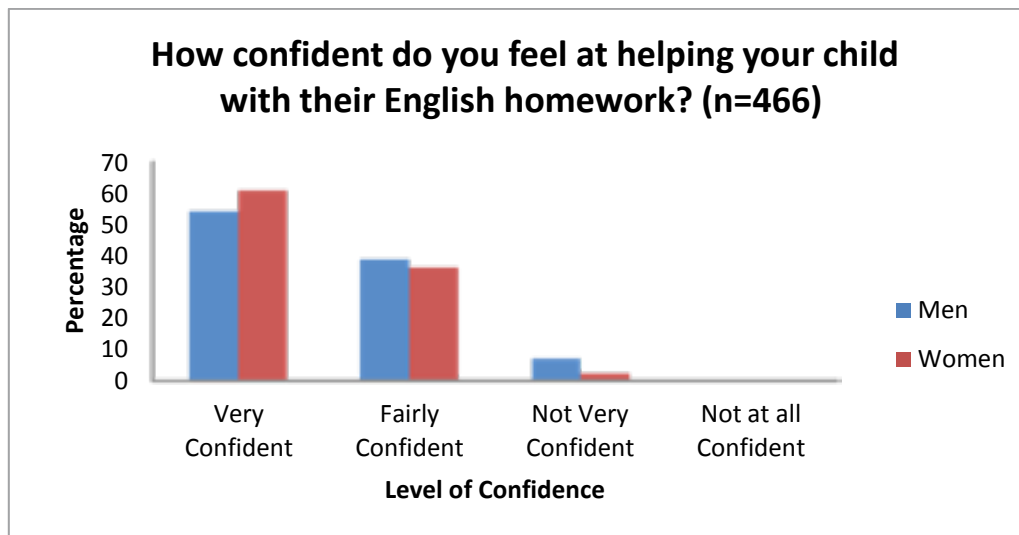
Parental Engagement

Parents' engagement with their child's education was explored by asking them about their participation in homework and attendance at school meetings.
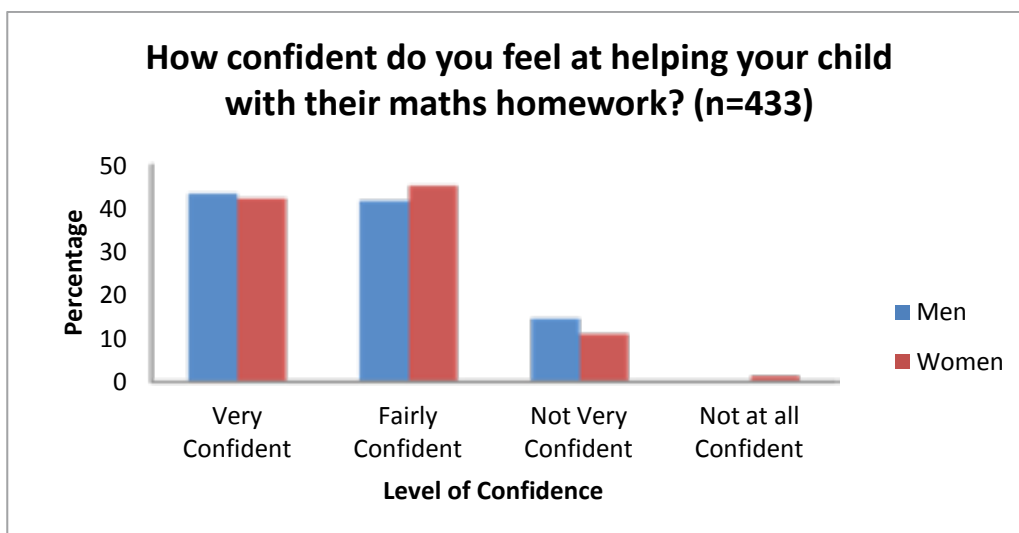
Engagement with homework

Parents were asked about how confident they felt in helping their child with homework. The majority (60%) felt confident helping their child with English homework while less than half, (43%) felt this way about maths. The results were also examined with respect to gender. Men and women differed in how confident they felt in helping their children with homework. As shown in Figure 11 more women, (61%) than men (54%) stated that they felt 'Very Confident' at helping their child with their English homework.

Figure 11: How confident do you feel at helping your child with their English homework?

In contrast, when it came to maths there was little difference according to gender with 42% of women and 44% of men stating that they felt 'Very Confident' helping their child with their maths homework. (Figure 12)
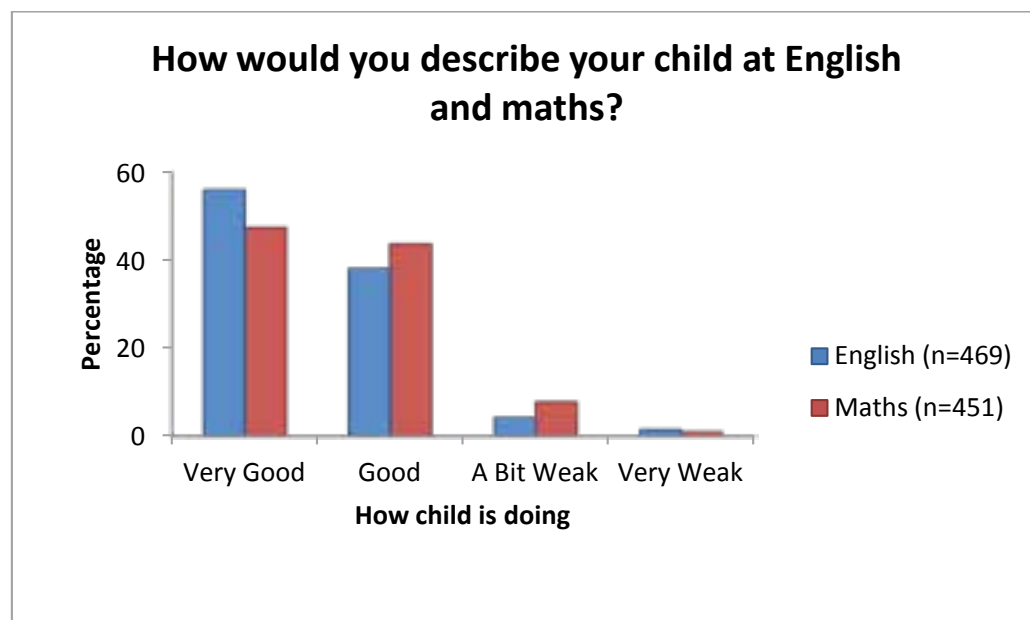
Figure 12: How confident do you feel at helping your child with their maths homework?

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The survey also examined which adults provided help to children with English and maths. The majority indicated that mothers generally provided help, 88% and 79% respectively. For fathers, 45% helped their child with their maths homework while 42% helped with English. Fifteen percent of respondents indicated that their child received help with their English homework from a sibling while 17% indicated that their child received help with their maths homework from a sibling. For some parents (5%), adults at a homework club helped their child with their English and maths homework. Grandparents were also listed by some parents as a source of help with homework: (English, 11%) and (maths, 9%).
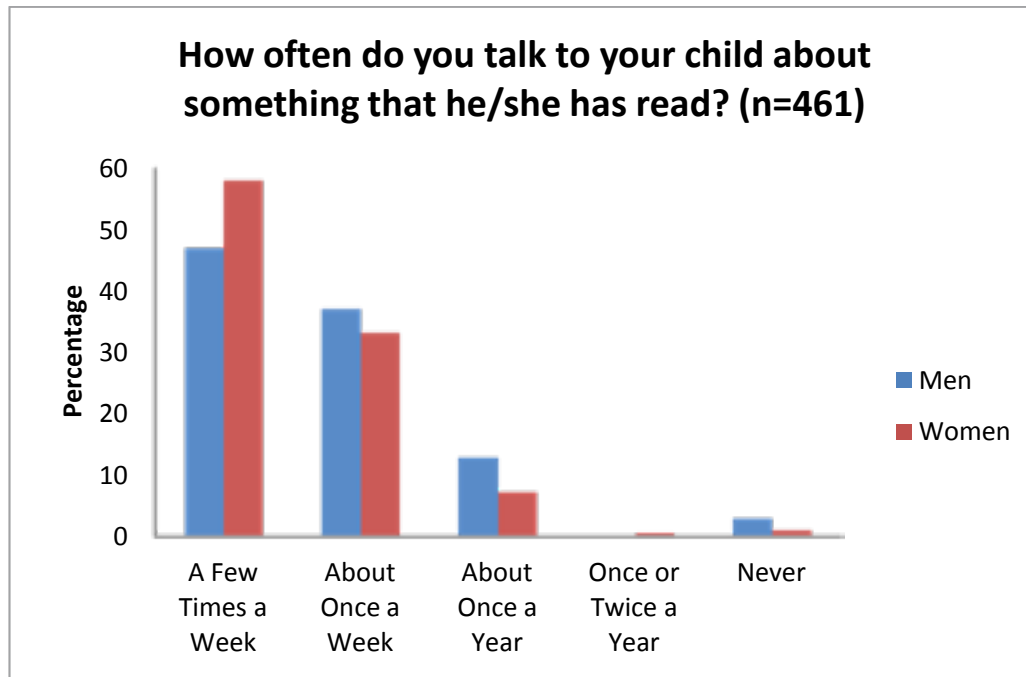
Parents answered questions with regard to how they felt their child was doing in English and in maths. Just over half (56%) felt that their child was 'Very Good' at English compared with 48% who felt that their child was 'Very Good' at maths. A small proportion of parents (4%) described their child as 'A Bit Weak' at English, while 8% felt that their child was 'A Bit Weak' at maths (Figure 13).

Figure 13: How would you describe your child at English and maths?

Parents were also asked how often they would speak with their child about something the child had read. The majority (56%) indicated that they spoke with their child 'A Few Times a Week' about something he/she had read while 34% said that they would discuss something the child had read 'About Once a Week'. One percent of parents said that they 'Never' talk to their child about something that he/she has read. Figure 14 illustrates the results according to gender. The chart shows that 58% of women reported that they spoke with their child about something they had read 'A Few Times a Week' compared with 47% of men. A further 3% of men said they 'Never' spoke to their child about something they had read compared with 1% of women.

Figure 14: How often do you talk to your child about something that he/she has read?

Engagement with Teachers

Engagement with teachers was also explored and parents were asked whether they had spoken to a teacher about their child's progress in English and/or maths during the school year. The vast majority reported that they had discussed their child's progress in English and maths (91%) and (89%) respectively.[24]

The survey data appears to support the findings from the principal survey. This found that the average attendance at parent teacher meetings was 86% across the seven schools. While this is a high level of attendance it does fall short of the national average reported by Growing up in Ireland study of 97% (Williams et al, 2009).
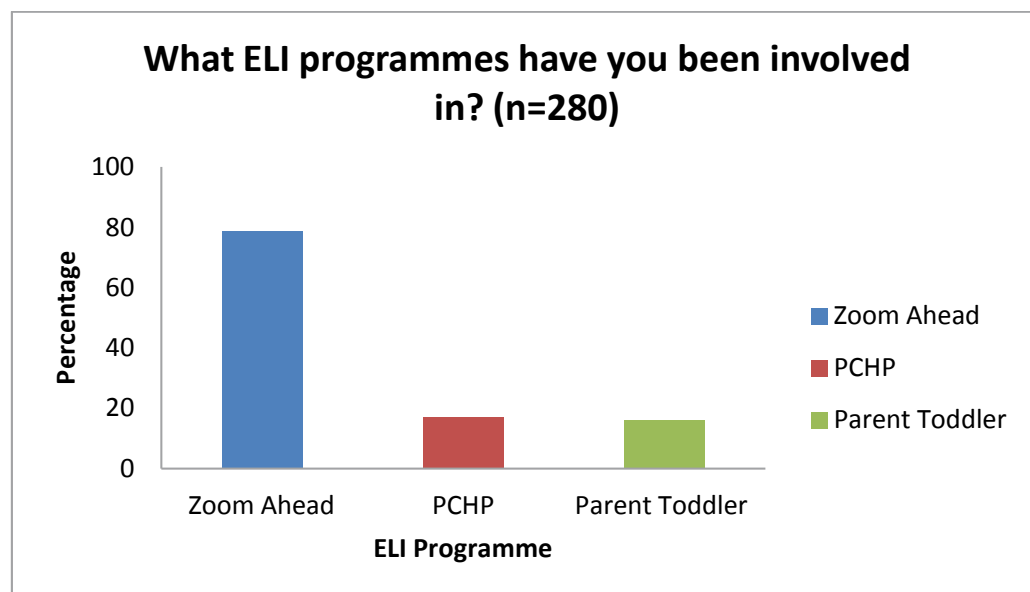
Parents and the Stretch to Learn programme

The baseline study aimed to provide the ELI with data on parental engagement with the Stretch to Learn programme and on parental awareness of the ELI in general.

To determine the level of parental engagement with the Stretch to Learn programme parents were given a list of ELI programmes and asked to identify those in which they had been involved. The list also included ELI programmes other than Stretch to Learn to place the results within the context of overall parental engagement with the ELI. As shown in Figure 15, the majority (79%) indicated that they had been involved with the Stretch to Learn Zoom Ahead with Books programme. In terms of other ELI programmes 17% and 16% were involved with the PCHP and Parent Toddler Group programmes respectively.

24 In terms of maths, 6% (n=29) of parent responses indicated that their child did not do maths. These responses were considered 'missing' for the purposes of the analysis.

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Figure 15: What ELI programmes have you been involved in?

Parents were asked to comment on how they felt about the ELI and its programme of activities. Of those that responded, 41% (n= 196) were generally very positive about the ELI. A quarter of parents, 24% (n=48) felt that the programmes promoted interaction with their child while the same proportion 24% (n=48) felt that the programmes were good for learning. The Zoom Ahead with Books programme was also viewed positively by 28% (55) of parents and they generally felt that the programme created a sense of enjoyment around reading:

I like the emphasis that the programme brought to both the child and parent of how enjoyable books can be and how lessons in life both old and young can be learnt through the gift of reading.

[DS5P131]

My son and I got great enjoyment from reading books together with the Zoom Ahead Programme

[DS6P95]

A total of 45 parents responded to a question about what changes they would like to see in the ELI programme. Thirty-three percent (n=15) suggested that more programmes should be introduced. A further 18% (n=8) felt that the programmes should be expanded. Expansion referred to ELI programmes being rolled out across all classes in schools and in two instances to the programme being rolled out to other school both locally and nationally:

It's such a great programme. I would love to see it expanded to include other areas i.e. taken on by other colleges country wide

[DS3P86]

Parents were also asked to indicate whether they had heard of the ELI and the NCI. The vast majority (95% n=456) had heard of the NCI and (75% n=348)) reported that they had attended an event there. In contrast two thirds of parents (66% n=309) had heard of the ELI. The results suggest a high level of awareness of the NCI among parents in the Docklands.

Summary

The parent survey results highlight a number of key issues for the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme. From an examination of the data relating to educational attainment it appears that parents in the Docklands have a diverse level of need. On the one hand 28% of parents have not progressed beyond Junior Certificate level but on the other almost a quarter (22%) of parents have a third level qualification.

In terms of attitudes to reading there is evidence that the preferred forms of reading among parents are not books but rather magazines and on-line media. This is useful information for an educational programme that seeks to include parents in their child's literacy.

Parental engagement was found to be strong in relation to helping with homework and discussing reading in the home. However, while the level of engagement with schools was found to be high among parents in the Docklands it remains somewhat lower than national norms.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings from the baseline evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme. It draws on key results and refers, where relevant, to published research. The chapter is divided into three sections for discussion: the strengths of the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme, the challenges facing the ELI, and the issues relating to the future evaluation of the programme. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme and future sustainability.

Strengths of the Stretch to Learn programme

Schools

For schools engaged with the Stretch to Learn programme one of the key strengths identified was the facilitation of professional development within and between schools. This was identified in a number of areas. Teachers spoke of increased collaboration between schools in the Docklands and their uptake of the in-school-training made available to them by the ELI. Professional development in terms of collaboration and collegiality was identified by Mourshed et al (2007) as an important factor in improved student outcomes. These increased opportunities for professional collaboration can facilitate the spread of best practice and allow teaching staff to develop their skills as teachers to the benefit of pupils (Johnston, 1992; Mourshed, 2010).The findings support the important role played by the ELI and the Stretch to Learn programme in facilitating collaboration.

The Stretch to Learn programme also helped to foster professional development in schools classified as disadvantaged by increasing their exposure to alternative approaches to literacy. The introduction of the Jolly Phonics programme was preceded by a formal visit to a school in Scotland implementing the programme. Schools were also shown how a school in Ballymun had implemented the programme. Giving teachers the opportunity to see innovative practices in action enhances professional development (Mourshed, 2010). The Stretch to Learn programme can be said to have provided invaluable support in this regard and schools were quick to credit the ELI with creating these opportunities.

The creation of this collaborative learning community between the seven schools in the Docklands is an important strength of the Stretch to Learn programme. Schools felt that without the ELI and the Stretch to Learn programme this level of collaboration would be difficult to sustain.

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Students and Families

Parents provided positive feedback about the Stretch to Learn programme. They identified increased interaction and engagement with their child and their child's education as the aspects they liked best about the programmes. A large proportion of parents wanted to see an increase in the number of programmes available. In relation to the Zoom Ahead with Books some parents felt it should be expanded across all classes. These responses indicate a high level of parental engagement with the ELI and the Stretch to Learn programme among parents surveyed. Principals also noted the role that the Stretch to Learn programme played in bringing parents into the schools and engaging them in their child's education. Increased parental engagement was identified by the ELI itself as a key objective of the Stretch to Learn programme. The important role of parental engagement in the educational attainment of children has also been widely documented and is identified by the Department of Education and Skills as integral to its approach to educational disadvantage in Ireland (DES, 2010; Eivers, 2010).In this regard the Stretch to Learn programme complements the efforts of schools and the Department.

The Stretch to Learn programme was also credited with creating a sense of fun and enjoyment around reading and maths through the Zoom Ahead with Books and the NCI Challenges. Parents and children enjoyed these activities and schools were supportive of these programmes in creating enjoyable opportunities for learning. The PISA 2009 report found that students who enjoyed reading the most tended to score highest in reading proficiency tests. The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading also found a positive correlation between attitudes to reading and reading test scores among Irish school children (Eivers, 2010). Research has also shown that factors such as low-economic status can be compensated for where students read regularly and enjoy the activity (Akerman, 2006). This study indicates the high value schools placed on how the Stretch to Learn programme fostered positive attitudes to learning among students.

Challenges for the ELI Stretch to Learn programme

The baseline data indicates that the Docklands community is diverse, changing and well-serviced in terms of supports for families and schools. It is also apparent that challenges in terms of educational disadvantage still persist in the community. For the ELI a key consideration is how best to address these challenges within the context of the evaluation findings.

Schools

A key consideration for the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme relates to programme sustainability. The evaluation found that schools were involved in activities that were similar to those in the Stretch to Learn programme. Examples include medal and award ceremonies organised either by the schools entirely or with external private support. The NESF identified duplication of services as a common problem for community-based projects (NESF, 2009a). The development of a multi-agency approach to educational disadvantage can result in a reduction in duplication, better targeting and better use of resources (NESF, 2009a).

Similarly, the number of literacy and numeracy supports available to schools should be taken into account when considering the future direction of ELI programmes. As well as the many programmes under the DEIS programme,

several schools indicated that they planned to engage with the *Write to Read*[25] initiative in the coming academic year. This initiative can be described as a formalised literacy 'Power Hour' and includes intensive reading and writing workshops and emphasises parental and community involvement and a focus on continued professional development for teachers and schools. How the Stretch to Learn programme will interact with this new literacy initiative in the coming academic year needs to be considered.

Students

The data generally described a positive picture of students' academic performance. Nevertheless, while a large proportion of the students in both cohorts had average scores in reading and maths a considerable proportion of students performed 'below average' or 'well below average' on both tests.

Parents

The majority of parents indicated that they had only completed Junior Certificate while almost a quarter of parents reported having a third-level qualification. Programmes designed to target families and at home literacy practices need to take in to account these differences. The evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme highlights two challenges for the ELI in relation to parents:

- Barriers to parental engagement
- Targeting

Barriers to Parental Engagement

Lower levels of education have been identified as potential barriers to parental engagement in previous studies. Parents' own poor literacy levels were found to act as a barrier to their engagement with their child's education in UK studies (DCSF, 2008). Low levels of parental educational attainment can impact negatively on children's educational performance (Eivers, 2010). The *2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading* (Eivers, 2010) demonstrated that higher levels of parental education tended to result in higher student performance scores. For parents with poor levels of literacy, additional support may be required to ensure that these parents can fully participate. The concerns raised by one school around the Zoom Ahead with Books programme are perhaps indicative of this problem. The school noted that some parents placed more emphasis on the drawing aspect rather than the reading aspect of the programme.

Targeting

Spatial targeting is problematic in an area where there is a demographically-mixed population. The risk is that those in need of the service being delivered do not receive it as they do not live in the targeted area and those that do not need it unintentionally benefit (Fahey et al, 2011). This type of inefficient targeting can undermine the strength of initiatives such as the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme and needs to be taken into account. The difficulties associated with spatial targeting are addressed in more detail in the next section.

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25 St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (2011) **http://www.spd.dcu. ie/main/news/Write_to_Read.shtml** [Accessed 19th April 2011]

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Both these factors pose challenges to any learning initiative in the Docklands area and need to be factored in to any programme development that seeks to involve parents in their child's education.

Future Evaluation

The challenges that face the Stretch to Learn Programme in terms of future evaluation relate primarily to the following:

- The ELI as an Area Based Initiative (ABI)

- The complex school environment within which the programme operates

- Consistency in programme delivery

- Target audience

Area Based Initiative (ABI)

The ELI can be considered an Area Based Initiative (ABI) in that it is a complex social intervention in a particular geographical location. The limitations of ABIs were noted in a Combat Poverty Agency report (2011). They tend to proliferate so that they include a large range of activities that are hard to enumerate and even more difficult to evaluate (Fahey, 2011). Similarly, the ELI has an expansive range of flexibly delivered programmes offered to a wide range of groups. This poses difficulties in assessing and understanding the overall impact of the ELI and of individual programmes such as Stretch to Learn.

The ABI approach is often found where poverty is spatially concentrated. However, Fahey et al (2011) note that for the ABI approach to be effective the majority of the inhabitants of the area in question must be poor and that most of the poor must live in that area (2011:27). The baseline evaluation reported that 22% of parents surveyed had a third level qualification while a further 28% recorded the Junior Certificate as their highest level of education attained. This data suggests a diverse rather than a homogenous population characterised by disadvantage. Displacement of local residents as a result of regeneration was posited as a possible explanation for this diversity.

Similar levels of displacement as a result of social regeneration were noted in a study of Fatima Mansions Regeneration Programme (Fahey, 2011). There, as in the Docklands, the existing flats were demolished and replaced with new private and social housing. Fahey (2011) noted that it is possible that perceived levels of disadvantage have been impacted by the displacement of disadvantaged families from such communities. Any evaluation of the activities of the ELI must take this into account. Evidence of this displacement can be taken from the dwindling numbers in some Docklands schools and the increase in the number of adults with third level education in the area. Figures from the CSO indicate a percentage increase of 43% between 2002 and 2006 in the number of adults in the Docklands with a third level qualification.[26] Gains in educational outcomes in the Docklands must be considered within the overall programme of regeneration that has occurred over the last two decades. Given this complexity it is difficult for any one organisation to isolate the impact of their interventions.

26 Percentage change calculated using census data from the

following Electoral Divisions in 2002 and 2006: North Dock A (076),

North Dock B (077), North Dock C (078) and Pembroke East A (125).

School Environment

Initiatives that are designed to improve educational outcomes in Docklands schools are numerous and diverse. These include programmes under DEIS and school and community initiatives. Future evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme will need to take on board the interplay between these programmes and those of the ELI in tackling educational disadvantage. Currently, outcome measures for the programme as a whole cannot be identified as the Stretch to Learn programme and its effects cannot be disentangled from this complex support network. The challenge of separating out the outcomes of an intervention from such a complex social context was acknowledged in the evaluation of the Sure Start Programme in the UK (Meadows, 2007). Suggested remedies focused on the need for a control group in order to explore outcome measures. In the case of ABIs, this control group would need to be a geographic area.

Approach to programme delivery

Schools have identified as a strength the flexible approach taken by the Stretch to Learn programme in its work with schools. However, in terms of evaluation this approach proves challenging. Echoing the findings of the Sure Start evaluation (2007) the variation in how Stretch to Learn programmes were delivered in schools and the general flexibility in the approach taken prevents outcomes based evaluation across the schools being carried out at present. The challenge for the ELI will be to balance the schools' needs for any programme they deliver to be adaptable and flexible and the ELI's need to be able to evaluate the impact of its Stretch to Learn programme on students and families in the Docklands.

Target audience

The Combat Poverty Agency (2011) highlighted concerns relating to spatial targeting in ABIs. The Stretch to Learn programme is aimed at all students and their families across the geographic Docklands area. With such a diverse population existing within those schools it can be argued that recipients do not constitute a homogenous group. Some students have the additional advantage of coming from a family where a parent holds a third level qualification, while some come from a family where a parent has not completed primary school. Measuring outcomes from an intervention with such a varied target audience is problematic. The report suggests that to counter this problem, ABI's should develop effective means of identifying those most in need of their supports and can then measure to what degree they have been successful in reaching that target audience. For the ELI and its Stretch to Learn programme this will pose a challenge. Again the need to be universal and flexible in their approach is not conducive to targeting as outlined above. However without a different approach to targeting, outcome measures will be difficult to effectively measure.

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Recommendations

- The ELI should continue to foster a support network for schools in the Docklands through its Stretch to Learn programme as part of its mission to improve educational outcomes for children in the community.

- The ELI needs to work strategically with schools and other providers to minimise duplication of services as part of the Stretch to Learn programme.

- The heterogeneity of parents in relation to education levels should be considered when designing programmes around literacy and numeracy.

- The Stretch to Learn programme might consider introducing alternative media for engaging parents in literacy programmes given the preference among parents for reading materials other than books.

- Consideration needs to be given to strategies for future evaluation so that measures and impact outcomes can be assessed. The challenge for the ELI will be in balancing these strategies with the universal and flexible approach to programme delivery currently in operation.

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