



Department of Education and Science  
An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta



# The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland **From Vision to Best Practice**

Written by the HSCL Coordinators  
2005-2006

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## Foreword by the Minister



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

Starting from fairly meagre roots in 1990 the scheme expanded over the intervening years until by 2005 it was reaching in excess of 150,000 families with children in approximately 470 schools, annually. In the same year the Government launched Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an action plan which provides a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme.

One of the main objectives of the action plan is to build on the successful work of HSCL over the past 15 years. A renewed emphasis will be placed on the involvement of parents and families in meeting children's education needs, particularly their needs in relation to literacy and numeracy as well as oral language skills of very young children.

Since the commencement of the HSCL Scheme we have learned that working with parents and families provides alternatives and choices where few existed before. We know that the development of strong links between the home and the community will help to foster higher goals and expectations and encourage achievement.

In 1997 the OECD cited the HSCL Scheme and commented that 'parental involvement, especially in the areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school - it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning'.

Key to the ongoing success of the HSCL Scheme is the selfless dedication of the HSCL personnel. Coordinators act not only as liaison between the schools, teachers, parents and communities but also act as advocates of partnership and collaboration as well as drivers of the range of activities that the scheme supports.

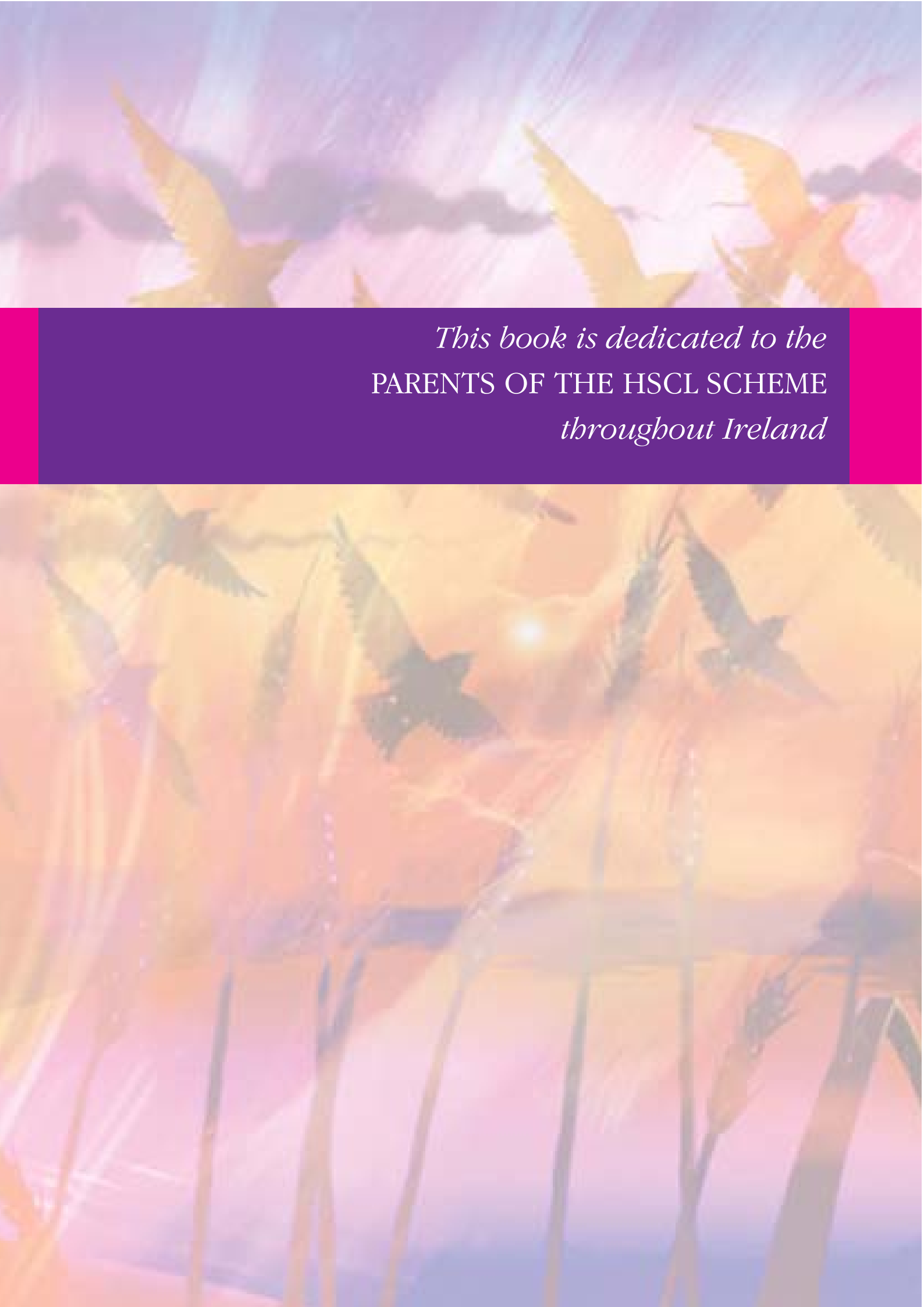
It has long been recognised that prevention is better than the cure. The guiding principles which underpin the HSCL Scheme aim to target the causes of educational underachievement by focusing on the adults whose attitudes and behaviours affect the lives of the children. This not only includes parents and guardians, but also teachers and community personnel.

The coming five years will see the continued implementation of the DEIS Action Plan. The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme will be extended to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the School Support Programme. This period will also see the continued integration of HSCL along with other programmes into the School Support Programme. The Action Plan will provide for coordination and complementarity between the programmes to ensure that the maximum benefits are brought to the families and communities which need them most and that the children of these families and communities will enjoy full equality of opportunity within our education system.

**Mary Hanafin T.D.**

Minister for Education & Science





*This book is dedicated to the*  
PARENTS OF THE HSCL SCHEME  
*throughout Ireland*



# National Coordinator - Disadvantage Initiatives

During the latter part of the twentieth century an enormous amount of money has been poured into education across the developed world. There have been varying results, many of them positive, such as increased literacy levels, employment, living standards and opportunities. The numbers attending post-primary and third level education continue to increase. However, the response is poor in areas marked by a wide range of socio-economic problems. With all the undoubted goodwill among teachers and educational administrators, some pupils seem to slip through the net and fail to realise their potential. As society changes, so do the needs of children. Governments must develop the capacity to match the ongoing changes in society so that the needs of children can be met in a timely and comprehensive way.

A key insight behind a lot of educational thinking is an awareness of the need to broaden the educational basis. The oft-repeated dictum that “parents are the prime educators” has a serious meaning and cannot remain a catch-cry or mere aspirational statement. Education is not something centred in the home or the school, but rather is to be seen as an ellipse in which there are two foci, the home and the school. This ellipse itself remains centred in the community.

It will be the contention of this publication that in Ireland there have been important developments in the three areas of home, school and community and above all in their interrelationships. Despite educational theory emphasising the role of parents, educational practice has lingered behind. It was taken for granted that the axiom “parents as prime educators” related to what went on at home and from the teacher viewpoint there was often an absence of a positive appreciation of the possible role of the parent. From the point of view of parents, especially in marginalised areas, there is a consciousness of the teacher as being better educated and therefore the expert. Again, parents of the marginalised, working and lower middle-class frequently have unhealed memories of their own unhappy school days, which were often associated with their self-image and lack of achievement. When teachers and parents come into a full appreciation of the limits and possibilities of one another’s role, the ensuing mutual understanding and trust could lead to massive growth in Irish education.

From the 1970s onwards people became aware of the gap between educational theory on the role of parents and the actual practice. Two things happened. Firstly, educationalists began to notice there was a gap. Secondly, this gap gave rise to more theories, and, more significantly, to specific action in various places. An example of such action is the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) in Ireland, the subject of this book. In this scheme, which emerged from the Department of Education in 1990, a third component was identified, namely, the community. The home and school dimension are relatively well advanced in areas where the scheme is developed. The community dimension, with all its complexity and the pluriform usage of the word has gained much ground in the past decade. Most will readily admit to the role for the community in education. The Local Committees of the HSCL Scheme are now specifying this role which is being gradually realised.

The role of the HSCL coordinator - teachers who are released from all teaching duties and engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community - will be spelled out in this book. The strength of the coordinator in supporting the whole family rather than a family member in isolation will be emphasised. The role of the coordinator in providing support for teachers and parents within schools, particularly in the areas of literacy and mathematics is



highlighted. Finally, we have viewed the interconnection of school and community and how the community can grow by processes generated from within and by the community. The role of the HSCL coordinator is a vital bridge linking any two of these three interconnections and also linking all three.

### **Acknowledgements**

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the commitment of successive Ministers for Education and Science and many departmental personnel, past and present, to the HSCL Scheme. In addition, I thank my colleagues on the national team of the HSCL Scheme and in the Social Inclusion Unit.

Chairpersons and principals, I affirm your faithfulness to the philosophy of the HSCL Scheme and to its implementation in your schools. The continued success of this scheme entirely depends on you. The national team has always been welcomed in your schools, thank you.

The HSCL Scheme works with many groups and agencies, both voluntary and statutory. We all need each other in order to provide an integrated service to families. We recognise and value our shared talents, our pooled resources and our interdependence.

We have always enjoyed a very positive working relationship with the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra. We thank Peter Archer and his team for providing a summary of HSCL evaluation outcomes.

Parents, our task is to work in partnership with you, as part of a whole-school approach, for the ultimate well-being of your children. We are privileged to go into the future together.

Well done to the pupils at primary and post-primary levels who have been chosen to represent your school as members of your Local Committee. Make the most of this opportunity as you work together for a better life now and in the future.

Finally, to the HSCL coordinators past and present, your dedicated loyalty and steadfastness, often in the midst of complexity, have brought the theory and practice of HSCL to the point which this book illustrates. I am singularly proud of you and of your work in education as you build intricate relationships while never losing sight of the task in hand. This book has been written by all of you, almost 400 HSCL coordinators. You have expressed your thoughts and described your work, you have collated this at local level through your own chosen representatives who in turn became the national editorial committee for this publication. This book is a testament to you and to your determination.

I conclude with the much regarded view of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Holland, as it also expresses the urgency of our work:

“Many things can wait, the child cannot.  
Right now his bones are being formed  
His blood is being made,  
His senses are being developed.  
To him we cannot say Tomorrow.  
His name is Today”.

**Dr. Concepta Conaty**

# The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme: An Overview

*Concepta Conaty*

The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme, (HSCL), was established in the Autumn of 1990. The underlying policy of the scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. In addition, the HSCL Scheme places great emphasis on collaboration with the local community. The HSCL Scheme is the pioneer in involving the school in the life of the community and involving the community and its agencies in the life of the school. The Local Committee of the HSCL Scheme is central to this process of involvement.

The HSCL Scheme has evolved, both theoretically and practically, over the years. Theory has informed practice and practice in turn has informed the theory. With regard to the theory and philosophy of the HSCL Scheme, there are many important stages. The **five aims** were established in the Department of Education and Science during the summer of 1990. In 2003 these aims were renamed **goals**, in line with the development of the department's strategic policy, though the substance was not altered in any way. The second stage soon followed, which involved the development of twelve **basic principles** devised within the department in 1990. These principles controlled the evolution of the scheme from 1990 to 1993, and there was little modification in their formulation until they were finally published for schools in 1993. An examination of the goals and basic principles reveals the philosophy and points to significant stages in the practical development of the HSCL Scheme.

The five goals of the HSCL Scheme focus on

- supporting marginalised pupils
- promoting co-operation between home, school, and community
- empowering parents
- retaining young people in the education system
- disseminating best practice.

[See also chapter 18.]

Educational writing, as well as a shared vision based on educational convictions, practical experience in the field, and research evidence, informed the department's thinking.

## The twelve basic principles governing the operation of the HSCL Scheme

The twelve basic principles were operative from 1990. Most of them are virtually self-explanatory. In the following paragraphs, under each principle a brief explanation is given, and, where appropriate, practical steps for putting these principles into effect are described.

### ***(1) The scheme consists of a partnership and collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers***

Partnership, as a central concept in the HSCL Scheme, is a theme at in-service courses for all principals and coordinators. Partnership, as a way of working, is challenging. It calls for

changes in individual and corporate attitudes, methods of work, and structures, particularly on the part of schools. (For a more thorough explanation of partnership see chapter 2.)

***[2] The scheme is unified and integrated at both the primary and the post-primary level***

It is expected that HSCL coordinators will adopt a team approach in schools and that any one family will be served by only one coordinator. In addition, space for parents is shared between the schools in the same catchment area, as are courses and activities for parents, funding, transfer programmes, and the Local Committee. Primary and post-primary coordinators in the same area should provide a seamless service.

***[3] The thrust of the scheme is preventive rather than curative***

The HSCL Scheme promotes initiatives that are preventive rather than compensatory or curative. The coordinator works with and fortifies the family so that instances of absenteeism and disruption will be minimised. The emphasis on the preventive nature of the HSCL work has been difficult to implement, because the outcome is, by nature, long-term. Within classroom settings, teachers tend to look for short-term benefits and may not be enthusiastic about more long-term remedies. "The emphasis should be on habilitation rather than rehabilitation, on self-determined change rather than on the cure of some supposed disease."<sup>1</sup> The notion of prevention covers such areas as illiteracy, unemployment, drug misuse, jail, and psychological collapse.

***[4] The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviour impinge on the lives of children, namely parents and teachers***

This basic principle is virtually self-explanatory. The work with adults enables HSCL coordinators to identify the needs of both parents and teachers and indeed those of community personnel as well. This principle may perhaps be viewed as the kernel of the HSCL Scheme, bringing together and involving home, community, and school. Theoretical justification may be found in the words of an English educator who holds that, just as children need healthy and strong bodies, so too they need "healthy and strong supporting communities. To that extent we are in the business of community development, just as we are in the business of child development." (For a more thorough treatment of this subject see chapters 5–10.)

***[5] The basis of activities in the scheme is the identification of needs and having those needs met***

**Identification of needs: Process and outcome**

Almost all initiatives, including courses and classes for parents, are organised as a direct result of a needs identification process, which is organised by the coordinators, both formally and informally. HSCL Scheme activities for parents organised by coordinators can be grouped in four broad categories, and there tends to be a pattern in the participation and involvement of parents. Some parents progress through a sequence, while others enter at a particular stage. The progression is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Welling (1985)

1. Leisure activities are a non-threatening starting point for marginalised parents.
2. Curricular activities enable parents to come closer to their children's learning.
3. Personal development courses take place, including parenting, leadership skills development, and involvement in formal learning.
4. Parents support and become a resource for their own child/children, to coordinators, and to the community.

***(6) The scheme develops teacher and staff attitudes in the areas of partnership and the whole-school approach***

The HSCL Scheme demands new ways of thinking and working, together with new attitudes that challenge approaches and values. Significant clarity has been introduced into the area of parent-teacher-community relationships through

- the theory and practice of partnership
- a whole-school approach.

The HSCL Scheme is built on the concept of partnership between home, community, and the school. This partnership is defined as “a working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability”.<sup>2</sup> (The theory and practice of partnership is dealt with more fully in chapter 2.)

Within the HSCL Scheme we hold that a whole-school approach calls for a broad philosophy; thoughtful leadership; quality of achievement; a strong sense of job satisfaction; and supportive and caring management structures. A whole-school approach is characterised by flexibility, the ability to negotiate, the ability to collaborate, a fine balance between task and maintenance issues, and the capacity to improve quality.

In all aspects of school life the principal plays the central role. The promoting, supporting and sustaining of a whole-school approach depends on the principal, while all staff members play a leading role.

***(7) The scheme promotes the fostering of self-help and independence***

Coordinator initiatives are focused on parents and teachers, not on children, but they impinge directly and over time on children's lives. The initiatives are concerned with

- promoting parents' education, development, growth, and involvement
- the participation of parents in their children's education, including homework support
- providing a parents' room and child-care facilities for parents who attend courses in the school
- developing principals' and teachers' attitudes towards partnership and a whole-school approach – parents and teachers are encouraged to collaborate in sharing their complementary skills, experience, and knowledge.

These parents pass on their skills to the children by acting as teachers' aides in the classroom and as support persons in the community. They also help teachers by organising and assisting with activities.

<sup>2</sup> Pugh and De'Ath, 1989:33.

### Parents as a resource for children at home, in classrooms, and in the community

Parents are a resource for their own children in the home, for other children in the classroom, and in the wider community.

- At the primary level, parents work with children in the classroom in such areas as reading and paired reading, the novel, art and craft activities, drama, library organisation, Mathematics for Fun, Science for Fun, computer work, and cookery.
- At the post-primary level, parents work with young people in the classroom on such topics as the novel, Mathematics for Fun and Science for Fun, peer pressure, the prevention of substance misuse, and teenage pregnancy.
- A number of parents provide modules to pupils doing the Leaving Certificate Applied in such areas as interviewing technique and relationships in the work-place.
- In addition to helping their own children with homework, many parents are involved in a community-run rota of "homework clubs," where children who have personal or home difficulties are supported.
- In some situations, teenage mothers come to the school on Saturday morning with their babies, who are cared for in the crèche. This facilitates the mothers in becoming involved in personal development, parenting courses, and Leaving Certificate classes. All these efforts are intended to support the young mother in parenting and to enable her to remain in school.

### Parents as community leaders and as educational home visitors

Some parents with basic training volunteer to participate in advanced training. These parents then become deeply involved in the community. A group of parents and coordinators monitor this process at the local level. Parents have for some time facilitated parenting and personal development courses for other parents. A further and exciting development is the training of parents as educational home visitors. This practice embodies the principle of delegation, of parents in the role of multiplier, and affords more opportunity to reach the most marginalised families. Parents who have been empowered and affirmed now have the capacity to visit other families and to offer support. Each parent as home visitor

- is equipped with a relevant information pack for the primary or the post-primary school
- gives information about school activities, uniform, book rental schemes, policies on homework, punctuality, school transfer, and good behaviour
- listens to the expectations and concerns of parents, particularly in relation to the transfer to post-primary school.

A number of the home visitors are involved in pre-reading or reading and storytelling in the local health centre, again as voluntary work, while young children await their turn to attend the doctor. These parents would have a good understanding of themselves, of others, and of the school and wider community.

The outcome of advanced training includes

- parent-to-parent contact
- a trained pool of parents providing local leadership and more efficient and effective work at the local community level

- more time for creative work on the part of coordinators, because of the process of delegation
- an increased emphasis on the school in the community, on the forging of local links and the development of the partnership process.

### **Parents and teachers working together on policy formation**

To strengthen links between the home and the school, coordinators work with teachers in

- developing a deeper awareness of pupils' and families' circumstances
- promoting the concept of parental involvement in children's learning
- providing opportunities for parent-teacher interaction.

Some teachers continue to explore new ways of working with parents through identifying both their expectations and their concerns for the children. They also involve them in class behaviour and homework codes. An emerging emphasis, since 1996, and one that took almost three years to develop in the HSCL Scheme is that of parents and teachers working together in policy formation. As a result, many of the policies in schools have been developed through parents and teachers working together. In some instances pupils and community personnel have been included in the process. (For a more thorough explanation of this topic see chapter 9.)

### ***(8) Home visitation is a crucial element in establishing bonds of trust with families***

#### **Home visitation by the HSCL coordinator**

The role of the coordinator also includes a systematic approach to home visitation. Home visitation is a purposeful outreach aspect of the HSCL Scheme for parents. It is both a symbolic and a real expression of interest in families, many of which have been alienated from the education system in the past. During the visits, the coordinators

- support parents in the education of their children
- seek to establish a rapport with the parents
- offer information about the services available in the community
- encourage the parents to become involved with the community, to work with community needs and to harness community energy, thereby enabling the community to solve its own problems
- endeavour to show the welcoming, hopeful and human face of the school in the context and circumstances of daily life
- seek out potential parent leaders, who are willing to participate in the HSCL Scheme's activities and to share their talents
- direct the parents towards relevant training
- aim at helping the parents to express their fears about approaching the school
- seek to break down negative attitudes among parents towards schools and schooling.

Coordinators are expected to be sensitive to the needs of the person. They aim to be non-threatening and friendly. "Encouragement" is the keyword in home visitation. There is a deep awareness that one is there for the good of the family; and coordinators offer support and gently

encourage parents into the school. It is vital that HSCL coordinators maintain a positive profile in the home and community in order

- to gain access to homes
- to be respectful of the fact that they have been welcomed into a child's home.

(For a more thorough treatment of home visitation see chapter 3.)

***(9) Networking with and promoting the co-ordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies increases effectiveness, eliminates duplication, and leads to an integrated delivery of service to marginalised children and their families***

**Networking**

HSCL coordinators liaise with various voluntary and statutory bodies and groups within the community to encourage a cohesive provision of service, in the interest of the pupils. Just as the school is a significant resource for the community it serves, there are also many advantages for the school in drawing from the strengths of the community. The HSCL Scheme's philosophy recognises that the school on its own cannot effect meaningful change but that it can, working collaboratively with other interest groups, minimise the effects of problems associated with educational disadvantage. The links are obvious in relation to the prevention of early school leaving. From its inception the scheme has emphasised the responsibility of coordinators in the area of networking and in directing parents towards existing agents and agencies working in the community. It can be said that an understanding of networking, in theory and in fact, is a first step towards the integrated provision of service to marginalised children and their families.

**The integrated delivery of service to marginalised children and families**

Pupils are not only members of families and schools, they are also part of community groups, churches, teams, clubs, and gangs. An integrated approach means recognising all the influences at work, aiming to bring coherence to the multiple messages young people receive. Acceptance of the value of the community aspect of the HSCL Scheme has been growing from the mid 1990s. This growth has been accelerated over the past twelve years with the development of Local Committees and the general emphasis on the community in the contemporary literature.

**How integration takes place**

- National coordinators meet and work closely together so that they, and their teams, can deliver the same message at the school and community level; they also support each other's work when visiting schools.
- Within Early Start and the Support Teacher Project, the relevant teachers work with the children while the HSCL coordinator works with the parents.
- A further example is the way HSCL coordinators worked with ESLI and SSRI and are now working with the School Completion Programme, where supportive links have already been forged.

HSCL coordinators and Giving Children an Even Break-rural, (GCER-r), coordinators work closely together on Local Committees in rural areas. (For a more thorough treatment of networking see chapter 11.)



***(10) Home, School, Community Liaison is a full-time undertaking***

The Department of Education and Science has made it clear, from the initiation of the HSCL Scheme, that coordinators could not be employed on the day-to-day duties of class and subject teachers. This is to ensure that clear boundaries with regard to areas of responsibility are maintained and that HSCL coordinators remain focused on the adults in children's' lives as well as on fostering community links.

***(11) The liaison coordinator is an agent of change***

It is recognised that in the partnership model, everyone has a contribution to make. However, the person freed to be a full-time agent of change is the coordinator. To the degree that coordinators have rapport with staff members, receive appropriate in-career development, are able to transfer learning, have a desire to grow in the understanding of the parents they serve, and seek to provide an integrated service at the school and the community level, they can indeed be agents of change within their area of responsibility.

***(12) Community "ownership" of the scheme is promoted through the development of the Local Committee***

**The Local Committee**

The HSCL coordinators are responsible for the setting up and maintenance of the Local Committee. The purpose of the Local Committee is to identify school-related issues at the community level that impinge on learning and to address these issues by working collaboratively with other interest groups. Examples of such topics are

- school attendance
- substance misuse
- anti-bullying
- transfer programmes
- homework support
- self-image courses
- health and environmental issues.

Issues identified at the Local Committee level often become

- part of the policy-making process between parents, teachers, pupils, and community personnel
- part of the material brought to the homes and explained through parents as home visitors.

In short, the Local Committee deals with issues in the community that impinge on learning, in its widest sense. In many instances the same committee serves the needs of HSCL and the management of the School Completion Programme. The obvious integration that takes place with the different education programmes will be dealt with later.

The Local Committee is centred on the post-primary school(s) and the relevant feeder primary school(s). The membership is divided equally between school personnel and representatives of voluntary and statutory bodies on the one hand and marginalised but developed parents on the

other. Some of the Local Committees have included primary and post-primary pupils. The publications of the National Children's Strategy have proved invaluable as a resource and support in this area.

The strength of the Local Committee is partnership in action. In the interval between meetings of the Local Committee the coordinator regularly meets the "core group" of parents to facilitate the development of committee skills and to enable parents to express their point of view. In fact all coordinators have a core group of involved parents who work with them and support the aims of HSCL. Many members of Local Committees have undertaken training together on the development of teams, committee work, partnership, and community development. The present climate of openness, together with the flow of literature, which accepts the mutually interacting roles of community and school, has opened up possibilities for the further development of Local Committees. In addition, different geographical areas and different groups of people dictate that there cannot be a uniform solution when it comes to the linking of community and school.

The underpinning philosophy of the HSCL Scheme has been dealt with in as much depth as is possible within the scope of this publication. The brief of the HSCL coordinator is expanded on throughout this document by the HSCL coordinators themselves. The Department of Education and Science always emphasises flexibility within the twelve basic principles regarding the role of the coordinator, in order to provide scope for creativity and initiative. Emphasis is placed on the dual role of developing the human and caring aspect of the role, which are the maintenance issues, and providing statistical outcomes, which are task related.



# Partnership: The Challenge for the HSCL Scheme

*Concepta Conaty*

Partnership is an emerging concept in the contemporary world; consequently neither the language nor the idea itself is fixed. In particular, the notion of equality varies from author to author. Thus we can speak of the need for equality of opportunity for pupils.<sup>3</sup> There is also, of course, inequality that may arise from social and psychological opportunities, leading to unequal achievement.<sup>4</sup> It may not always be helpful to speak of equality among the different contributions of individuals and groups. Equality does not imply that people come from a position of equal resource or power, rather “it implies that a relationship has been formed on a basis that recognises that each has an equally important contribution to make to the whole, contributions which will vary in nature, are compatible and each of which is unique.”<sup>5</sup>

The HSCL Scheme has been built on the theory and practice of partnership since its initiation in 1990. The emphasis in the HSCL Scheme is on developing the potential of parents, teachers and the community through the process of partnership, in order to provide a seamless service to children. Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead see parents as “our first authority figures . . . Parents encourage their children’s first steps and support their later leaps. They learn to correct without stunting . . . inviting the child into adulthood.”<sup>6</sup> Partnership does not do away with hierarchy, because “people at higher levels do have specialised responsibility, but it is not so much for control as it is for clarity . . . of requirements . . . of value-added ways of attending to a specific market.”<sup>7</sup>

Partnership is brought about by the consistent commitment to the demanding and painful work of human relations. Partnership invites people to share power and mutual vulnerability. It implies that there is an ability to listen; clarity in thinking; self-understanding; a high level of motivation; and commitment to conflict resolution. Partnership also calls for the capacity to acknowledge feelings and to be compassionate.<sup>8</sup> According to Block, partnership means “to be connected to another in a way that the power between us is roughly balanced.”<sup>9</sup> He also uses the notion of “stewardship,” which is the “willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organisation by operating in service, rather than in control.”<sup>10</sup>

Partnership incorporates the concept of vision. Vision can be compared to the guiding principle of a scheme for the school community, the wider community, or the organisation. The concepts of power, authority, patriarchy and gender are all aspects of partnership. Among other salient characteristics of partnership are a shared sense of purpose; goal definition; communication; structures that are human and caring; task orientation; solidarity; joint accountability; empowerment; and transformation.<sup>11</sup> These qualities, working in sequence or in tandem, can initiate change and growth, leading to an empowerment of groups and communities. This in turn facilitates transformation, which is the central tenet of partnership.

It can be said that people want to make a difference. Often society is unable to take advantage of the human creativity and initiative that is available. Empowerment is a process of enabling people to acquire “skills, knowledge and confidence” to make “responsible choices and to carry them out in an interdependent fashion.”<sup>12</sup> Block holds that the empowered person is the one who serves, the one who chooses service over self-interest, and that the recipients of our service are the ones to whom we become accountable. We can say that real power, empowerment, is service.<sup>13</sup>

The empowerment of the local community is a strong theme running through much of the literature today and through all the Bernard van Leer literature. Its development is a reaction against authoritarian attitudes, or handouts, which can ease the distress of people but without

<sup>3</sup> Drudy and Lynch, 1993:31–35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–157.

<sup>5</sup> Healy, 1992:13.

<sup>6</sup> Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead, 1991:27.

<sup>7</sup> Block 1993:28.

<sup>8</sup> Ferder and Heagle, 1989:166.

<sup>9</sup> Block.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Conaty.

<sup>12</sup> Paz, 1990:17.

<sup>13</sup> Block, 1993:41–51.

changing the causes of deprivation or helping people to come to full dignity or humanity.<sup>14</sup> The main thrust of the Bernard van Leer Foundation is its emphasis on the child. This enables its education theorists to make important contributions to the interrelation of the teacher and the parent. In the study *The Parent as Prime Educator*, for example, we note that the role of the professional is not to teach the parents but “to widen their common meeting ground” and in particular to develop a teaching-learning situation so as “to enable the validation of parents’ knowledge and self-confidence.”<sup>15</sup> Paz refers to these parents as para-professionals. She holds that their involvement transforms them from being passive and dependent to becoming active community members.<sup>16</sup> Salach expresses the same view about the empowerment of parents and the consequences for children: “due to their ability to create direct ties with parents and children in the community, they personified the process of replacing apathy and dependency with a responsible and active approach.”<sup>17</sup>

Empowerment is an outcome of the partnership process and releases “a new awareness of self, has a new sense of dignity and is stirred by a new hope.”<sup>18</sup> Freire’s theory of working “with” and not “for” finds further expression in a transformation of life that can be realised when “those hands, whether of individuals or of entire peoples, need to be extended less and less in supplication . . . they become hands which work and, by working transform the world.”<sup>19</sup> A former Director of Education in the Strathclyde area of Scotland put it succinctly at a conference in Dublin in 1992 when he claimed that “partnership can be defined as identifying, releasing and sharing our own gifts and the gifts of others, not only gifts of personality but gifts of experience as well.”<sup>20</sup>

Whether partnership is a desired and feasible end or an attainable aspiration or whether it turns out to be unrealistic, a responsibility still lies on all educators “to become more responsive to the needs, wishes and experience of parents and children . . . the development of an honest partnership that recognises important differences as well as shared concerns.”<sup>21</sup>

As we have noted, the call of partnership is for personal transformation that will, hopefully, lead to the recognition of the strengths and the concerns of individuals and to genuine interdependence. Structural transformation will be demanded in order to bring roles and plans into greater congruence with values. This will demand “a choice for service, with partnership and empowerment as basic governance strategies.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Hague has worldwide experience in early childhood and community development within marginalised areas.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1986:14–15.

<sup>16</sup> Paz, 1990:2.

<sup>17</sup> Salach, 1993:23.

<sup>18</sup> Freire, 1972:12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>20</sup> Pignatelli, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Bastiani, 1988: xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Block, 1993:49.



# Home Visitation: The Heart of the HSCL Scheme



Home visitation is at the heart of the HSCL Scheme's focus on partnership. In conjunction with many other aspects of the HSCL Scheme, it promotes co-operation between the school and the home. The ultimate purpose is to maximise the child's involvement and their retention in the education system. The school's part in the education process is not an isolated one, and home visits affirm the parents' role as the primary educators. In reaching out to families the HSCL coordinator represents the human face of the school and embodies a real expression of interest in the lives of the children entrusted to schools. Home visits occupy 32 per cent of the coordinator's time.<sup>23</sup>

### Purpose

There are many reasons and circumstances that prevent parents from engaging with the school. Many parents have been alienated from an education system that in the past did not always serve their needs. They may lack the confidence to talk to teachers about their child's progress and believe they do not possess adequate skills to support their child's learning. Education may not be high on the list of priorities, because of the many pressures experienced by families today. Visitation opens doors and enables the school to make contact with the home. When HSCL coordinators work with parents they often find that the parents' expectations are raised for their children. Parents become aware of their importance in the education process. The coordinator as an agent of change

- instils confidence
- provides support and reassurance
- breaks down negative attitudes and fears
- encourages active parenting
- helps parents to develop their own skills and potential through involvement in school-related activities.

The home visit is crucial to developing empathy with families in their efforts to engage with the education system. It essentially builds a bridge between the home and the school. Information about the school and other services in the community is offered, and in turn parents' views and opinions are invaluable to the school. The visit is a two-way journey where bonds of trust are built in a spirit of mutual respect and support. The partnership of parent and school is crucial and enriches the child's engagement with learning. This partnership is, as Pugh defines it, "a working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate."<sup>24</sup>

### Preparation

A central element in the preparation for family visits is the identification and selection of families for whom the HSCL Scheme might provide extra support and encouragement. The gathering of pre-visit information creates a good starting point. Discussion with the principal, year head, class teachers or community organisations prepares the coordinator for the visit. The consultation with staff members, together with school records, gives an insight into the child's progress, punctuality, attendance and well-being in school. The coordinator may gather literacy or numeracy materials, information regarding courses, or the services of community agencies, all of which may be of value to the family in supporting the best interests of the child. Home visits establish vital home, school, community relationships.

Children in the same family may attend different schools within the community and outside the community. In such instances close communication between the family cluster of HSCL

<sup>23</sup> Archer and Shortt, 2003:68.

<sup>24</sup> Pugh and De'Ath, 1989:33.



Chatting on a home visit.

coordinators ensures that home visits are planned in a manner that avoids any duplication. Home visits are conducted in a purposeful and systematic manner and at a time of day that will suit the parents or guardians.

Openness and sensitivity to the family situation are essential to successful home visits. These are the key to establishing a sense of ease and trust. During the visit, formal school business is conducted in an informal way. The parents of Early Start children and junior infants, and also new pupils and the parents of children transferring to senior primary or post-primary school, are visited at particular

times of the year. A teacher or parent may also request a visit as a consequence of a particular school issue or crisis. The coordinator works closely with the school care team and the SCP coordinator and liaises with the family on related matters. Family contact with the EWO or JLO may precipitate a visit in support of the family's needs at that particular time. The coordinator builds an important profile of the family, so that repeat visits and follow-up actions strengthen the relationship between the home and the school.

### Process

Parents welcome a home visit. As described by one coordinator's comment, "*we meet them on their balconies, at their doorsteps, or in their kitchens.*" When we visit parents we must always be sensitive to their situation and needs and stay as long as is necessary. The HSCL coordinator visits the home with a purpose but without an agenda.

HSCL coordinators sometimes hear the very personal and unique experiences of their families. These experiences may include such life events as celebrations or those involving loss and separation. Life events for parents at times include children who are temporarily in care, prison sentences for members of the family, or unemployment. Sometimes domestic violence, depression or children with exceptional needs are concerns for parents.

HSCL coordinators do not listen in order to fix, to criticise or to analyse any issues that a family may disclose. Instead they consciously listen in order to appreciate the reality of the life experience of the family. At times, coordinators sense feelings of fear, anger or sadness behind their life circumstances. Parents value a visit from the HSCL coordinator. One parent commented: "It's great to have someone to listen to me. I'm glad you called." Meeting parents in the home and on their own terms is a significant improvement in providing the education service today.

The HSCL coordinator extends the friendly face of the school. The gap between the parent and the teacher is reduced, and an atmosphere conducive to partnership can be cultivated. It is important for the coordinator to be relaxed, approachable, and friendly and positive in their approach. They support both the parent and the school.

The coordinator is in a position to bring “good news” to the home regarding a child’s success. This in itself is a positive experience and opens many doors. The use of conversational, everyday language and the establishment of common educational goals is a springboard to further achievement. It is important during a home visit

- to value and validate the parents’ role
- to identify their strengths
- to build confidence
- to celebrate their successes
- to encourage and to empower them.

Where issues or problems may arise and families become locked into blame and criticism, the HSCL coordinator is uniquely placed to offer a way forward. They can encourage the family to take responsibility in a creative way for addressing the issue.

At the primary school level, packs are brought to the parents of Early Start children or infants entering school for the first time. These may contain an age-appropriate book, colouring materials, or a simple craft activity. The parents are encouraged to engage in the activity or to read and interact with their child so that an enjoyable and educational experience, with an emphasis on play, communication, the use of language and the development of the parent-child learning relationship is developed.

Through home visits parents can make a direct contribution to work being done in the child’s class at school. This is facilitated in a number of ways:

- Coordinators emphasise the benefit parental interest brings. They remind parents to look at school journals, to sign homework, or simply to ask about the child’s day in school.
- As part of the primary to post-primary transfer programme some HSCL coordinators bring a literacy pack to all first-year families. The coordinator usually develops this in collaboration with the special education needs teacher. Its aim is to improve the child’s reading level and general literacy skills. Examples of activities enclosed in packs include a list of the three hundred most commonly used words and literacy lifters, such as cloze passages, that are graded to suit the child’s reading age. Coordinators encourage and support parents to work through these with the child at home.
- In the JCSP literacy initiatives the role of the parent is to monitor the child’s progress. The visit of the coordinator demonstrates an appreciation of the parents’ contribution to the child’s education. It motivates and helps sustain that commitment and the link back to the child’s class work.

A home visit is a perfect platform for encouraging one-to-one parental involvement. The coordinator can take time to explain numeracy and literacy initiatives, such as Mathematics for Fun, shared and paired reading, and the role parents can play in providing these in the classroom. Parents have the opportunity to ask questions and express fears before committing themselves to the involvement. Where parents, despite encouragement and support, are unable to take that step and to come to meetings or events in school the coordinator can bring the child’s work to the home and allow the parents to share in and celebrate the child’s achievement.

Coordinators are made to feel welcome in the homes they visit and offer support and reassurance to complement and enhance the parents' efforts. The recipe for a successful home visit contains a number of ingredients: empathy, respect, a positive and non-judgemental attitude, confidentiality, and responsiveness.

### **Outcome**

For the majority of HSCL coordinators, home visits are perceived as the most central and rewarding element of their work. They bring new perspectives and may transform the ways of connecting and working with all involved. Home visits raise parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's future and, in many instances, their own. Some of the direct outcomes include improved attendance, increased contact with the school, and co-operation with teachers or community agencies. Parents become aware that schools and teachers are more accessible. In itself this is a significant positive experience. Ensuring that their child has appropriate books and equipment and signing the school journal or homework are important expressions of the parents' interest in the child's education and demonstrate that they value and support the work of the school.

Home visits can also be a vehicle for imparting important parenting skills and in this regard can be viewed as preventive in nature. In addition, parents may attend courses run by the HSCL Scheme, join the Local Committee; train as home visitors themselves, contribute to policy formation, or develop their own skills and return to education or work. Sometimes they become involved in such school activities as breakfast and homework clubs, Mathematics for Fun, and paired reading. Parents sit side by side with their own child in the classroom and become actively involved in family learning programmes.

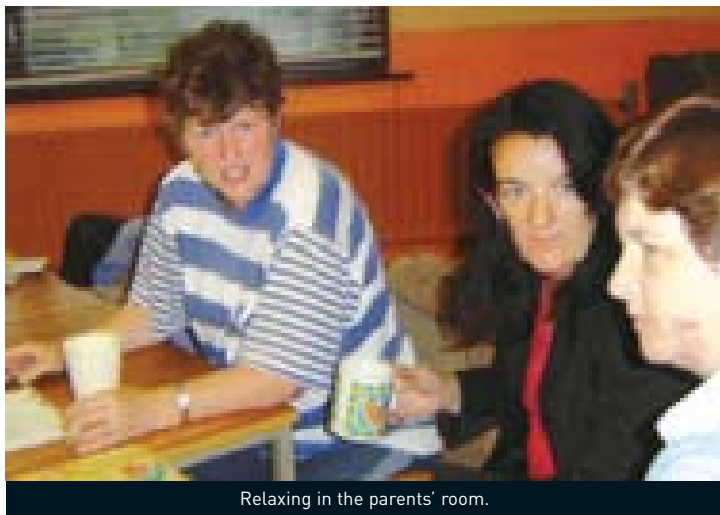
As a result of parents' involvement at home through various literacy initiatives, teachers have reported improved performance by pupils in class, improved reading ability, better attendance, higher aspirations, and a happier pupil in school. Parents may buy a novel for their child and explore other material for themselves as well as pursuing basic literacy. Receiving certificates and recognition instils a sense of pride and is a motivator to further involvement.

Home visits are an enriching experience for all involved. The school community gains by having parents as active partners in the education of their children. As HSCL coordinators, we are privileged to be invited to share the heart of family life.



# The Parents' Room: The Welcoming School

The parents' room is an integral part of the life of the school and a great asset to the HSCL Scheme. Situated in the heart of the school, it provides an easy, warm and welcoming forum for parents in realising their role as the primary educators of their children.



Relaxing in the parents' room.

Parents are first introduced to the parents' room when enrolling their children for Early Start, primary or post-primary school. Regular welcoming mornings and coffee mornings enable parents to become familiar with this facility and its functions. In this room the parents meet the HSCL coordinator and other members of the school community, who can provide a valuable source of friendship, support, encouragement, and reassurance. For many parents

this is the beginning of a long supportive journey in their child's life in the school. Subsequent daily or weekly visits provide a source of information and security for new parents. Experienced parents delight in sharing advice and affirmation. This experience of belonging is valuable for parents who feel daunted by the prospect of being separated from their child or are concerned about their child's ability to cope with change.

As the school year progresses, a more formal course is offered to parents, based on their requirements and wishes. These courses are many and varied and may include flower arranging, cookery, drama, art and crafts, literacy and numeracy work, self-development, computers, life skills, parenting, and sport. As parents develop they are then facilitated with more formal and certified courses as they seek them. Many parents have progressed to third-level education as a result of participating in courses initiated by the HSCL Scheme and have obtained FETAC awards. The work of the parents' room transfers later into the home, where positive messages from the parent, increased confidence and help with homework enable the child to progress.

Teamwork is at the core of the operation of a successful parents' room. Skills and talents are shared in a variety of ways as parents are empowered with a heightened awareness of the needs and requirements of other parents. This fostering of skills is reflected in the actions of parents as they become leaders in a wide variety of activities and courses, both in the parents' room and in the classroom. This sense of ownership among parents is extended beyond the parents' room, enabling them to be more participative in the wider community. It is acknowledged that the majority of summer camps and after-school activities for children began as a result of group discussions in the parents' room.

In some areas there is the provision of a child-minding service, operated by parents who have completed courses and like to give a little back to the school in return. This adult interaction with very small children enhances the child's social skills and lays the foundation for their entry into Early Start or junior infants. In many instances the parents' room facilitates child-minding for parents who are attending classes themselves or attending parent-teacher meetings. This support is welcomed by all parents, as it allows them to concentrate fully and to relate with the

teacher in a calm frame of mind, without pressure, knowing the children are safe and well occupied.

The high visibility of parents and their involvement in the parents' room and in the classroom are also reassuring and encouraging for members of the school staff, as it is a sign of good relations between the home and the school. The parents' room is a centre of welcome, where parents enjoy the hospitality of other parents in a warm and cheerful atmosphere. Parents see the parents' room as an oasis of peace away from the grind of their daily chores. Meeting and chatting with their friends has a positive supportive effect on parents as they grapple with their fears and anxieties about their child's education and social development. We cannot emphasise enough the need for parents to meet and encourage one another in a room where they feel a sense of belonging.



Hands-on in the parents' room.

Parents' rooms are multi-purpose areas. They provide a venue for courses, for meetings, for support programmes, and for relaxation. The involvement of parents in the planning, decorating and furnishing of their room gives them a sense of ownership and allows them to indulge their artistic and creative skills. Such creative activities often result in parents helping one another decorate their homes. This encouragement of volunteering is of the essence of the HSCL Scheme and is fostered in all parents' room activities. Some parents initiate a breakfast club for themselves after a hectic morning of getting children out to school, so as to re-energise themselves before returning home or attending a course of their choice.

The equipment in the parents' room may include literature on the various aspects of education, comfortable surroundings to help give a sense of home, leisure reading for adults, leaflets, brochures, television, video, computer, printer, and notice-board, as well as toys and books for children. Photographs of various classes are always found to be interesting, and parents spend many enjoyable moments pointing out their own children.

As parents grow in confidence they lead, train and support other parents in best practice in such areas as reading, mathematics, learning in the home, and healthy lunches. Open discussion provides topics for consideration at the Local Committee level and also gives the HSCL coordinator practical suggestions for current programmes. This often culminates in the parents' room being a busy and well-used room from early morning until the end of the school day.



### **The perception of parents**

- *“The parents’ room means that I can interact with other parents, and this prevents me from going mad. It also gives me a second chance at education and picking up where I left off.”*
- *“It is a great outlet, certainly helping me to keep my sanity. I feel more connected to other parents, my children and their friends and also their friends’ parents. I have gained confidence and am learning new skills in dealing with parenting issues and education.”*
- *“I used to dash up the road with the kids, and without raising my head I’d rush home again. This was my way of coping, until one day I was brought to see the breakfast room, and from there I was invited for a cup of tea in the parents’ room. Now I am very involved in doing courses and enjoy calling up to the school, where I meet people rearing children like myself.”*
- *“I tell my children about the changes that have taken place and how my parents never darkened the door of the school. I’m glad that schools have changed and are now places within the community where children are happy. It’s a very positive way of showing that teachers are there to work with us parents for the good of the children.”*
- *“Since I am a househusband I love coming to the school and getting involved. I only wish more fathers could see the benefit of having a place for parents in the school. It was a whole new world to me at first, and my children are also excited that Daddy comes to school two mornings a week.”*

# Courses and Classes for Parents: Keeping Parents Close to Children's Learning

HSCL coordinators organise a wide variety of classes and courses for parents throughout the school year. These courses, in the main, take place in a parents' room provided in the school. Other school accommodation may be used with co-operation from staff members. In certain circumstances coordinators use community halls and resource centres. The nature of some courses may also require a venue outside the school. Parents' participation in these classes sometimes depends on the provision of adequate child-care facilities. HSCL coordinators often network with local partnerships or community crèches to facilitate parents in this respect.



A proud Traveller parent being presented with her FETAC award by Minister M. Martin.

Some coordinators are in a position to provide child care in the school. Where this occurs it is essential that all relevant child-care regulations and guidelines are observed. Where there is adequate provision of child care more parents have the opportunity to become involved. While courses generally take place during the school day, some happen outside school hours, for a variety of reasons. There may not be a parents' room in the school; parents may be working outside the home during the day; or there may be a lack of child-care facilities. Occasionally coordinators need to provide accessible centres of learning for isolated parents or those living in rural areas.

### Purpose

Classes and courses are organised initially to bring parents into the school environment. Coordinators carefully ensure that this is done in a non-threatening manner and that the whole experience is a safe, enjoyable and positive one. This may help to dispel the bad memories and negative feelings that many of the present generation of parents have as a consequence of their experience of the education system and of schools in the past. The classes and courses are an important tool in making the school a place where parents feel comfortable and welcome and are a valuable and valued resource in the school community. The provision of courses is critical if parents are to become full and equal partners in the whole education process.

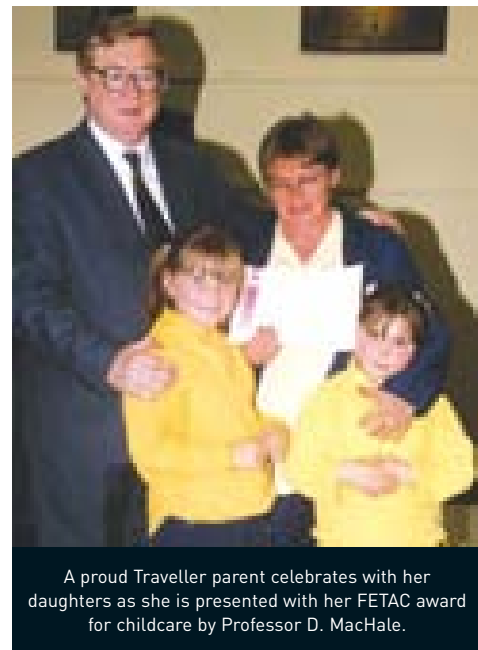
An important benefit is the parent-to-parent interaction, which provides great opportunities for building relationships, problem-sharing, problem-solving, informal parenting and parent-to-parent support in the education context. The personal enhancement that flows from this cannot be underestimated. Many of these courses also help to demystify school and the education system for the participants. Before organising courses or classes each coordinator goes through an informal needs assessment with the parents involved; the courses and classes are a response to these identified needs. While providing a great opportunity for personal development they also raise awareness in parents of their own capacity to enhance their children's learning and educational experience. This is important if the parent is truly to become the primary educator. Having developed the skills and confidence, many parents are empowered to take a more active role in the school community. This manifests itself in their participation on the Local Committee, in school policy formation, and in literacy and numeracy initiatives, both within and outside the classroom setting.

## Preparation

Home visitation provides the opportunity for coordinators to get to know parents, build trust, and cultivate a friendly rapport. This shows parents that the school genuinely cares about them and their children and also values their involvement in building partnership and a communal approach to education and learning. Through home visitation, which is an integral and fundamental part of the role of the HSCL coordinator, the needs and interests of parents become apparent. This identification of needs is deliberate in order to give parents a sense of ownership of the classes and courses provided.

Having identified these needs, the coordinator proceeds to organise a particular course. Practical considerations include such issues as time, venue, availability of a tutor, funding, resources required, child-care facilities, and suitability for the parents.

Many courses are funded by the HSCL grant provided by the Department of Education and Science. Where extra funding is required it is often obtained from the VEC Community Education Programme, adult learning centres, local partnerships, and Government departments and agencies. Coordinators gain access to this funding by providing detailed plans and proposals to the relevant body or agency. Ordinary essential tasks, such as setting up the venue, organising refreshments, purchasing resources, and contacting parents by phone or letter, are all carried out by the HSCL coordinator. A core group of parents often develops from these classes and courses, and this core group becomes a vital support and resource for the coordinator. The enthusiasm, sense of teamwork and dedication are a great source of encouragement to the coordinator and provide inspiration for other parents.



A proud Traveller parent celebrates with her daughters as she is presented with her FETAC award for childcare by Professor D. MacHale.

## Process

As described above, coordinators begin with non-threatening introductory courses based on parents' interests. A wide range of courses is run throughout the country. The most popular have proved to be cookery, flower arranging, computers, pottery, macramé, découpage, art and crafts, and keep-fit classes. The hands-on nature of these courses provides an opportunity for social interaction, in addition to building a sense of belonging and enhancing parents' self-esteem through personal achievement. As they leave the school with their flower arrangement, their découpage picture, the Christmas cake they baked or other creation, the parents' sense of pride and achievement is tangible.

A group of parents who have successfully participated in this initial stage may now be ready to engage in more formal courses or classes. These tend towards two distinct strands of parental development on the personal and educational levels.

Personal development is enhanced through such courses as first aid, parenting, and healthy eating and nutrition. Parents' skills and competence are further developed, which improves their own quality of life and that of their family. Courses in such areas as family learning, literacy, numeracy and information technology are specifically designed to enable parents to develop skills and strategies that allow them to be comfortable and confident in being close to their child's learning. They can now begin to provide practical day-to-day support. These parents are now better equipped and often progress to take part in such classroom activities as Mathematics for Fun, Science for Fun, shared reading, and paired writing. Sometimes these class-based activities are the starting point for parents in attending other courses. This brings the partnership model to fruition, with parents and teachers working together to enhance the learning experience of the children. Parents who have enjoyed the learning experience within the school environment are encouraged to go on to obtain access to similar opportunities available elsewhere within their own communities. This can often be the first step on the ladder of lifelong learning and creates a positive feeling about learning within the whole family.

One of the successful outcomes of the scheme is apparent when parents, through their involvement, now feel ready and wish to return to formal education. Some coordinators are in a position to facilitate this desire by organising suitable courses in conjunction with FETAC, BTEI, VTOS, VECs, or other appropriate bodies. Other coordinators may refer parents to the relevant agencies already involved in this work in their community. Parents who have taken this courageous step continue to receive support and encouragement from the coordinator. It is possible that some of these parents will gain access to further education courses. On occasions parents and their children may find themselves studying for the same examination and receiving the same qualification. This creates a powerful dynamic and bond between parent and child.

### Outcome

Classes and courses for parents are an integral component of the HSCL Scheme and often result in the empowerment of the school community. The positive force generated by the transformation of parents cannot be underestimated. A confident and skilled parent who is comfortable in the setting of the school is an invaluable resource in the home, school, community partnership. This helps to promote the culture of teamwork between parents and teachers in the school.

Through involvement in this aspect of the HSCL Scheme parents gain a greater understanding and appreciation of education and learning. Having themselves achieved in an educational setting, they now believe that it is possible for their own children to do likewise. They are now more likely to communicate with teachers about their hopes and the specific needs of their children. The fostering of parental interaction and parent-to-parent support helps to build community and eradicate isolation and marginalisation. Many classes generate great conversation, fun, and laughter. Furthermore, involved parents make an enormous contribution to the school through their presence on the Local Committee and involvement in policy formation. Participation by parents may also have a positive effect on school attendance.

The work of HSCL is about sowing seeds. While the seeds themselves continue to bear fruit, the real harvest will be reaped in the next generation of parents.

## Working on courses and classes in rural areas

Giving Children an Even Break-rural, (GCEB-r), is served by coordinators working in rural areas. Their role is very similar to that of the HSCL coordinator, except that the rural coordinators also have a teaching element. The GCEB-r programme is concerned with primary schools. Part of the role of the GCEB-r coordinator is to work with parents, and co-operation between these schemes ensures that services are not duplicated. It provides a solid basis for successful networking.

### Purpose

HSCL and GCEB-r can serve the same community. It is important to meet

- to review the needs of the community
- to avoid duplication of courses and classes
- to develop parents in and through their introduction to new areas and to new courses

### Process

A meeting needs to be held at the beginning of the school year, at least a month before courses begin. Arranging a meeting with GCEB-r coordinators can be difficult, as some coordinators work in up to five rural schools. The telephone is usually the first contact, where possible courses can be discussed. This is an important preliminary to any meeting, as we can independently research any courses being run and tutors who are available locally. Parents can be surveyed on their needs through a circular to each home. However, many of their needs will have been established through regular contact with them. Decisions about prospective courses are concluded, and applications are then made to the VEC or other relevant body, such as the local health board.

It is essential to look at short-term or immediate needs and to plan ahead for the long term. This involves determining what we intend to do for the three terms of the school year, as well as looking

ahead to the following year. Some courses may be appropriate only every second year. Looking at what other courses are available locally will help determine which courses should be run and where they should be organised. Establishing and maintaining a list or data-base of tutors who are available locally is essential to the process. Methods of promoting courses need to be determined. This can involve notes in the local newspaper or a parish newsletter, circularising parents at each school, or the production of a brochure. If a brochure is compiled it is useful to include other courses run locally. It is important to direct our target group to literacy courses, courses run under the VEC community budget, and any others courses that deal with disadvantage.



Parent and child.

## **Evaluation**

A review of the success or otherwise of courses is carried out at the end of each term and of each year. Before the review meeting it is crucial to get feedback from parents. This is best received verbally and informally, rather than by form-filling, where literacy levels could present a difficulty. The coordinator's own experiences of each course are also considered. Among the topics discussed during evaluation are what worked and what did not work, which tutors were successful, what should go ahead in the future, and what further courses are required.

# Literacy Initiatives: Home, School and Community Working Together



The HSCL Scheme aims to enable parents to become active participants in their children's learning and to stimulate learning in the home. The scheme acknowledges parents as partners and encourages them to take an active part in improving the literacy of their children. It also helps to inform parents about curricular content and about their schools' educational aspirations for their children. This is achieved through the implementation of a range of literacy initiatives by HSCL coordinators.

The scheme is unified and integrated at both the primary and the post-primary levels. Initiatives to improve literacy adopt this integrated approach, producing a range of activities suitable for all levels, from pre-school to the end of post-primary schooling.

In the recognition that early language skills are the foundation for later literacy achievement, parents of pre-school children are supplied with starting school packs, which include crayons, colouring sheets, nursery rhymes, and similar materials. Parents are invited to a meeting before their children start school, at which they explore the purpose and use of the packs as a tool in preparing their children for school. The emphasis for parents is on talking, listening, enjoying nursery rhymes, colouring and playing word games with their children. They are encouraged to actively engage in storytelling, and the class teacher models storytelling techniques for them. This practice may be continued in the infant years with home packs containing similar materials, with the inclusion of an age-appropriate storybook. Some parents actively participate in the preparation and monitoring of these packs, under the guidance of the HSCL coordinator.



A trip to the library with parents.

The family reading session is closely related to this practice. Parents, or another significant adult in the pupil's life, are invited to the classroom for story time. They listen to the story with their children and observe how the teacher's questions enhance the storytelling experience. After story time, adults and pupils engage in an art activity that can be used to recall the story at home. The adults are brought closer to the children's learning, and reading is presented in a nurturing, non-

threatening way. This activity is also a wonderful opportunity for the teacher to build a rapport with the parents in a relaxed setting.

The HSCL coordinator, in consultation with the teachers in Early Start and infant classes, endeavours to familiarise parents with the phonic scheme and pre-reading programme being used in the school. This is achieved through meetings facilitated by the coordinator or through home visits, or both. As part of the Forward Together programme employed in some schools, parents are shown how to play phonic games with their child, how to model initial sounds and letter formation, and how best to use picture books for language development.

As pupils progress from the infant level, parents and others in the community are invited into the school to engage in **shared reading**. This is a reading partnership between parents or guardians and the children and involves a two-stage process. The first stage is reading together, when the

child selects a book that he/she like, discusses why he/she chose it, and then reads the story aloud at the same time as the adult, at a pace suitable to the child. The second stage is the letting go stage, when the adult sees the child getting more confident and gradually lowers his/her voice to allow the child to dominate. The adult will join in again if the child starts to lose confidence or to struggle with some words. Many teachers request the continuation of the shared reading model in the home as part of children's homework. Here, and at every stage in the process, the HSCL coordinator is encouraging, informing and supporting parents to enable them to participate.

Similar initiatives, sharing these basic aims and generally using the same methods, are used in various primary schools under different titles, such as Children and Parents Enjoy Reading (CAPER), Dads and Lads Enjoy Reading, etc. The CAPER initiative involves a very structured approach, with pre-programme and post-programme testing, a graded reading scheme, and home and classroom reading sessions running in tandem. The success of this programme has been evident in the considerable improvement in percentiles, scores, and reading ages.

Many teachers employ the reading of a class novel with their pupils as a method of promoting reading for enjoyment. The HSCL coordinator contributes to this work by encouraging parents or guardians to take an active role in this exercise. In an effort to achieve this, parents are invited to the school to meet the class teacher. Discussions follow, and ideas are shared on how best to advance and support the young person's reading. Artwork, drama, word searches and quizzes are all part of this process. The value of the contribution of parents and guardians to their children's learning is once again emphasised.

The HSCL Scheme promotes the use of the school and local libraries. Coordinators organise family trips to the library, where parents and children spend time browsing and selecting books and are given the opportunity to enjoy storytelling sessions or to read books together. Parents are then encouraged to become members and to take books home with them. The librarian is always on hand to support the families and to guide parents in the right direction in selecting suitable books.

HSCL coordinators, at the primary and the post-primary level, co-operate in implementing **paired reading**. Paired reading embodies the same principles as shared reading but includes others as well as parents or guardians in supporting children, for example pupils in LCA and transition year or retired members of the community. The adult partner aims to allow the child to read in as independent a manner as possible. Similarly, **peer tutoring** involves pupils from senior classes working in pairs for reading with children from junior classes. This supports the building of confidence and self-esteem for both parties. The aim is to create a unified community effort to promote reading as an enjoyable activity and to improve reading skills.

When pupils progress to post-primary school it is important for parents to maintain interest in their education and to continue encouraging them. Many schools are involved in a Write-a-Book Project. The pupils choose the topic for their book and write it with the help of the learning support teacher. Coordinators engage in conversation about the book with the parents during home visits. They are encouraged to talk about its contents at home and to attend a celebration in the school when the work is completed. The book provides a tangible message of success and a positive sharing of information between parent and child. In schools where the JCSP is part of the curriculum the HSCL coordinators assist by informing parents about the programme and also by encouraging them to become involved in the various literacy initiatives.

As with the method employed in primary schools, the parents of post-primary pupils are invited to share with their children in the enjoyment of reading the class novel. They are often supplied with a list of questions about the characters, action, and interesting events, in the hope that this will lead to a focused conversation. This has the potential to enhance a young person's confidence and self-esteem while promoting active involvement on the part of the parent.

The promotion of literacy initiatives by the HSCL Scheme in some instances reaches beyond the classroom to after-school clubs facilitated by schools but run by parents. Here, among games and activities, language development, pre-reading skills and storytelling are further encouraged. The parents involved are themselves exposed to a variety of learning experiences and a range of strategies for promoting literacy and social skills in their own homes.

Through their varied opportunities for contact with parents and adults in the communities in which they work, the coordinators are ideally placed to encourage parents to engage with adult literacy courses for the enhancement of their own skills. Where literacy difficulties are encountered, parents are referred, in confidence, for one-to-one or group tuition. Coordinators network with VEC adult programmes and adult learner support services. In many instances the coordinators facilitate the running of literacy or literacy-related classes in the parents' room in their schools. One such programme is the Family Learning Programme, where parents explore children's learning styles and are led to a greater awareness of their own skills as natural teachers. Similarly, the Read to Succeed is a certified training course run by the Open College Network that enables parents to engage with paired reading in the primary school.

We have described the range of initiatives established to improve literacy, which result in many positive outcomes. In a questionnaire completed in 2004 by HSCL coordinators, increased reading ability on the part of the pupil was recorded in 51 per cent of cases. In addition, 24 per cent reported an increase in the enjoyment of reading, while 42 per cent of respondents recorded an improvement in parent-child bonding. The following quotation is typical of parents' comments: "Usually I wouldn't know what is lying at the bottom of his bag, but now I can talk to him about the book. It's great to know what he's reading in school."

Coordinators gain an important understanding of parents or guardians, and the parents or guardians in turn recognise the value of their own contribution to the education of their children. The schools benefit from the increased involvement of parents. There is a community response to the advancement of literacy where the school, parents or guardians, older pupils, older people and various agencies contribute to an integrated approach. HSCL coordinators have carefully developed friendly working relations, based on mutual respect, with the parents or guardians of our pupils. By concentrating on building the self-esteem and confidence of parents and guardians, as well as by introducing a variety of initiatives, the HSCL coordinators aim not only to improve literacy but also to play a vital part in creating a healthy, happy and successful educational experience for our young people, taking into account and appreciating the varying abilities, personalities and skills of all involved.

## Literacy initiatives 2: The impact of a reading intervention

We outline here the effect of a reading intervention project on parents' perception of their role in their children's education and on children's reading attainment.

A reading intervention project, with parental involvement, has been operating in a particular school since 2001. The HSCL coordinator co-ordinates this project.

The aims of the project are

- to foster an awareness by parents of their role as the primary educators of their children
- to involve parents in developing their children's reading skills
- to increase parents' confidence and competence in helping their children learn to read
- to foster a love of books
- to improve oral language competence
- to improve scores on standardised reading tests
- to help story-time to be seen as a time of sharing and bonding between parent and child.

The findings presented here are the results of a study of the fourth year of the project. The first strand of the fourth year of the project began in September 2004. Parents' involvement is central and integral to the project. Before each stage of the project commenced began, and at the end of each stage, meetings were held with parents, class teachers, the principal, and the HSCL coordinator. The proposed course was considered and discussed, and suggestions for future adaptations were considered. The course was open to amendment at any time. All sixty-eight children in the three first classes were involved. A timetable was arranged so that each class had half an hour of the project each week. These sessions were arranged at the start of the school day, at the request of parents.

The initial six-week session began with storybook reading. Parents and members of the extended family were invited to participate. Colourful, attractive, age-appropriate books were bought. Sitting on comfortable quilts, the children were read to by mothers, fathers, grandparents and aunts in groups of about six. A six-week course of paired reading followed this strand. Parents' numbers were supplemented by pupils from fourth and fifth class. The parents and



A family reading session.

older pupils were trained in the paired reading technique. The books were colour-coded according to level of difficulty, and the children progressed through the graded levels as their reading competence increased.

The third strand of the project, conducted in January and February 2005, was “literacy through information technology.” A structured, interactive reading programme, the Oxford Reading Tree (Hunt, 2001) was used. Parents were invited to work with the children on computer, again for a six-week period. Books based on the content of the computer program were sent home with the children.

### **Impact of a project on parents’ perception of their role in their child’s education**

All parents of the children in first class who were involved in the project were asked to complete a questionnaire on the project. Fifty-eight questionnaires, out of a total of seventy-one distributed, were returned, a response rate of 82 per cent. Six interviews with parents were conducted. Findings from the quantitative data in the questionnaire were complemented by qualitative material gleaned from the comments in the questionnaire and also by parents’ opinions recorded in the interview process.

### **Survey findings**

88 per cent of parents responded that they thought their child was more interested in books and reading as a result of the project.

Comments from parents:

*“Children love to read now and are attempting to read everything in sight, including signs, posters, words in newspapers and magazines, and teletext.”*

*“Children are breaking down bigger words and are not afraid to make mistakes.”*

*“There is a great selection of new books, and children are enjoying the adventures in the books. Children’s reading has improved.”*

83 per cent of respondents stated that their child was now more likely to spend time reading.

Among the comments from parents were:

*“He loves to read books and is reading to his brother.”*

*“She loves to read her library and school books and takes pride in her reading homework.”*

67 per cent of parents felt their child was anxious not to miss school on parents’ reading days.

55 per cent felt their child was happier in school as a result of the project.

79 per cent replied that they thought they were better able to help their child learn to read as a result of the project.

Comments from parents:

*“Children were enjoying reading.”*

*“Children were reading more fluently.”*

*“Children were sounding out the words themselves.”*

This increase in confidence and interest among the children seemed to have an effect on parent-child reading sessions at home, making them more enjoyable for both parties.

*“Children knew most of the words. It is definitely not a stressful exercise.”*

74 per cent of parents responded that they now felt more confident in helping their child learn to read.

84 per cent stated that they now know more about the types of books suitable for their child.

64 per cent stated that they believe they now know more about what is happening in school.

Comments from parents:

*"I think the school keeps parents very well informed."*

*"Yes, they have always made parents aware of what's going on."*

*"Yes, I now feel I am active in her schooling, even if it is only one hour a week."*

79 per cent of parents stated that they thought they could now play a bigger part in their child's education.

62 per cent stated that they felt welcome when they came to the school to take part in the reading.

Comments from parents:

*"I felt they were very happy about me being there. I felt I was making a difference, with my son being happy that I was able to do it."*

98 per cent of parents responded that they felt it was all right for the school to ask them to come in to help with the reading.

83 per cent of respondents stated that they believed parents are treated as partners in the school.

Comments from parents:

*"I feel the teachers treat the parents as equals and always welcome their input, and vice versa."*

*"I feel that parents are really made to feel very involved in their children's education in this school."*

*"In your school you try to involve the parents as much as you can, which I personally think is brilliant."*

*"Definitely, the past few years have been more inclusive for parents. It also helps the child to recognise that school also welcomes Mam and Dad."*

### Impact of the project on children's oral language development

The British Picture Vocabulary Scale (1982) was used. The children were pre-tested on this scale in October 2004 and underwent the same test in April 2005. The same person—a retired primary teacher—carried out pre-testing and post-testing. Scores were expressed as **standard scores**: this is the ratio of one's chronological age to one's language or reading age.

- The average standard score recorded for 67 children at pre-testing was 91.85.
- The average standard score recorded at post-testing was 98.42.

This is a gain of 6.57.

### The Renfrew Language Scales Action Picture Test (1997)

This is a norm-referenced test of language development. Children are shown a series of pictures to stimulate them to give samples of spoken language, which can be evaluated according to the information given and grammatical structures. Children were individually pre-tested in this test in November 2004 and were re-tested in May 2005. Marks were allocated separately in accordance with information content and grammatical usage. The children's scores are compared with a standardised average for children of that age. Pre-testing and post-testing were carried out by the same person, a retired primary teacher.

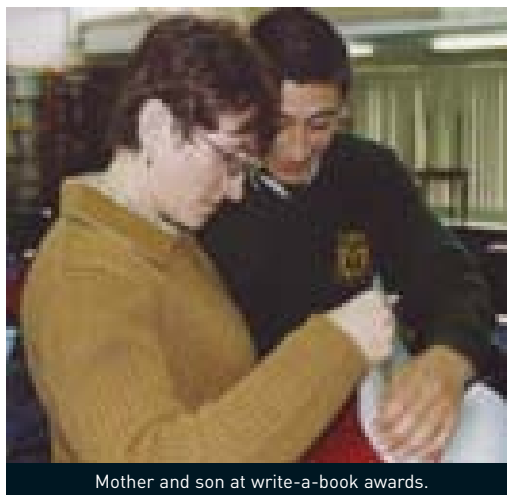
A total of sixty-seven children were pre-tested and post-tested in the Renfrew Action Picture Test. The average score of the children in the information component of the test rose from 0.96 points below average at pre-testing to 1.47 points above average at post-testing. This represents a gain of 2.43 points.

The average score of the children in the grammar component rose from 1.15 points below average to 0.41 points above average at post-testing. This represents a gain of 1.56 points.

Oral language competence is the foundation on which reading skills are built. Oral language development is facilitated when children are afforded opportunities to listen to and respond to stories read to them. It may be concluded from the evidence furnished by the results of the British Picture Vocabulary Scale and the Renfrew Action Picture Test that the project succeeded in enhancing children's oral language competence.

The BPVS results recorded an increase in average standard scores, bringing the post-testing average to 98.42. (A standard score of 100 indicates that one's chronological age matches one's language age.) The average score gained by the children at post-testing indicates that their language age is very close to their chronological age.

The Renfrew Action Picture Test found that at pre-testing, children were functioning at below the average level for their age in both the information content of language and the grammar structures. Post-testing results demonstrated that the children are now functioning at about average for their age in both these areas. It may be concluded that a structured programme of engagement with books, combined with parental support, can have an effect on a child's language skills.



### Reading test results: Young Group Reading Test

Pupils were tested using the Young Group Reading Test (1992) in September at the start of the intervention and re-tested the following April to assess the effect of the intervention on their reading scores. This test is valid only for children aged six years five months and older. Fifteen children were below the age range at pre-testing, so their scores are not included.

- The average standard score of the fifty-three eligible children at pre-testing was 89.74.
- The average standard score of these children at post-testing was 98.22.

This represents an increase of 8.48.

### Reading test results: The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test

The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test was administered to the pupils towards the end of first class. This is the test that is routinely given to pupils in the school at the end of first class. Records of the pupils' scores in previous years provided a benchmark against which the scores of pupils in the intervention programme could be measured. A study in the same school in 2004 recorded an average score in the DPRT of 98.85 for first class at the end of a three-year reading intervention

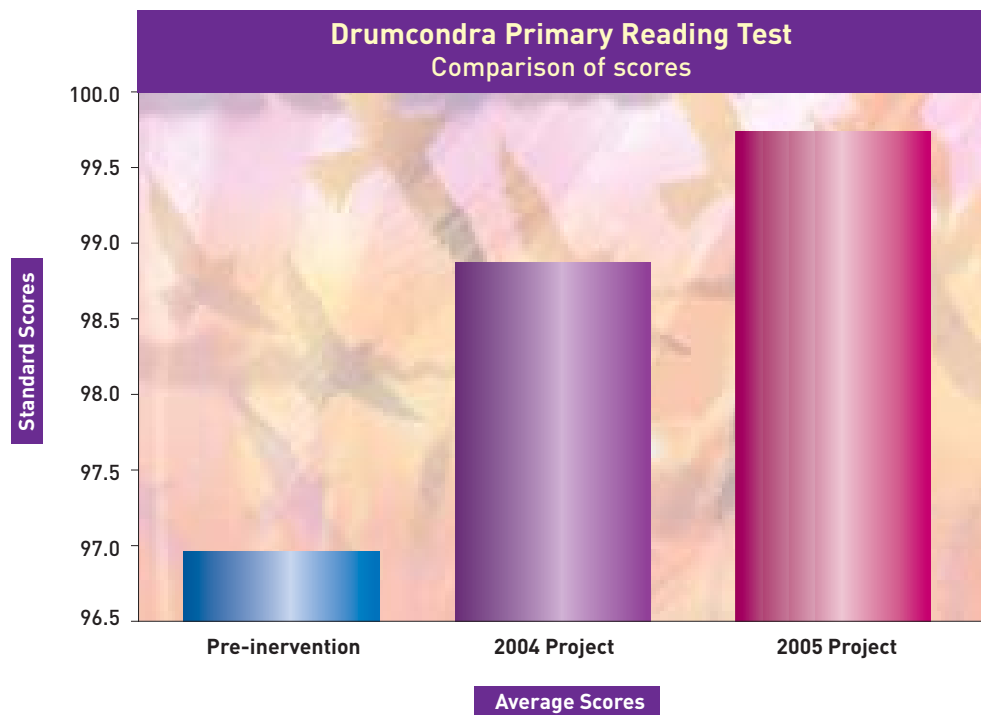
with parental involvement. This was an increase of 1.86 when compared with the average score for first class in the DPRT for the previous three years, when no intervention took place.

The average scores for the present study are as follows:

In June 2005 the average standard score for first class was 99.62. These results show an increase in standard score of 0.77 when compared with the 2004 average score and an increase of 2.63 when compared with the average score for the three non-intervention years. It is also noteworthy that the present level of average score, 99.62, is very close to 100, the level at which the children could be said to be achieving a level appropriate to their age. For a school serving disadvantaged communities, this represents a considerable advance.

The average standard score of the sixty-nine children in first class in the Young Group Reading Test at post-testing was 99.08. This is close to the average standard score of 99.62 recorded in the DPRT.

#### Average standard score comparison, Drumcondra Primary Reading Test



- Average standard score before intervention, 2001–03: 96.99
- Average standard score, intervention project, 2004: 98.85
- Average standard score, current project, 2005: 99.62



## Literacy initiatives 3: Storysacks

A **storysack** is a large hand-sewn bag containing a storybook, props and activities with which a story is told in order to bring reading to life. In addition, storysacks usually contain toys to represent the characters from the story, a tape recording of the story, and a non-fiction book based on the theme of the story. In the situation being described, the storysacks were made during a series of sewing-cum-literacy workshops during which the parents worked together with a professional artist to produce this marvellous tool for making both adults and children feel confident with books. The parents participated in the selection of the books and in storytelling workshops, which are also organised by HSCL coordinators.

The purpose of storysacks is to develop a culture of reading among parents and children, to promote a sense of confidence about books and storytelling, and to make reading a fun experience for all. It also provides an opportunity for the parents to participate in a creative process using their hands, their imagination, and in fact their whole person.

Storysacks can be put to use by parents, teachers and members of the wider community for a number of reasons. They can be used in the development of children's listening, reading, writing and language skills. They can be used simply for storytelling on its own, for dramatic activities, and for stage work; they can be used to assist in the teaching of Irish, and in the teaching of English as a second language. Imagination is the only limitation! The quality and unique hand-made feel of storysacks gives them a timelessness and a magic not found in most modern toys.

### "Helpful Hints"

The HSCL Scheme seeks to promote partnership between home, school, and agencies in the community. The Local Committee, a feature of the HSCL Scheme, involves parents, teachers, pupils and representatives of local agencies in a practical way, addressing issues in the community that impinge on learning.

One group of parents, teachers and members of the local community worked together to identify issues that impinge on their children's education and to gather ideas from parents on how these matters could be addressed. The committee agreed on topics and made all the decisions on such matters as funding, content, and outcomes. A sub-committee of parents and the two HSCL coordinators carried out practical work between meetings, such as deciding on final content and artwork, visiting the printers, and preparing the cards for distribution. These attractive cards are the result, and a set of four will be given to every family in the school. A great deal of work was carried out by the sub-committee of parents in the preparation and compiling of these cards. The Local Committee selected and produced "Helpful Hints" in relation to storysacks. Participation by parents in the process was and is a vital component. "Helpful Hints" is a set of four fridge magnets on the topics of *Helping your child to read*, *Getting ready for school*, *Budgeting and saving*, and *Self-esteem*.

Some of the stories include "Cinderella," "Barty's Ketchup Catastrophe," "Nine Ducks Nine," "Lucky Mucky Puppy," "Commotion in the Ocean," "Sleeping Beauty," "Red Riding-Hood," and "Goldilocks."

The parents found the process to be relaxing, and there is a great sense of pride and achievement in the final outcome. A lot of hidden talent was discovered, and there is no doubt that some parents have discovered a hobby for life, if not an opening for a new career. The final products are not merely a useful literacy tool but works of art in themselves. They will be a gift to the children of the school for many years to come.

### **Proposed guidelines for setting up storybags**

- Make contact with a fabric artist or a sewing tutor.
- Identify a source for funding.
- Contact the county librarian to supply you with suitable books; very large children's books with little text but with striking illustrations are very helpful. This encourages even those with low literacy levels.
- Bring together a group of ten to twelve interested parents.
- Each parent selects a storybook; they may choose to work in pairs on the theme of the story.
- Buy suitable fabrics. The right choice here is central to the richness of the final product.

Encouraged by the artist, the parents chose an image or outstanding theme from the book and used this as an idea for the bag.

Using newspaper and crayons or pencil, they drew patterns for the outline of the bag.

Working by hand and using no more than scissors and a few sewing machines, they saw the storybags taking shape.

Regular visits to a pound shop and to jumble sales secured lots of cheap props, such as dolls, toys and animals suitably dressed and adjusted to the story. Numerous beds, chairs, farmyards and ducks were made by hand. A number of teachers helped by making tape-recordings of the stories. Some of the stories already had tape-recordings available to buy. The county librarian again provided beautiful factual books to go with the theme of each story.

The storybags were displayed in each school, and the parents visited the staff room to explain their use and the process of making them. Storybags were given as a gift to the school.

The storybags were launched, bringing together all those involved, including people from the home, the school, and the community. Storytelling classes and workshops involving parents and children were held in the parents' room, using the storybags. Storybags are now used in a library-type system for the benefit of children, teachers, and child-minders. Child-minding was provided throughout the twelve storybag sessions.

NALA receives funding from both the ESB and the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science in order to run storybags and family literacy projects. Grants and training courses are available to community training and literacy groups, including HSCL coordinators. The process described above was run without the help of an outside agency.



# Mathematics for Fun and Science for Fun: Parents as a Resource in the Classroom

## Rationale

The rationale for the Mathematics for Fun initiative is underwritten in the findings and recommendations of all recent research on mathematics carried out by or on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. Activity-based teaching and learning is central to the revised Primary School Curriculum (1999). The Evaluation Report on Curriculum Implementation recommended that in the teaching of mathematics teachers should provide opportunities for discussion, combined with the use of concrete materials by the pupils.<sup>25</sup> This report also stated that the use of precise, concrete materials would result in effective teaching and learning, aimed at meeting the individual needs of the learner. The report recommended that schools promote purposeful parental involvement. Mathematics for Fun is readymade to meet these recommendations both at the primary level and in the junior cycle at the post-primary level. Furthermore, the dissemination of the good practice and positive outcome of the Mathematics for Fun programme, not only among designated schools served by HSCL but throughout the school system generally, addresses a central objective of the HSCL Scheme.

In the evaluation report *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools* the Inspectorate recommended that all pupils' learning in mathematics be facilitated by the extensive use of concrete materials.<sup>26</sup> It further recommended that HSCL build on the proven success of initiatives to involve the parents of younger children, by extending these strategies to enable parents to engage effectively with the school as their children progress through the middle and senior classes. As Mathematics for Fun is practical, workable, and non-threatening, it can address these recommendations.

An assessment of mathematical achievement conducted by the Educational Research Centre showed the difference between the performance of pupils from advantaged and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> Recommendations based on the findings also emphasised the necessity for differentiated and activity-based learning.

The Mathematics for Fun collaborative learning initiative is designed and structured to address the following aims:

- to meet the individual needs of the pupils through hands-on work and parental involvement
- to enhance the parent-teacher partnership
- to help parents understand more fully the challenging nature of mathematics for the pupil as learner and the teacher as tutor
- to break down the fear barrier some pupils may have towards mathematics by bringing fun and variety into the learning process
- to help parents experience at first hand the working school environment
- to empower parents to engage meaningfully in the learning process of young people.

Parents are generally not invited to get involved in the teaching of mathematics. They often refrain from involvement with the school because of cultural norms that discourage interference with teachers' autonomy, according to Yao.<sup>28</sup> Addressing this issue is central to HSCL, as collaborative parent-teacher interaction falls within the goals and basic principles of the scheme. Parents' involvement in classroom-based numeracy initiatives has been developed through the HSCL Scheme in recent years, and it is now integral to the scheme's practice. Mathematics for Fun was operating in a number of schools for a few years, and because of its success the programme was presented to all HSCL coordinators at their national in-service training during 2001/02.

<sup>25</sup> DES, 2005a.

<sup>26</sup> DES, 2005b.

<sup>27</sup> ERC, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Yao, 1988.

## Preparation

Individual HSCL coordinators consult principals and staff colleagues in exploring the concept of Mathematics for Fun. It is important that relevant teachers are consulted at every level of the programme, especially with regard to the provision of suitable materials, developing partnership with volunteer parents in the classroom, and the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. Coordinators and teachers collaborate in the identification, purchase and preparation of materials required for the project.

## Process

Parents are invited to participate in Mathematics for Fun through personal contact by class teachers or HSCL coordinators or through home visits by coordinators. In general, HSCL coordinators facilitate the parents' training, with some involvement by teachers where possible. Parents' training takes place in the school over four or five sessions, though this varies from school to school. These sessions



afford parents and teachers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the various activities, allowing them to build confidence, competence, and partnership. The activities used include tangrams and pattern blocks, aimed at developing spatial awareness; dominoes and the banker's game, aimed at developing number and computational skills; relational attribute blocks, aimed at developing language, logical thinking and problem-solving skills; clock bingo, to consolidate work done by class teachers on time; and pentominoes, aimed at developing problem-solving skills and the concept of tessellation. Many other games and activities are used in different schools, taking into account the varying abilities and ages of the pupils involved.

In general, Mathematics for Fun sessions take place in the classroom for one hour per week over a period of six weeks. Depending on the size of the class and the number of available parents, the class is divided into groups, with no more than four pupils in any group, if possible. A parent takes charge of a particular mathematical activity. They are familiar with the instructions and solutions. Children move from one activity to the next at a given signal. The class teacher is in the room, in a supportive capacity, while the HSCL coordinator oversees the process and meets the parents to review the session.

## Outcome

The Mathematics for Fun programme is a concerted effort by HSCL to develop the home-school partnership. It endeavours to increase parents' involvement in the school and in the classroom. Parents in all schools serving designated areas of disadvantage are invited to work in a spirit of

partnership with teachers in classrooms. They work with selected mathematical activities that incorporate the use of concrete materials.

The Mathematics for Fun programme, as a collaborative learning initiative, has been successful on many levels. It ensures that pupils are generally absorbed in a variety of differentiated activities, which are facilitated by parents, in partnership with teachers, in positive learning environments. An open, transparent and inclusive approach is adopted to ensure the success of the programme.

Parents, teachers and pupils benefit from the process. The positive feedback from those participants and the requests for the continuation of the programme suggest that it is both enjoyed and valued. Parents, as well as recognising development in their own skills and expertise in the learning process of their children, experience the children's enjoyment of learning. The adult participants see Mathematics for Fun as a novel alternative approach to learning that captures the pupils' interest and imagination. Children talk of how easy it is to grasp the activities. Teachers report that pupils are happily and actively engaged for the duration of the session. All involved enjoy a sense of achievement at seeing progress and confidence-building with each session.

The Mathematics for Fun programme has provided one opportunity for progressive change in education, that is, equal participation and partnership between pupils, teachers and parents in the classroom.

## Science for Fun

### Policy statement

The primary goal is to present Science to pupils and parents in an enjoyable way. The hope is to emphasise the importance of language while developing scientific concepts and skills.

### Aims

The aims of Science for Fun are

- to train parents and post-primary pupils as Science for Fun facilitators in the classroom
- to foster close liaison between parents, teachers, and pupils
- to present Science to children in an enjoyable way
- to encourage pupils to use scientific language and terms
- to provide opportunities for pupils to use logic and reasoning while carrying out scientific experiments
- to provide opportunities for parents to remain close to their child's learning.

The Science for Fun training programme is presented by parents and post-primary pupils over a five-week period for each class level. The trained Science for Fun facilitators then present the programme to selected classes in primary and post-primary schools.

There are four different training programmes to cater for the different class levels:

- first and second-class programme
- third and fourth-class programme
- fifth and sixth-class programme
- first, second and third year programme at post-primary level.

The Science for Fun programme covers the following topics at each class level:

- magnetism
- electricity
- light
- sound
- floating and sinking.

Evaluation is then carried out with pupils, parents, teachers, and facilitators.



### Purpose of Science for Fun

Science for Fun is a five-week course that deals with five areas: light, sound, electricity, magnetism, and forces. The programme is provided in the classroom by trained parents and pupils.

The programme is designed by HSCL coordinators, in consultation with the Local Committee and teachers. Science for Fun is a practical approach to Science. It emphasises the importance of language while developing scientific concepts and skills. The trained facilitator, parent or pupil, works with small groups of children, allowing active participation and questions that challenge the existing knowledge of pupils and consolidate new discoveries. The programme uses the revised SESE primary curriculum, as it concentrates on the strands and the content of the curriculum. In addition it helps children develop an interest in Science. It also supports teachers in the teaching of Science. It adds the vital ingredients for any successful science programme: fun and discovery.

### Preparation

The HSCL coordinator undertakes the preparation for Science for Fun. He/she recruits a number of parents to run the science programme in the school. The Science for Fun programme also has a peer-to-peer aspect, where LCA pupils join the facilitation team for primary schools. The parents and pupils attend a five-week intensive training course. There are four different training courses, ranging from junior primary to post-primary. Once the parents are trained they present the programme to the classes in question over a period of five weeks.



### Practical steps

The class is divided into five groups. There are five main areas: magnetism, electricity, light, sound, and forces. The children work for 45 minutes at one area each week. The trained Science for Fun facilitator prepares the area before the session begins. This involves organising materials for the experiments and photocopying any activity sheets the children need. The facilitator guides the children through the experiments while illustrating the underlying scientific concepts and skills to be developed.

### Outcome

The Science for Fun programme fulfils its primary function of helping children and adults develop an interest in Science. The children leave the session with a desire and a curiosity to learn more. They are guided towards the appropriate books and web sites at the end of the session. In this way they are moving towards becoming independent learners.

The carefully chosen experiments incorporate fun and active participation while at the same time developing scientific concepts and skills. The children are encouraged to work together on their experiments, and in doing so they discover new concepts to add to existing knowledge. The programme itself puts a huge emphasis on language and on discovery-based learning. It gives clear and concise guidelines to the facilitator. Each session begins with questions or circle time, when the children explore and develop new concepts.

#### Here is what those involved with the programme say!

*“To be out straight with you, I didn’t know what I was getting myself into; but as soon as we began working with the kids I loved it. They really enjoyed it!”* (Parent)

*“The programme was very well organised. A lot of preparation went into organising each station area. The experiments were very suitable and enjoyable. Great initiative! Well done to all involved!”* (Class teacher)

*“Both pupils and teacher benefited greatly from this programme. I was so impressed by the content of the programme and the level of training the parents received. I think we’re onto a winner!”* (Principal)

*“Can’t wait till we can do it again. The outrageous ooze was my favourite.”* (Fifth-class pupil)

# The Local Committee

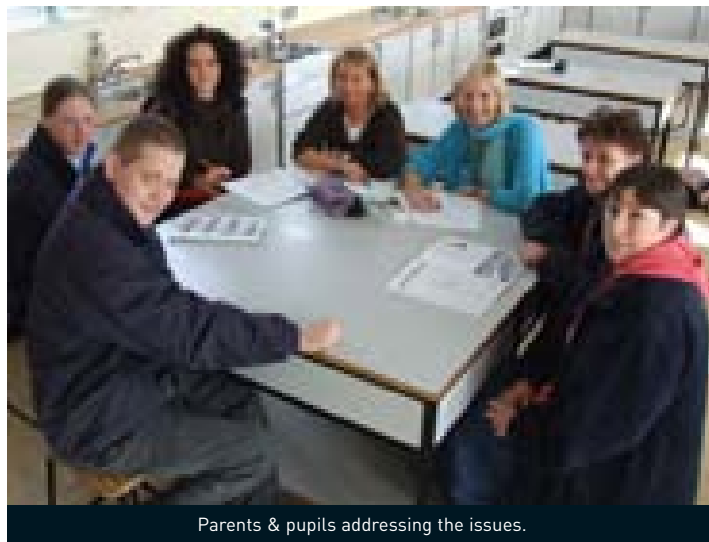
The Local Committee identifies and addresses issues in the community that impinge on children's learning and life in the community. This involves co-operation and partnership with parents, pupils, community agencies, and the schools that participate in the HSCL Scheme. Pupils spend 85 per cent of their waking time up to the age of sixteen in the home and in the community; the remaining 15 per cent is spent in school. This fact underlines the significant role that parents play as the prime educators of their children. It also illustrates the significance of the community in their development and education. Underlying all activities is the intention to deal with educational issues affecting children and parents; to build strong, effective school and community links; to promote positive attitudes towards the environment; and to recognise and value the contribution of local people.

A Local Committee may consist of

- principals
- HSCL coordinators  
SCP coordinator
- members of the school staff
- parents
- pupils
- representatives from the local business community
- voluntary and statutory agencies.

The voluntary agencies may include

- the Society of St Vincent de Paul
- local clergy
- youth services
- community development project staff.



The statutory agencies involved with the Local Committee may include

- the visiting personnel for Travellers
- School Completion Programme personnel.
- the Garda Síochána
- members of the FÁS staff
- Juvenile Liaison Officer
- Probation Services personnel
- Education Welfare Officer
- Area Partnership personnel
- Community-based drugs initiative personnel
- Health Service Executive personnel
- VEC personnel.

The Local Committee works to provide an integrated provision of service at the local level and encourages active community participation in the social, personal and educational development of children. The involvement of parents is the cornerstone of the Local Committee. Parents who might not otherwise engage with the school are provided with an opportunity to participate and to express their opinion, in spite of their apprehension. As one parent said, "Initially I was delighted to be asked to join the committee, and then I was fearful I wouldn't be good enough; and in the end I enjoyed being a part of it." The involvement of pupils from primary and post-primary schools has raised their awareness of how much the general community shares a genuine interest and concern for them. One young pupil remarked to the committee: "I never knew before that so many people were interested in what we had to say."



Minister visits a Local Committee.

### Preparation

The initial planning takes place when HSCL coordinators meet at the family cluster and local cluster levels. Preparation at this stage is quite time-consuming, and it requires a great deal of energy and dedication on the part of the HSCL coordinator. The networks built up by the coordinator prove crucial in identifying community agencies relevant to the purpose of the Local Committee. The coordinator then contacts these agencies, explains the rationale of the Local Committee, and invites a representative to attend.

HSCL coordinators feel that home visitation plays an important role in encouraging parents to participate. Parents who are involved in the HSCL Scheme are invited to join, and the coordinator ensures that these parents are ready for active participation through information, training, and personal support. Participation by pupils at the post-primary level is particularly effective when such pupils are selected from school mentoring groups, transition year groups, and pupil councils. At the primary level, pupils are usually drawn from middle and senior classes. One pupil remarked: "*I wouldn't be afraid to get involved with other committees, now that I know how they work.*"

With regard to organisation, the usual protocol for committee meetings is adopted. A chairperson and secretary are appointed; in some instances the HSCL coordinator takes the chair, while in others it is a local principal or parent. The position of secretary is sometimes rotated. The initial agenda is drawn up by the HSCL coordinators; subsequently, the agenda arises from the proceedings of the previous meeting. All the actions of the Local Committee require the support of, and continuous discussion with, the local school principals.

### Process

At the first meeting of a Local Committee there is a brainstorming session to identify issues that affect children's learning, in effect, a needs analysis. Parents' contribution here is of paramount



importance. Issues identified have included

- early school leaving
- anti-bullying
- substance misuse
- poor attendance
- multiculturalism
- lack of adequate facilities and guidance for young people.

A short list of issues is given priority for immediate attention,

on the grounds of what can be addressed realistically. Different aspects of the task are then allocated to appropriate sub-groups.

At least one HSCL coordinator sits on each sub-committee. Sub-committees meet to further each project, in accordance with needs. They may meet once or twice between general meetings in order to work on their assigned tasks. In many Local Committees the pupil representatives have their own sub-committee, and they give their own feedback at the general meeting.

The next part of the process may require training for pupils or other members of the committee. One example of this is where pupils are trained to participate in a transfer programme organised between a primary and a post-primary school. Sometimes the process requires the Local Committee to prepare a funding proposal for a particular event or activity. Throughout the school year, HSCL coordinators provide a steady momentum and give important continuous support to all the actions of the Local Committee.

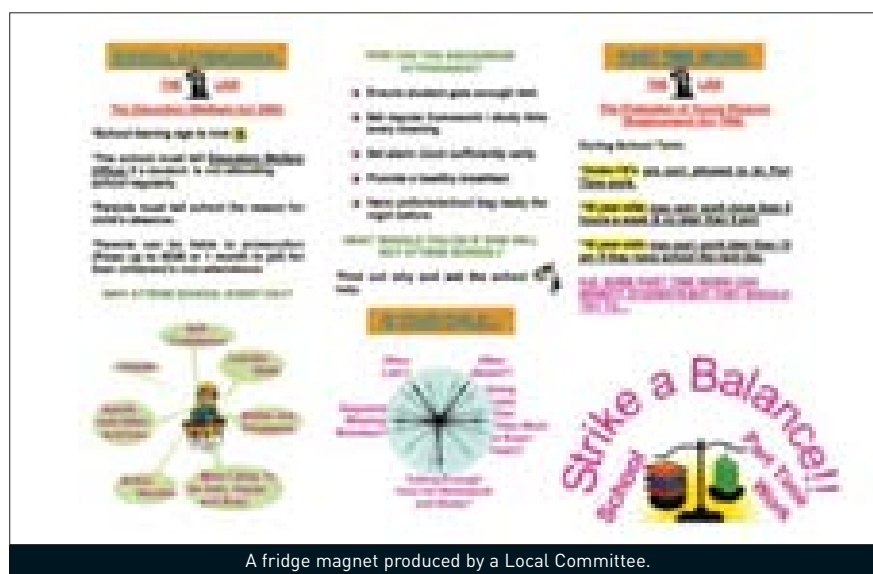
In the following case studies we see the Local Committee in action.

### Case study 1: School attendance

The issue identified at the initial meeting of the Local Committee was poor school attendance. The response to this issue was the formation of sub-committees to address homework support, part-time work, and good attendance.

One sub-committee decided to deal with the provision of homework support clubs. The main stumbling block facing this group was lack of funding, which was overcome by successful application to the local partnership. The result was a thriving homework support club in each of the schools involved. Teachers commented on the fact that pupils who attended the homework support club had improved both in their school work and in their participation, and they were less likely to be absent from school.

The second sub-committee addressed the problems caused by pupils participating in part-time work. Having researched it from the parents' and the pupils' viewpoints, the committee decided to meet and voice their concerns with the employers of the town. The hoteliers and supermarket managers attended this meeting. They acknowledged the concerns mentioned



A fridge magnet produced by a Local Committee.

and agreed on terms regarding work times, days and contracts. However, despite the promises made by the employers, not all complied with the agreed arrangements regarding part-time work. One HSCL coordinator commented: “We were disappointed, but the highlight of this project was the lively discussion which took place between parents and pupils on this issue. The first step to raising awareness in the community had now taken place.”

The third sub-committee looked at the issue of good school attendance. Firstly, SCP staff members who monitor attendance contacted the homes of frequently absent pupils. This contact between the school and the home resulted in a reduction in the level of truancy, and as a result attendance improved. Secondly, to complement this the sub-committee also produced a pamphlet, entitled *School Attendance Matters*, outlining the benefits of good attendance and offering advice, encouragement and support to parents. Following its launch the pamphlet was included in all school transfer packs and pre-school packs. Parents who were trained as home visitors also circulated this pamphlet in their various housing estates. The response from parents and principals to this pamphlet confirmed to the Local Committee that this had been a most worthwhile project.

### Case study 2: Peer mentoring

A Local Committee decided to undertake a project to address a smoking, alcohol and drugs problem in the town. The project was called Peer Mentoring Project: Smoke, Alcohol, and Drugs. It was felt that pupil-to-pupil mentoring might work better with eleven to fourteen-year olds. The representative for health informed members that peer mentoring had worked successfully in other parts of the country and that their Health Promotion Unit was willing to support the Local Committee with the project.

Planning began in the last term of the 2004/05 school year, when HSCL personnel met the Health Service personnel. Afterwards the principals of the post-primary schools gave their approval to initiate the programme. It was decided to train transition-year and fifth-year pupils as peer mentors to work in conjunction with SPHE teachers. Meetings were held in May and

September, involving transition-year and SPHE coordinators along with the year heads of fifth year, to present the outline of the programme and to prepare for its smooth implementation. HSCL coordinators organised and were present at all these meetings.

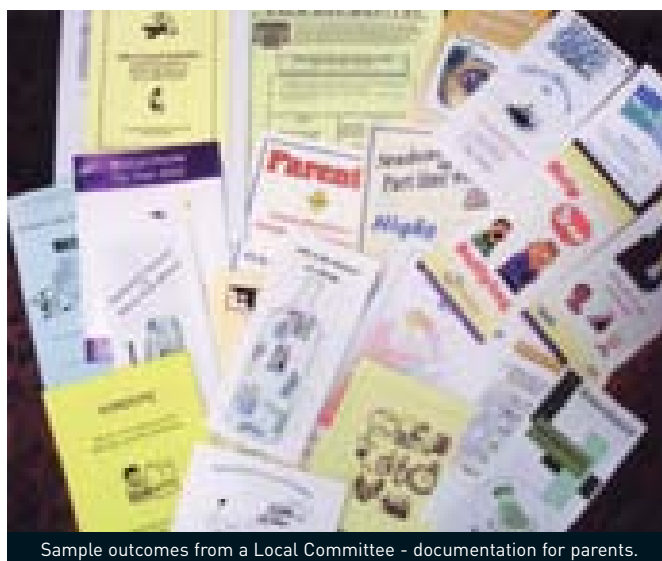
From September to January, the Health Promotion Unit, in conjunction with the County Youth Federation, trained twenty-two peer mentors from five post-primary schools. This training with transition-year pupils took place in a community resource centre over seven sessions, each session lasting a full school day. During February and March, the peer mentors presented the programme, over a four-week period, to all first-year classes in their various schools as part of their SPHE curriculum. The SPHE teacher supervised this process. In the first week of April the peer mentors met their tutors from the Health Promotion Unit and the County Youth Federation to review the post-primary provision and to plan for presenting the programme to the senior classes of the primary schools involved in the Local Committee. The provision in primary school is to take place in the last term of the school year 2005/06. In conjunction with the peer mentoring, parent and community awareness sessions are being held at three different community venues. The aim of these sessions is to inform the parents and community about the peer mentoring programme and to give an opportunity to the Health Promotion Unit to discuss further possibilities with the community in addressing the smoking, alcohol and drugs problem in their various areas. Parents and community personnel on the Local Committee are very much involved in the organisation and promotion of these sessions.

In May, the peer mentors will receive certificates, and there will be an assessment of the programme in its inaugural year. This assessment will involve hearing the views of peer mentors, primary and post-primary pupils, parents, tutors, principals, SPHE teachers, and transition-year, fifth-year and HSCL coordinators. Following this assessment, the Local Committee will make a decision on a plan for the 2006/07 school year.

The Local Committee serves ultimately to empower people to engage constructively in developing appropriate responses to the home, school and community challenges facing them.

## Outcome

The first tangible success from the Local Committee of the HSCL Scheme is that a collaborative response is established, whereby all the local stakeholders take ownership of initiatives to deal with local problems and to work on possible solutions. The Local Committee strengthens the bonds between primary and post-primary schools. It provides a forum where links between the education partners and voluntary and statutory agencies are formed and strengthened for the betterment of the whole community. Strategies



Sample outcomes from a Local Committee - documentation for parents.

are devised and continuously improved to promote the education and development of parents and pupils. All stakeholders have an ownership of the process, and this enhances outcomes.

The issues dealt with at the Local Committee level include

- transfer and mentoring programmes
- drugs and alcohol awareness
- school transport
- after-school activities
- out-of-school activities
- access to third-level education
- internet use
- intercultural festivals
- dissemination of information
- homework clubs
- bullying awareness
- school attendance
- healthy eating
- youth forum
- directories of community services
- appointment of senior youth worker
- parental development
- self-esteem courses
- lunchtime clubs
- parent and toddler interaction
- policy development that promotes parents' involvement
- pupils frequently suspended or out of school
- booklets and leaflets, including pupil-to-pupil pamphlets.

Through working in partnership at the Local Committee level, members identify any gaps that arise in the provision of services, and the duplication of services is avoided. Through collaboration on initiatives, a fairer, more inclusive and more co-operative relationship is developed between home, school, and community. The members of Local Committee think deeply about the challenging aspects of their local environment. They progress in solidarity and respond constructively to the home, school and community challenges that they identify. In conclusion, several strands of the general HSCL Scheme are brought together in the Local Committee.





# Parents, Pupils, Teachers and Community Working Together on Policy Formation

## Introduction - by Marie Fleury

When the HSCL Scheme started in 1990 it recognised that schools were unlikely to bring about change in relation to educational disadvantage unless they operated collaboratively with families and with other agencies in the community. The HSCL Scheme believed that people in these communities needed to be empowered to take control of their own lives, environment, and future. In order to develop community, partnership needed to be fostered.



Parents and teachers working together on an anti-bullying policy.

Partnership adheres to a number of general principles, such as communication, democratic decision-making, and participative ways of working. The most obvious feature of a partnership approach is the involvement of parents in the education of their own children. When schools accept the principles of partnership it means that the role of parents is greatly enhanced, and the implementation of this approach has significant implications for the education and training of all the

partners. New ideas and approaches are required in order to support schools. Teachers need to have training for the new and different responsibilities of working more closely with parents.

In the early 1990's, the education centres were encouraging school staffs to review their practices, with a view to improving their effectiveness. After one of these reviews in 1995, a school in the HSCL Scheme decided to work towards a more inclusive and collaborative way of working with parents. A staff survey showed that it informed parents on policies and rules, rather than involving them in the formation of these policies and rules. The task of including parents in policy formation was given to the HSCL coordinator. This called for close preparation with teachers and parents together.

Five *workshops* were devised at national level. Parents and teachers attended workshops and worked together as a group to share experiences, explore common ground, and come up with suggestions for how parents and teachers could complement each other in their roles. In the first workshop, parents and teachers explore the idea of team development and building trust. The second workshop is on role definition and creating an understanding of each other's roles. The next session is about identifying strengths and challenges. The fourth session is about what we do well as parents and teachers and how we build self-esteem in children. The final workshop examines the definition of partnership, as described by Gillian Pugh, and the consequent implications.

The workshops create a real sense of togetherness. They are very successful because of two factors: the genuine interest, honesty and enthusiasm of parents, and the resourcefulness and sensitivity of the teachers and their openness to change, both individually and as part of a whole-

school approach. The workshops prepare teachers and parents for their involvement in the formation of policies through a more participative way of working. This is a dynamic process in which effective schools employ the principle of respect.

From its inception, the HSCL Scheme has found the definition of Gillian Pugh challenging. She defines partnership as “a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies the sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision making and accountability.”<sup>29</sup>

## Policy formation including parents, pupils, teachers, and community

As already stated, an important element of the HSCL coordinator’s work is joint policy-making with parents, teachers, pupils, and community members. Coordinators have worked with the education partners on a variety of policies, including anti-bullying, substance misuse, homework, attendance, nutrition, numeracy, and literacy.

### Purpose

The purpose of the inclusion of parents, pupils, teachers and community members in policy formation is to give all parties a voice in what is contained in the policy, to draw on the life experience of the school community, and to give a sense of ownership of the policy. Parents have a right to be consulted and informed on all aspects of their child’s education. A local principal holds that “we are increasingly dependent on the good will of parents to support us in our task. We must therefore provide parents with opportunities to have a voice in how the school and community evolve.”



A sub-committee at work: policy formation.

### Preparation

Through whole-school planning, policies that need to be addressed are identified. Staff members discuss the issue; a time frame is agreed; and teachers and parents are identified to take part in the process. The role of the HSCL coordinator is to prepare marginalised but developed parents to take their place in the process. Trust-building and mutual respect for parents’ and teachers’ roles is an integral part of the preparation. The realisation that parents and teachers are working together in the best interest of the pupils is the key to success.

<sup>29</sup> Pugh and De’Ath, 1989:33

### Case study 1: Substance misuse

One coordinator's experience of developing a substance misuse policy illustrates how home, school and community can work effectively together. The coordinator worked with two parents for three 45-minute sessions to prepare them for the task. The parents discussed the issues with two staff members and four pupils. Parents, staff members, pupils and the coordinator subsequently attended a seminar organised by the City Partnership on substance abuse. The information gathered was taken to the Local Committee, where a Foróige leader, the JLO and representatives of the Licensed Vintners' Association were present. With this inclusive approach, a comprehensive policy was developed that reflected the views and needs of all parties. The final step was approval by the board of management.



In the second year, staff members, pupils and parents monitored the policy. Links were made with a mental health association, and pupils, parents and members of the staff attended seminars. The continuous sharing of information with relevant groups, including the Local Committee, ensured that the policy was a living document in the school, providing continuing support to all parties.

### Outcome

Teachers are no longer drawing up policies themselves and sending them out to parents for comment. Parents are involved in the process from the beginning. Parents are aware of the contribution they can make to their child's education; they are conscious that this contribution is valued and are more aware of the content of the various policies in the school. Teachers come to appreciate and value the contribution that parents can make. They realise that they can work with parents as partners in a relaxed, enjoyable and positive atmosphere. The joint approach gives all participants a sense of ownership and ensures that policies are more open, inclusive, and above all, effective in attaining their desired goal.

The view of a school principal is that "when parents, teachers and children co-operate to produce a particular policy, the individual needs of pupils and teachers can be met. This ensures that the school forms an efficient and pleasant learning community."

A parent "really enjoyed being part of the group. We worked well as a team, and each of us brought our own skills to the meeting. Being involved is very important to me, and even though my children have moved on to post-primary education I will continue my partnership with the school, giving back to the school what was given to my children."

## Case study 2: Developing an attendance policy

The purpose of the attendance policy was to address the issue of attendance in the light of the Education Act, together with concerns about the attendance of certain pupils and falling attendance on certain days or times of the year.

The foundations for successful policy-making had been laid through a variety of HSCL activities in the school, which facilitated the development of a good working relationship between parents and teachers. Parents had already been involved in an anti-bullying policy and a substance misuse policy, and the teachers were familiar with the process.

### Challenges

To ensure maximum participation, an open invitation was issued to all parents to become involved. The challenge for this policy was to ensure that the voice of the most marginalised parents was heard, and that the real, often sensitive issues affecting their attendance could be named. It was essential that a wide range of parents be engaged in the process, especially the parents of children with attendance problems. To achieve this, the coordinator visited the homes of these parents to discuss the issue and personally invited them or gave several reminders. A number of core parents were asked to encourage other parents to attend. On the first morning the coordinator was a visible presence in the school yard, encouraging parents to come to the parents' room.

Making teachers available is another challenge for schools. The role of the resource teacher is central here. The experience of the teachers involved is also an important factor for success. The process included some reliable, experienced teachers who had taught several members of the same family and who had the trust of parents, as well as a good record in handling parental conflict. This ensured that any negative issues, especially those relating to school, would be dealt with in a non-confrontational way.

### Process

To minimise disruption to classes, it was decided to work over two one-hour sessions at the time that best suited parents.

The first session dealt with the causes of poor attendance. The parents worked in groups in order to support each other more and to ensure the inclusion of the most marginalised parents. A range of issues surfaced, including sickness, hospital appointments, peer pressure, older children off school, birthdays, and problems with a teacher. The parents were impressed by the manner in which the teachers listened to them, and appreciated the fact that no issue was trivialised. Consequently, when the teachers gave their response, the parents listened attentively. They were astounded at how much a child can miss in one day. The inclusion of the pupil's voice allowed for sensitive issues to be named, such as parents keeping children at home to mind younger children, or parents taking children to town to buy clothes. At the end of the first session the EWO gave a short report on the Education Act and its implications for parents and teachers.

At the second session, all parties were asked to consider solutions. The parents were asked to discuss issues relating to home, and the teachers looked at school-related issues. The value in the process was that suggestions for parents were devised by parents. The solutions offered by pupils gave a powerful message, because they wanted the school to put more pressure on parents regarding attendance. Acceptable absences were named.

### **Outcome**

The teacher got a glimpse of what life is like for the marginalised parents and the issues affecting their children's attendance. This subsequently informed their teaching. Parents and pupils were aware of the effects of poor attendance, and suggestions for improving attendance emerged. The staff members discussed the issues raised and developed a strategy for rewarding pupils for good attendance. An attendance notice-board displayed the attendance policy and lists of pupils with full attendance for each month. A structured system was established that involved the principal, other members of the staff, the coordinator and the EWO to monitor attendance. Attendance figures improved, especially for those families for which attendance was a serious issue. This ultimately led to improved performance in school.

# Parents as Educational Home Visitors





Parents are the primary educators of their children. Educationalists acknowledge that parents who stay close to their own children's learning and to school have immense social, cultural and educational capital to invest in their children and in the community. The HSCL Scheme, which trains parents as home educational visitors, recognises that experienced trained parents acting as agents for the school are best positioned to engage with other parents. Parents who act as home visitors support other parents, and they disseminate information. They enlist other parents, especially young parents, for courses, classes, committees, and meetings, especially parent-teacher meetings. They also encourage them to participate in classroom-based HSCL initiatives.

In each area, potential home visitors are identified by HSCL coordinators, experienced home visitors, and members of the school staff. An active interest in educational and school issues, capability and willingness, together with personal development undertaken, are the usual criteria. Parents from all national backgrounds and all school catchment areas are selected. HSCL coordinators host an informal meeting, which ideally is jointly facilitated by experienced home visitors, to initiate each new course.

Local cluster groups of HSCL coordinators, working as a team, establish a management committee to oversee the planning of the training for participating parents. The management committee can include parent visitors and local agency people. The training is devised by the HSCL coordinators and the facilitator. This facilitator may be a suitable professional or a HSCL coordinator. The rationale for the training is

- to explain to the parents in detail how the education system works at all levels, from Early Start to third level, with special emphasis on schools in their own area
- to raise awareness among the parents of the learning process and to build confidence in the parents
- to maximise their communication skills so that they can convey messages and information for the schools.

The training consists of eight sessions, each lasting two hours. The first six modules are presented by the main facilitator and cover such topics as child development, school structures and curriculum, family dynamics and cultures, and the role of the family as partner in education. The final two modules are presented by the coordinators or other personnel from the local schools.

The methods used are a mixture of lecture, group work, and role-playing. Great emphasis is placed on planning, preparation and communication skills, primarily in relation to home visits but also with a view to organising meetings for other parents and generally taking an active role in schools. The purchasing of such materials as diaries, folders, and pens; the production of identification documents and the provision of transport and crèches is undertaken by the committee.

Individual HSCL coordinators compile folders of relevant information related to their schools for trained home visitors. These folders contain:

- copies of the school's mission statement
- school policies, for example behaviour, anti-bullying, homework, and substance misuse
- lists of school personnel and phone numbers

- suggestions for the most suitable times to contact the school; in addition, post-primary schools also give the visitors details of subjects and choices for state exams
- information regarding project work
- explanations of terms such as JCSP, LCA, and LCVP.

Following training, these parents are ready to make home visits on behalf of their local schools. These visits are all concerned with the provision of educational information. Therefore, visits are undertaken on transfers at all levels: from Early Start to junior primary, from junior primary to senior primary, from there to post-primary, and finally to third level. Visits are also undertaken to bring school policies to parents or to seek to engage parents in classes, courses, or meetings. Materials relating to literacy or numeracy initiatives have also been brought to homes.



Parents supporting each other.

Monitoring, reporting and evaluating are continuous and are carried out in conjunction with the HSCL coordinators. Regular meetings take place in the school during any series of visits. All concerns that arise within the defined areas of educational information are referred back to the coordinator. The coordinators and the visitors are very aware of the boundaries of this work. Family concerns are treated in total confidence.

Visitors work generally in their own area. At first they may work in pairs to support one another. The training and skill development of the parent visitors is continuous. They are kept informed, by means of regular area meetings, of all changes and developments in education. For example, they attend sessions on curricular changes, including subjects such as SPHE, at both the primary and the post-primary level. They also attend school policy development sessions. These informational meetings are held five times in each year.

### Case study 1: A Local experience

In 2004, under the Back to Education Initiative, the HSCL cluster of coordinators worked with a local community college to develop an advanced course for the parent visitors, which was accredited as a FETAC level 2 course. The purpose of this course, besides enhancing and developing skills, was to provide initial certification for those wishing to pursue a career or further studies in the education area. The parents studied four units within their module:

- progression in education
- the parent as the primary educator
- the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme
- parent-to-parent educational home visitors.

### Outcome

The outcome of the work of the parents as home visitors ranges over a spectrum, such as efficient information provision, targeted involvement, practical visible partners, and personal development.

The benefits include the following:

- Large numbers of families can be visited within a short time.
- Personal contact allows the information to be conveyed verbally or in writing, as necessary.
- The visit can take place at any time appropriate to the family.

Visitors have worked successfully on focused projects throughout the school year, where a specific number of families can be visited more frequently to achieve a particular aim. For example, parents have visited in relation to homework support and family literacy and numeracy programmes. One numeracy programme involved bringing educational games to homes and the monitoring of their use by parents with their children.

Home visitors develop an increased personal confidence and awareness of educational and work opportunities. There is a constant need to retrain new groups, as existing visitors move to other interests, including work or study.

Finally, for the school community these parent visitors generally move on to a more active role in the home, school, community partnership.

### Case study 2: Parents as educational home visitors

Since 1997 it has been part of the practice of the HSCL Scheme to train parents as home visitors. This study of parents as home visitors was conducted by a HSCL coordinator in the course of pursuing further studies. A semi-structured interview was used to survey ten home visitors who had been visiting parents over a period of three years. The visitors came from three different areas where home visiting is well established. The visitors called to homes on behalf of six different schools. Four parents represented secondary schools, five represented primary schools, and two called on behalf of Early Start. They visited between ten and thirty homes in any one year. This study is based on the experience of the visitors as reported in their interviews.

#### Profile of a visitor

The visitors interviewed feel that a good home visitor should be sensitive, able to read a situation, sympathetic, reasonably outgoing, and non-judgemental. All visitors are articulate and passionate about the education of their own children. One parent admits that her own literacy level was poor, while others regretted having left school early. All have attended, or are attending, courses in their schools, varying from leisure courses, such as swimming or painting, to accredited courses in the areas of information technology, mathematics, and child care. Many have been involved in policy-making in their schools, have helped in the classroom, published newsletters for parents, or made submissions on the revised curriculum through

their parents' association. One visitor served on her school's board of management, while another attended the National Forum on Disadvantage in Dublin in July 2002.

When they visit, these parents bring with them the experience, knowledge, skills and best practice that they have acquired. They encourage other parents to get involved in the school. Five visitors go out alone; the other five visit in pairs. All homes are informed in advance of the visit. Some visitors telephone in advance to arrange a precise time; the others call at a time they think would be suitable. This varies from 10 a.m. to "after dinner."

Four aspects of the necessary development for parents as educational home visitors are discussed in this account and their role evaluated. The areas for development are: motivation, awareness, information and knowledge, and communication.

## 1. Motivation

The parents interviewed in this study became home visitors because

- they believed in home visiting
- they felt it would increase their own confidence to offer support to the school
- of their desire to help other parents
- the coordinator invited them to participate
- they wanted to ensure that other parents would have a positive experience with regard to their child's education.

Zappone reports "anger about their own experience in education" among parents.<sup>30</sup> Cullen sees the parents' own experience translated into a belief in the importance of education.<sup>31</sup> These two elements emerge clearly from interviews with the parents under discussion here.

*"My mother never came to the school. She was too busy rearing five children to an age when they could earn money."*

Another parent has very bad memories of school. She was bullied and harassed by one particular teacher, who caused her to leave school early. Her daughter was upset recently: a teacher was making unrealistic demands of her. The parent thought it through, wrote out her points, and made them calmly and respectfully at a parent-teacher meeting. She feels that her work as a home visitor has given her the necessary skill to deal with awkward situations.

## 2. Awareness

All the visitors enjoyed the initial training. The role-playing aspect was most significant in the training course. Some hated it, some enjoyed it; all appreciated the value of it on the doorstep. Included among the strengths of the training were the sharing of life experiences and the mix of parents from primary and post-primary schools. Following initial training and some home visits, a feedback session was held. This was particularly enjoyable and worth while.

<sup>30</sup> Zappone, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Cullen, 2000.

Three visitors have recently completed a top-up training course. This included leadership skills and assertiveness and was very valuable. Visitors feel that all courses help personal development and that their own continuing education is important.

### Reasons for visiting

The purpose of the visit varies from school to school. Some schools train parents for a specific task; others train them and then decide what the task will be. Two parents presented welcome packs for Early Start. Three parents brought pre-entry packs for incoming junior infants. Four brought information leaflets or packs to the homes of incoming post-primary pupils. Two presented an anti-bullying policy on behalf of a primary school; and one brought a calendar of religious events to the homes of a First Communion class. The Early Start and pre-entry packs proved to be a great icebreaker. Parents believe that visits at transfer points prepare them as well as reaching out to the children.



Parents supporting each other.

Two visitors presented an anti-bullying policy drawn up by parents and teachers, working together. It was decided to personally deliver the draft policy to the parents of a selected class in an effort to get feedback. After initial confusion, people were reassured to know that there was a clearly laid-out system for dealing with bullying situations, and that strategies for prevention had been established in the school.

A number of HSCL coordinators in one area report that their boards of management had reservations when home visiting was first suggested. Their concerns were about the sensitivity and discretion required when the visitors would be faced with difficult situations. The visitors in this study were both respectful and kind in their contacts with other parents.

### The benefits for visitors

Many visitors mention increased self-confidence as a personal benefit of being a visitor. This appears to be linked to the acquisition of new skills: listening, speaking to groups of parents and professionals, contributing at seminars and workshops, and problem-solving. Visitors report that they have developed friendships with the parents they visit, with other visitors, and with teachers. They have earned the respect of the school community. Visitors also say that their children are more inclined to share school experiences with them as they (the visitors) become more informed about the school. All visitors are conscious of the importance of their own role in their child's education. They see this role as different from but complementary to that of the school. The school's responsibility ends between 3 and 4 p.m.; theirs is an all-day, lifelong duty. They offer encouragement to their children and a belief that success can be achieved.

Visitors feel that the school, the children and the homes all gain from the visit. The school is seen as caring, in reaching out, especially to those who have not yet started. The incoming infant children benefit, in that they feel a sense of belonging, even before they start. The children often listen in during the visit; one post-primary pupil asked more questions of the visitors than the

parents did. The parents can ask questions and share their concerns in the comfort of their own home with a peer. Visitors, in this study, see the strength of their position as that of the non-professional. In some areas where parents feel threatened or isolated they value the opportunity to speak to someone who is neutral, from outside the community, as in the person of the HSCL coordinator.

### The concerns shared

Parents' concerns vary according to the level of schooling their child has reached. The main concern for parents is how the children changing school will cope with their new environment.

**Table 1: Concerns of parents at points of transfer**

Early Start	Primary school	Post-primary school
settling in	settling in	settling in
crumbly lunches	suitable lunches	lunchtime supervision
length of session	new subjects in curriculum	number of new subjects
clothes	uniform or tracksuit	heavy books
going to the toilet	going to the toilet	organising locker
	bullying	bullying
		mixed classes
		getting lost

Bullying is a concern for parents at both the primary and the post-primary level. Home visitors are able to reassure parents that many of their fears are unfounded, and they take the opportunity to stress the importance of reporting bullying. Those parents who present an anti-bullying policy are able to describe the steps in reporting and dealing with bullying incidents, as well as preventive strategies devised by parents and teachers.

Lareau<sup>32</sup> and Reay<sup>33</sup> found that working-class parents had not got the access to educational knowledge, family and friends working in education or the social networks that middle-class parents had. It is clear that the visitors fulfil these roles for each other by offering friendship and a social network, sharing their knowledge of the school system and the supports that work for them.

When confronted with questions, the visitors became aware of the amount of school knowledge they had acquired.

*"We were afraid of what type of questions they might ask, but in a lot of cases it was basic questions that we took for granted. I was after putting three of them through the school. I didn't realise how much I picked up along the way."*

<sup>32</sup> Lareau, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Reay, 1998.

### 3. Information and knowledge

First-time parents often have little knowledge of the child-centred curriculum introduced in primary schools in 1971 and revised in 1999, or of the positive changes that have taken place. Visitors explain the broader curriculum and how parents can support learning.

*“You tell them school is different now. I never realised that school could be so good and the teachers so friendly. Parents are so involved too. It’s great for you too.”*

**Table 2: Information shared with parents during visits**

Early Start	Primary school	Post-primary school
opening times	staggered opening times	timetables
suitable clothing	where uniform available	where uniform available
curriculum content	curriculum changes	lunchtime clubs
toy library	bullying policies	bullying policies
assistant’s role	easy-to-tie shoes or bag	layout of school
parents’ rota	dealing with problems	dealing with problems
	healthy lunches	use of lockers
	toy and book libraries	parents’ room
	parents’ room or courses	talks and workshops

Post-primary schools can be daunting for both parents and children, particularly if the parents themselves were early school-leavers. Visitors talk about strategies and supports that work for them.

### 4. Communication

Visitors feel that their relationship with teachers has improved as a result of being involved with the school. Respect and equality underpin their relationship now. A lot of the houses are very welcoming and really appreciative. “We couldn’t believe it. We thought they’d take the leaflet and say, ‘Goodbye, now.’ We got a good start: our first home visit was excellent. I’m still friendly with the lady today. They brought us in, sat us down, cups of tea and everything, she was so interested.”

#### Conclusion

Home visiting is strongly endorsed by the interviewees. Personal change for parents as a result of becoming home visitors begins on the training course. Increased self-confidence, better communication and good listening are among these changes. Visitors develop friendships with teachers, the parents they visit, and other visitors, including those from other schools. They become aware of the amount of school knowledge they have gained through the years. They share information and knowledge of school and the benefits of participation and good communication and listen to concerns parents have about their children. These worries are then relayed to the school. Visitors become aware of the many ways in which they support their own children and thus

are affirmed in their own parenting. Those visited welcome and appreciate the contact from the school. New parents have only their own experience of school, sometimes negative, to draw on. They use the visit to share their concerns.

The practice of home visiting by parents has developed throughout the country during the past nine years. Its strength lies in the low-key, non-judgemental, friendly tone of the visits. The visitors are seen as objective participants in school life, while parents share concerns they might be slow to share with a professional. Visitors are taking a more active role in home visiting by shopping for and assembling packs, getting involved in training new visitors, and disseminating good practice. The experienced visitors are a support system to the HSCL coordinator, reducing the coordinator's work load and providing a listening ear in the community.





# Integrated Services

The most effective response to the needs of pupils at risk is a multi-faceted approach, which cuts across the boundaries of school, agency services, and government departments. A number of initiatives by the Department of Education and Science have been developed to support communities and schools serving designated areas of educational disadvantage. These include the HSCL Scheme, Early Start, the Support Teacher Project, the School Completion Programme, and the Junior Certificate School Programme. The department stated in the late 1990s that “the HSCL Scheme is now the cornerstone and force for integration of service in all Department strategies that are designed to address educational disadvantage and early school leaving.”

This integration takes place at the national level and at the local level. At the national level, coordinators meet and work closely together, so that they and their teams may provide the same message at the school and the community level. They also support each other’s work when visiting schools. This chapter examines how integration takes place at the local level and describes models of best practice in operation throughout the HSCL Scheme. The process involved will be explored under the following headings:

### **Section 1. Staff development**

A clear understanding of the role of the coordinator on the part of principals, other staff members and coordinators of the various initiatives is crucial to the integrated provision of services to marginalised children and their families.

### **Section 2. The role of the HSCL coordinator**

The HSCL coordinators work with the parents and significant adults in the lives of the children at whom the various initiatives are aimed. Teachers and other professionals are employed to work with the children.

### **Section 3. Networking**

HSCL coordinators liaise with the various voluntary and statutory bodies in the community, encouraging a cohesive provision of service and directing parents towards agencies and support in the community.

## **Section 1: Staff development**

“The HSCL scheme seeks to develop teacher and staff attitudes in the area of partnership and a whole-school approach.” This development is integral to the successful provision of integrated services within the school. In this section a school principal, a classroom teacher and a learning support teacher describe their work with the HSCL coordinator. Their clear understanding of the role of the coordinator demonstrates an awareness and appreciation of the manner in which the HSCL Scheme can enhance their work. The relationship between the HSCL coordinator and the guidance counsellors at the post-primary level is also emphasised.

### **Personal reflection of a principal on the HSCL Scheme**

*“It is easy to write about a topic for which you feel passion and empathy. The HSCL Scheme was established in our school in 1995, and I have witnessed at first hand the evolution of the scheme both in my role as a teacher and later as principal.”*

*The role of the HSCL coordinator is very different from that of the class teacher. The coordinator has been professionally developed to meet the diverse needs of this post, and it is vital that principals have faith and a belief in the ability of the HSCL coordinator to carry out their duties effectively. Principals, therefore, must act in a supportive and encouraging way towards the role of the HSCL coordinator. In choosing the 'road less travelled,' the HSCL coordinator must be affirmed and acknowledged by the principal, and given the necessary autonomy to carry out their job with vision, enthusiasm, and emotional intelligence.*

*In schools serving designated areas of disadvantage the HSCL Scheme is a preventive strategy aimed at families whose children are unable to maximise their potential in the education system because of environmental factors. In such areas the principal and the HSCL coordinator must work in a mutually respectful and supportive fashion, each role complementing the other. The principal needs the HSCL coordinator for support in ensuring that the most marginalised are pursued and respectfully invited to engage meaningfully with the school; the HSCL coordinator needs the sincere support and genuine commitment of the principal in order to undertake this task."*

#### **A class teacher reflects on working with the HSCL coordinator**

*"I have experienced the Home, School, Community Liaison coordinator to be an agent for change in the life of the school and in family relationships. As I reflect on the beginning of this academic year I remember vividly the struggle to engage the interest of the children in school work. For some of them the struggle of their inner lives was so marked that they seemed unable to focus on external reality and therefore could not take information offered in school about the outside world. I soon realised that if I was ever going to connect with these children I would need to reach out to their parents.*

*It was at this point that the HSCL coordinator came to my assistance. She invited the parents to come to a meeting, which was designed to provide them with information about how I work with the children in the classroom. School rules, homework, code of positive behaviour and boundaries were discussed. We also exchanged some ideas on how to help children with their homework. Some of the parents doubted their ability to help their children to master new content, especially in mathematics and reading. Once the connection had been established, the HSCL coordinator continued to encourage the involvement and support of the parents. To help allay their fears they were given a chance to experience at first hand their children learning in an environment that is pleasant and non-threatening.*

*This was facilitated by organising art and craft workshops with parents and children; parents reading for pleasure with their children in school and parents helping their children write a story at home. These stories were compiled to make the first book the class had ever written. The coordinator has raised awareness in these parents of their own capacity to engage in their children's educational progress. They have also been assisted in developing relevant skills by attending courses organised by the HSCL coordinator in the school. The provision of child-care facilities has been a great help in enabling the parents to attend these courses.*

*The coordinator has been and is an important support in the life of my class. This support has greatly helped me as a teacher. I consider the home visitation to be an effective way of making contact with parents and a crucial element in establishing the bonds of trust with families. The coordinator has helped sow the seeds of partnership in the context of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children."*

### **A learning support teacher describes links with the HSCL coordinator in developing parent-teacher partnership**

*“The Learning Support Guidelines of 2000 point out that the success of the learning support programme depends upon effective communication with parents (p. 48). These guidelines also suggest that the learning support teacher should ‘demonstrate techniques and strategies to parents that will enable them to help with their child’s development in such areas as oral language, reading, writing and mathematics’ (p. 49). It is widely acknowledged that collaboration and consultation with parents on all aspects of a child’s development have a positive effect. While in no doubt about the effectiveness of a parent-teacher partnership, most learning support teachers find that such a partnership is highly difficult to achieve in practice. Often it is the parents of the child with the greatest learning difficulties who fail to turn up for meetings or class workshops. As a result, teachers often assume that parents do not care or cannot be bothered about their children’s education, and they are blamed as being the direct cause of their children’s difficulties.*

*However, to avoid being judgemental and making assumptions about our pupils’ parents it is necessary to understand the needs of parents. Before any learning support teacher can hope to set up a successful partnership with parents they need to understand what the parent is able to do for their child and also what the parent’s own feelings about school and education are. This is where the HSCL coordinator’s expertise becomes an invaluable asset to the learning support teacher. The coordinator can visit the homes of the pupils for initial contact with parents and invite the parents to come in to the school. It is often necessary to point out that the meeting will be friendly and informal, as many of the parents will have negative feelings about school, based on their own experiences.*

*Once parents take that step and overcome their negative feelings it may be necessary for the coordinator and the learning support teacher to organise three or four sessions to convince parents how effective their support and involvement is going to be for their child. It is also essential that they realise how much their support is valued by the school and staff. From here the learning support teacher and the HSCL coordinator need to plan sessions in numeracy and literacy that will demonstrate techniques and strategies that will be of use to the parents, always keeping in mind that parents must not feel under pressure to complete activities that may add to an already busy or chaotic household. The goal must always be to make the connection between the parent and the important part they can play in their child’s learning.*

*Learning support teachers need to build bridges, as they are constantly confronted with problems that originate outside the classroom. To help children cope with or overcome learning difficulties, learning support teachers need to work closely with the HSCL coordinator, as their contribution is essential to the development of a successful parent-teacher relationship.”*

### **Guidance counsellors and HSCL coordinators**

Coordinators at the post-primary level often work closely with guidance counsellors in fulfilling the objectives of the HSCL Scheme.

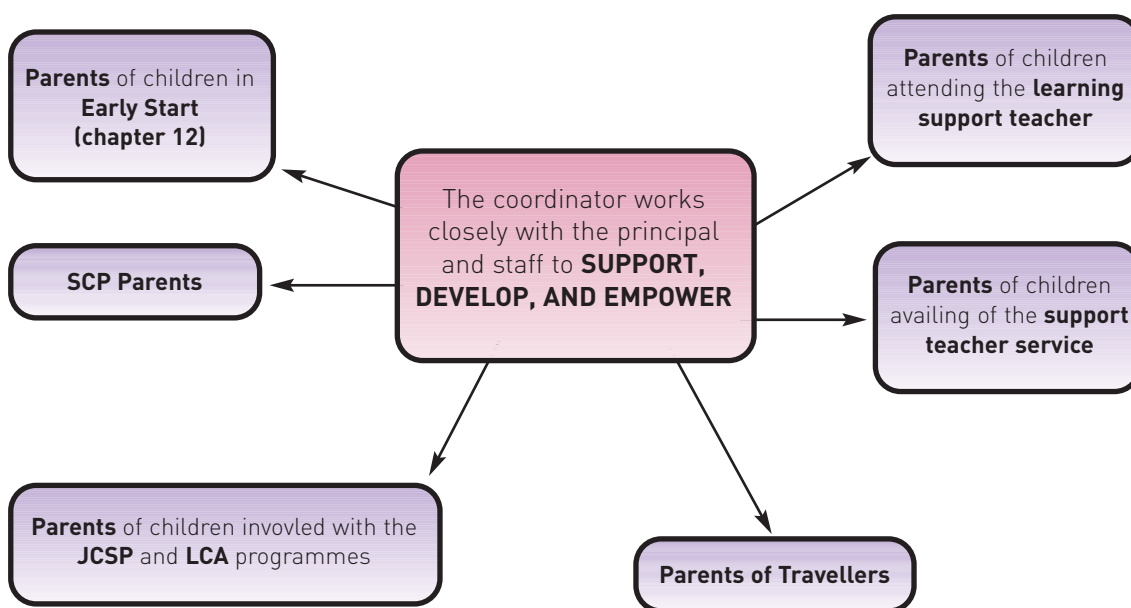
The HSCL coordinator develops a friendly working relationship with parents or guardians, while the guidance counsellor works in a pastoral capacity with the individual pupil. The outcome is a valuable, holistic understanding of the young person and the environment in which they live, which is reached through shared knowledge and experience.

The guidance counsellor directs an individual pupil towards a suitable career path and provides the information required to pursue it successfully. This may involve information about FÁS, PLC courses, or one of the various access programmes available at the moment, so that the necessary support is forthcoming. The HSCL coordinator can do this during a home visit.

Co-operation between teachers holding different roles in the school and parents or guardians is necessary so that the pupils' educational success is enhanced. Each role has its own targets and responsibilities, which are reached more effectively by good communications within the school and with the home.

## Section 2: The role of the HSCL coordinator

The work of the HSCL coordinator is directed at the most disadvantaged, linking closely with initiatives by the Department of Education and Science to break the cycle of disadvantage. "The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviour impinge on the lives of children, namely parents and teachers."



### Role of the HSCL coordinator with Early Start

[See chapter 12.]

### The HSCL coordinator working with the support teacher

The role of the support teacher is to enable pupils who are disruptive, disturbed or withdrawn to develop appropriate social, personal and behaviour management skills in order to participate fully in the daily life of the school and the wider community. Parents are consulted in the selection of such pupils.

The HSCL coordinator works closely with the support teacher, principal and parents in the process. They will liaise with the parents at the early stages, support parents in reviewing the support allocated to their child, and generally inform the parents through home visits, or informally in the school, of the child's progress while in school.

The coordinator facilitates contact between the parent and the support teacher. This contact provides opportunities for the sharing of information, for positive improvements to be communicated to parents, and for parents to get practical tips on dealing with their child's behaviour. The coordinator supports the parents in working on the agreed targets and encourages them to avail of local services, such as Barnardo's or parenting courses in the family centres.

Outcomes for the parents include:

- the strengthening of links between home and school
- the provision of a positive contact for parents in the school
- the improvement of parenting skills and a greater willingness to become more active in their child's education
- the development of more effective strategies to deal with challenging behaviour, which often results in improved learning opportunities.

The work of the HSCL coordinator is a vital component in ensuring that the support teacher works in a cohesive, meaningful and successful manner.

### **The HSCL coordinator working with Traveller parents**

Traveller parents are included in all HSCL activities, and generally they require continuing intensive support from the HSCL coordinator. Regular home visits are necessary to support the Traveller family and to allow for a two-way flow of information between home and school. Special links are made between the HSCL coordinator, the resource teacher working with Traveller children, and the visiting teacher for Travellers (VTT). Literacy is often an issue in the Traveller home; the help of the HSCL coordinator is often required, therefore, with filling out enrolment forms, psychological assessments and the explanation of school policies. Intensive support is particularly required at points of transfer, such as when entering junior infants and again when beginning in the post-primary school. Information is provided on obtaining books, uniforms, and transport.

As there is a high level of mobility among Travellers, with new children entering the system at a variety of levels during the year, the support of the HSCL coordinator is vital in the transfer. Parents frequently call on the coordinator for assistance with practical issues and general information when children are preparing for Holy Communion and Confirmation. Parents also require a lot of support to encourage attendance at parent-teacher meetings and meetings with learning-support teachers.

It is a continuous challenge for the coordinator to involve Traveller parents in HSCL activities in the school. Networking with community agencies that work with Travellers, particularly literacy coordinators, is vital in this process. In one area these links were made at the beginning of the HSCL Scheme in the school, with Traveller parents meeting every Thursday morning in the parents' room. Over the sixteen years of the HSCL Scheme this group has progressed from an initial support group through literacy work and a range of self-development programmes to

participation in the FETAC Child Care Programme. This group provides a focal point for new Traveller parents coming to the area.

The coordinators are regularly invited to other meetings with Travellers in the community to discuss school-related issues. Recently one of the coordinators was invited by the VTT and the EWO to give a presentation to a group of Travellers on attendance, with practical steps on encouraging attendance.

Another project to support Traveller parents involved a collaborative approach between the VTT, the member of the support team working with Travellers, and the HSCL coordinator. All Traveller parents with children in the school, from junior infants to fourth class, were invited to the parents' room to meet the learning support teacher. In preparation, all parents received a home visit and were consulted on the time that suited them best.

The aim of the group was to name the issues that are affecting the Traveller child's education and to look at ways in which the school can support them. Over a series of four workshops the learning support teacher

- discussed ways in which parents can support their child, even when literacy is an issue, for example explaining the homework journal, showing them where to sign it, and giving advice on helping children to organise their materials
- discussed methods that value the word box, with simple suggestions to encourage children to play with the words at home
- discussed ways in which educational materials would be used in the home; these were given to the Traveller parents, and they were shown how to use them with the children
- helped the parents become familiar with simple number activities that would subsequently be used in Mathematics for Fun sessions in the classroom.

The four workshops and all the activities encouraged the participation of Traveller parents in the educational life of their children and of the school.

## Outcome

Good relations with Traveller parents have been fostered. More parents are establishing contact with the school to discuss their child's progress and are more supportive in their attitude towards dealing with challenging behaviour. Traveller parents are now striving to improve their literacy skills and are expressing the view that they want more education for their own children. The general attendance of Traveller children has improved, with increased participation at the post-primary level. A number of Traveller children are beginning to obtain access to the Early Start pre-school. This has encouraged the participation of Travellers in school activities.

In the words of one Traveller parent, *"I used to look at photographs on the wall of parents doing maths or reading with the children, and I was afraid to take part. But since I began in Early Start I have the confidence to come along."* This parent, who is one of the most developed Traveller parents in this school, went on to take part in art and craft activities, reading sessions and a science workshop in the school. She also participated in the development of the nutrition policy and has become a real role model for other Traveller parents in the school.

The key to success in supporting Traveller parents with their child's education lies in a whole-school approach, combined with close collaboration with the VTTs and with community agencies working with Travellers. The HSCL coordinator is central to this process.



### **Role of the HSCL coordinator and SCP: Rationale for their co-operation**

The Department of Education and Science sees the prevention of early school-leaving as a significant element of the general strategy for tackling educational disadvantage. The HSCL Scheme has as one of its main goals “the enhancement of children’s uptake from education and their retention in the education system.” The HSCL coordinator aims to achieve this goal by working with parents and the significant adults in the child’s life. The aim of SCP is to significantly increase the number of pupils who stay in school and complete their Leaving Certificate by concentrating on those who are at risk of educational disadvantage. The SCP staff provides a wide range of targeted individual and group support to children who may be at risk of early school leaving. From the outset there has been a positive working relationship between HSCL and SCP. HSCL coordinators work with the significant adults involved in children’s education and the local community while members of the SCP staff work with the children at whom the project is aimed. At their best the two schemes operate in an integrated and complementary way and are characterised by a targeted, preventive and partnership approach.

The management structure of SCP differs from area to area. Some areas have a steering group that includes SCP personnel and principals; others have a much larger management body of SCP and principals together with representatives of various voluntary and statutory bodies with an interest in the education and welfare of children. HSCL coordinators are on the management team in all cases. These management bodies usually meet bi-monthly, so the day-to-day running of the scheme is left to SCP, principals, and HSCL coordinators. Each term a meeting is held at which the management unit, parents, voluntary bodies, and statutory bodies, meet to discuss outcomes. HSCL coordinators support parents on the wider management group.

### **Identification and selection**

At the beginning of the school year HSCL coordinators and their principals, following consultation with class teachers, meet SCP personnel and draw up a target list of pupils, based on agreed criteria. These include absenteeism, instability at home, poverty, behavioural issues, a pattern of early school leaving among brothers or sisters, learning difficulties, or lack of family support leading to educational underachievement. They agree on a method of working that allows for a degree of flexibility. The HSCL coordinator will visit the home to invite the parents to participate in the scheme. On agreement, the parents will then meet the SCP personnel, when they are informed of the workings of the programme.

Children who meet the criteria coming from a primary school without HSCL often enrol in a post-primary school with HSCL and SCP. Occasionally pupils in SCP may transfer to a post-primary school without the SCP service but with the HSCL Scheme. When this occurs, links are maintained through the HSCL Scheme.

### **An experience of HSCL and SCP working together**

At the outset the HSCL coordinator plays a vital part in the early identification of children at risk of early school leaving. The HSCL coordinator is in a unique position to co-ordinate information received through home visitation, liaise with members of the school staff, and work with local agencies, both voluntary and statutory. In addition, the HSCL coordinator provides a permanent communication link between SCP staff, school, and home.

### Partnership in action through the Local Committee

The sharing of information and agreed interventions are essential for supporting families at risk. HSCL coordinators, SCP staff members, parents, pupils, principals and representatives of local agencies are all members of the HSCL Local Committee, which identifies issues in the community that impinge on learning and seeks to address them by working collaboratively. Examples of these are attendance policies, parenting courses, after-school provision, and anti-bullying and self-esteem courses. The Local Committee of the HSCL Scheme provides an opportunity to the community to support its children in their learning. The Local Committee has brought schools, agencies, parents and pupils together in a unique model of partnership which often leads to an integrated provision of service. (See chapter 8.)

### Facilitating the academic and extracurricular work of SCP

The HSCL coordinator plays a central role in the introduction of SCP initiatives and in the continuous liaison between SCP personnel and members of the school staff. The SCP personnel provide a wide range of support to pupils. One-to-one academic support for pupils is provided, but it is more often offered to pupils in the classroom. Co-operation and the sharing of good practice between the classroom teacher and members of the SCP staff clearly exist, as is evidenced by the team teaching approach in some schools. The HSCL coordinator facilitates such co-operation and continues to seek opportunities for the professional development of teachers. Furthermore, HSCL coordinators have facilitated SCP staff members in becoming members of the pastoral care team in schools.

The work of the school community is enhanced by the provision by the SCP of a wide range of non-academic support, mainly outside school hours and during holiday time. This non-academic support assists pupils in building self-esteem and social skills and promoting a sense of belonging and ownership and pride in their school. We are aware from research findings that these are prerequisites for the participation of children in the education system. The HSCL coordinator, by informing, connecting with and engaging parents, facilitates an enhanced circle of support for the child.

### Supporting parents

Parallel with the work of the SCP staff and identified pupils, HSCL coordinators work with these selected parents because they are committed to the principle that parents are the primary educators of their children. The coordinator gets to know the needs of parents and is sympathetic to any difficulties they may experience in keeping their child in school. Pupils themselves can often put pressure on parents to allow them to leave school early, particularly after the Junior Certificate examination. Pupils can become disengaged from school, and parents can feel powerless. The coordinator, by being close to parents and being on hand when difficulties arise, can play a critical role in liaison between school and home. The coordinator not only provides a listening ear for parents but is always seeking practical ways in which the school and SCP staff can provide extra support for pupils, as for example gaining access to extra tuition and after-school study.

### **Supporting the transfer from primary to post-primary school**

HSCL coordinators begin transfer programmes in primary school and continue such programmes at the post-primary level. SCP staff members work with HSCL coordinators in providing complementary support to pupils and parents. Topics covered include the working of timetables, subject options, and school rules. If resource hours are allocated to a particular pupil, educational or psychological reports are passed on to the school in question. HSCL personnel will get the required parental permission.

This integrated and collaborative approach makes transfer from primary to post-primary school easier for child and parent. The success of transfer and continuing support programmes for children and parents is evident in the fact that pupils who were nominated for the programme ten years ago, when they were in primary school, are now completing a Leaving Certificate programme. The HSCL Scheme, which is integrated at the primary and the post-primary level, has resulted in many parents benefiting from the support of a HSCL coordinator throughout their child's education.

### **Involvement of parents**

HSCL coordinators support parents on management committees of the SCP. Training programmes organised by HSCL coordinators have enabled parents to have their voice heard on these committees. Some coordinators have brought parents together to form a support group. HSCL coordinators guide parents through the running of meetings. The practice of holding these meetings at school venues has the added benefit of giving parents and teachers an opportunity to communicate with each other. Parents and coordinators meet monthly to share information and organise activities. HSCL coordinators are inviting parents into the decision-making process that governs their children's learning. Parents on these support groups speak of the huge benefit of coming together and realising that other parents experience difficulties with their children. They are not only coming together to receive support but are actively giving support to other parents. They are sharing ideas and parenting skills and as a result have increased their confidence and self-esteem. Some parents in these groups are moving towards being a resource for other parents.

HSCL coordinators organise courses on various subjects, including computers, parenting, and personal development for parents. Some parents, having completed these courses, are willing to be involved in such activities as breakfast clubs. The HSCL coordinator works with the SCP staff and other agencies to provide a co-ordinated programme of summer activities. Parents make a contribution to summer programmes and have advised SCP staff members on activities; some parents have presented these programmes. Where this has occurred, the parents witness meaningful participation, involvement, and empowerment. The empowerment of parents is the key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage for many families.

### **HSCL coordinator and JCSP: The rationale for co-operation**

Collaboration between the HSCL Scheme and the Junior Certificate School Programme has the potential to raise pupils' literacy and numeracy competence and to involve parents in this process. The coordinators of these two programmes have complementary roles in supporting those pupils who are showing signs of difficulty in school. JCSP personnel work with the pupil or class teacher; the HSCL coordinator works with the class teacher, the parent and the community.

The JCSP is a Department of Education and Science programme for post-primary schools. It is a supportive intervention within the Junior Certificate programme that aims to ensure that all participating pupils sit the same Junior Certificate examination as their peers but in a reduced number of subjects. It provides a pupil-centred approach for those finding it difficult to cope with the school system and who might otherwise leave school without certification.

One of the aims of the JCSP is to establish, acknowledge and build on success at the post-primary level. This success is acknowledged and recorded by building a folder of the pupil's work and achieved targets. This folder provides an opportunity for parents to be involved in the JCSP. At the end of the junior cycle, pupils are awarded individualised final profiles by the Department of Education and Science that attest to their achievements over their three-year junior cycle. This profile describes their achievements within the formal curriculum as well as their successes in such areas as punctuality, ability to work independently, and co-operating with others.

Parents can often feel disempowered once their child goes to post-primary school. In disadvantaged areas they may feel challenged in supporting their child's education. The child can often block the parents from links with the school and the curriculum. Information is often difficult to elicit from a teenager about what goes on at school. In such cases, parents need support and advice on how to stay in touch with their child's progress.

Recognising the benefit of parents' interest and support, JCSP has parental involvement through literacy and numeracy initiatives as one of its objectives. This objective is achieved by a collaborative process between the HSCL coordinator, JCSP in-school coordinator, and JCSP team. Part of the JCSP literacy and numeracy strategy is to engage pupils in exciting short-term interventions designed to motivate and accelerate aspects of literacy and numeracy.

The JCSP national team supports the schools by providing resources, funding, expertise, and research. It promotes a whole-school approach to literacy development, which often involves a cross-curricular collaborative approach. Parents' involvement is valued and promoted. HSCL coordinators and subject teachers can explore possible ways in which parents and teachers can work together for the benefit of the child's education and in which continuing involvement by parents can be strengthened.

### **Preparation**

"Make a Book," "Reading Challenge" and "Word Millionaire" are examples of JCSP literacy initiatives. Each initiative is preceded by planning meetings, involving subject teachers and HSCL and JCSP coordinators. A target group of pupils is selected. A suitable programme is chosen and is tailored to meet the pupils' needs and strengths.

### **Process**

The JCSP coordinator invites the parents to a school information meeting. The HSCL coordinator supports and encourages the parents to attend. If parents are unable to come to the school meeting the HSCL coordinator visits the family at home with the information and continues to support the family.

At the school meeting the JCSP coordinator explains how the initiative works and the benefits to the child and the parent. Guidelines for monitoring or supporting activity at home are given to the parents. The reservations or concerns of the parents are discussed. They agree to support the child's work at home. The pupils work at home on the books they have selected, and they commit themselves to reading aloud to their parents on designated days each week. The parents agree to give priority to time on each of those days to support the child's work. This activity can be done in a number of ways: listening to the child reading, talking about it, signing a progress record sheet.

The strategy promotes reading for pleasure, through easy access to the most interesting and up-to-date reading materials. The children are challenged to read a certain amount over a set period, and, when encouraged by their parents, great progress is possible. When the initiative is finished the parents are invited to the school to celebrate their child's achievements. They are encouraged to bring younger children to the celebration, which is jointly organised by the HSCL and JCSP coordinators. There is an agreement with the teaching team that no negative issues will be raised at the celebration. At celebrations such as this and those at the end of the year the children's work is displayed. The JCSP folder contains Junior Certificate statements and learning targets. Parents can get a clear picture of their child's progress through these folders. A number of the child's teachers attend these celebrations, and the folders provide a focus for constructive discussion with the parent about the child's school work.

The JCSP postcards are a convenient and attractive way for teachers to communicate with home and to acknowledge the child's achievements and effort. These postcards were developed by pupils. Parents and children feel valued when the postcards arrive. Parents take pride in showing them to the HSCL coordinator on home visits; this in turn is reported back to the teacher who sent the card.

## Outcome

Collaboration between HSCL and JCSP coordinators has resulted in many positive outcomes, such as:

- positive communication between school and home
- JCSP in-service opportunities for dissemination of best practice
- HSCL coordinators presenting models of engaging parents directly in the child's education in such areas as delivering literacy packs to the home, keywords for subjects, and supporting and monitoring their use
- the class teacher listing keywords each week that describe the characters and themes in the novel
- the HSCL coordinator bringing these keywords to the parents, who agree to do the homework with their child.

Such literacy initiatives have supported the direct involvement of parents in their child's learning and have linked the work in class with work at home. This facilitates the parent and the child in spending quality time together, provides a positive experience for parents in the school setting, advances the child's school performance, and provides constructive exchange between teacher and parent.

There have also been unplanned outcomes. HCSL coordinators have found that bringing literacy materials into the home has resulted in other family members requesting help with literacy. Many JCSP libraries have systems whereby the parent can borrow books through the child.

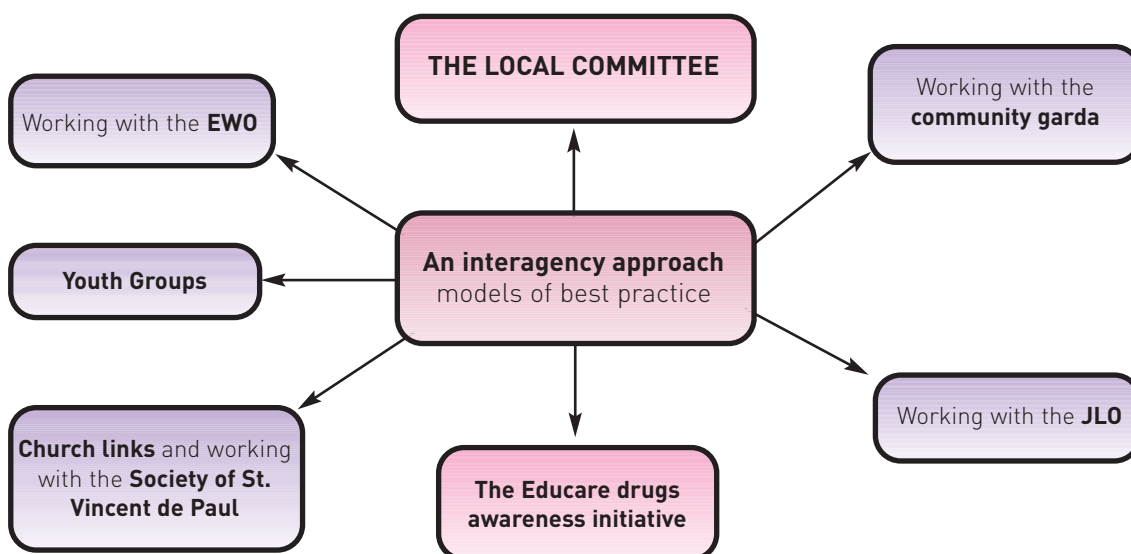
### The HSCL Scheme and the LCA

Partnership is a cornerstone of all HSCL activities, and this is particularly evident in how the scheme integrates with the Leaving Certificate Applied. Many Local Committees include LCA pupils, which adds a unique aspect to their work and gives the pupils a greater sense of responsibility in relation to their school, community, and local environment. Work experience, a central component of the LCA, often follows as a result of pupils' involvement and work with employers on the Local Committee. HSCL coordinators inform parents of how the LCA is structured; during home visits they keep parents advised of project tasks and operational matters of the LCA.

## Section 3: Networking

Networking with the statutory and voluntary agencies enhances the effectiveness of the HSCL Scheme. HSCL coordinators work closely with agencies of the Health Service Executive, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of Education and Science, and Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Many voluntary bodies are also a constant source of support for the HSCL coordinators. Coordinators network especially with the various youth clubs and sports groups and most frequently with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The links with statutory bodies vary according to where coordinators work.

The following are examples of practical and fruitful co-operation that exists between HSCL coordinators and some of the statutory and voluntary bodies.



### Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO)

Local JLOs are a great support for the HSCL coordinator. In many instances they are members of the Local Committee, and they assist in addressing issues that impinge on the education of our pupils. The main objective of the JLO is to ensure, as far as possible, that young people do not acquire a criminal record before they reach the age of eighteen. Because they work closely with pupils at risk, and their parents and families, they are a great source of advice and information and are often able to assist HSCL coordinators in addressing minor difficulties before they develop.

### Community Gardaí and the HSCL coordinator

The community garda plays an active part in the Local Committee and works in partnership with the community in eradicating anti-social behaviour and ultimately in preventing it. They are involved with the school in a number of ways, such as accompanying pupils and teachers on school trips and outings and giving presentations to pupils on a variety of topics. The work between the community garda and the HSCL coordinator seeks to foster good relations between the Gardaí and young people in areas of designated disadvantage and with the wider local community. In working with HSCL coordinators, the community garda becomes known to the school population, and his/her presence is seen in a positive light.



Community Gardaí presenting an EBS cheque to parents for further learning.

### The HSCL coordinator networking with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO)

The EWO provides a service to schools in areas of disadvantage in ensuring that each child between six and sixteen years of age attends school regularly. An EWO states: "In dealing with absences from school it is the brief of the EWO to focus on the reason why and to work collaboratively with schools to bring about improvement. While the responsibility for the official school returns to the NEWB lies with the school principal or designated staff member, close co-operation and co-ordination of effort between the EWO and the HSCL coordinator is vital in the provision of the service."

The main purpose of regular meetings between the EWO and the HSCL coordinator is to identify pupils with attendance difficulties and to plan strategies to help support and encourage parents whose children may be absent. Information on support for parents, pre-school provision and transfer programmes is also shared.

The issue of poor attendance is handled in a sensitive, professional and confidential manner. In preparation, the HSCL coordinator talks to class teachers to identify children with worrying patterns of attendance, for example those with twenty days missed or who are missing regularly on Monday or Friday. The HSCL coordinator helps the EWO to gain an insight into social and family backgrounds. The EWO gives information on the attendance pattern of siblings in other schools;

and information from outside agencies is also shared. Together, they build up a profile of the family, to identify the root causes of absenteeism and an agreed strategy is then developed.

Initially the HSCL coordinator may visit the family to discuss the general progress of the child and heighten the parents' awareness of the negative effect of poor attendance on the child's education. Alternatively, the class teacher may be in a position to initiate discussion with the parent, either informally at the classroom door or formally at a parent-teacher meeting. If a pupil is absent for twenty days or more the EWO will send a letter to the family, and a follow-up visit may be required. In some situations, tackling an attendance issue may require the combined support of a number of agencies, including SCP, social workers, Barnardo's, and the visiting teacher for Travellers. It is also effective to hold a joint meeting between coordinators, SCP personnel, EWO and parents to address the issue.

### Outcome

The EWO works with staff members and parents to develop an effective attendance policy. Families are supported through an inter-agency approach in addressing issues affecting poor attendance. Positive habits of attendance have been established in families. Younger children in identified families have been selected for Early Start, where regular patterns of attendance are fostered. Information is shared on new pupils entering the school, and attention is drawn to children moving to other schools, ensuring that they are not lost in the system. Positive improvements in attendance are noted, and feedback is given to parents, emphasising the corresponding link with achievement in school. Again, an EWO states that "positive co-operation and sharing of information between the EWO and HSCL coordinators has led to marked improvements in attendance levels and to the increased participation of parents and families in school and community support. Parents are now self-referring to the NEWB, looking for advice and assistance regarding their child's education." The collaborative approach of the EWO and of the HSCL coordinator, combined with the resources of the SCP is proving a powerful force in breaking the cycle of absenteeism and early school-leaving.

## An example of best practice: The Educare Drugs Awareness Initiative

The Educare drugs awareness initiative was set up in 2000, in partnership with a number of community organisations, and is part of the drugs prevention strategy in one of our cities. It is managed and administered by HSCL coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in the city. Funding is obtained under the young people's social fund as part of the National Drugs Strategy.

The aim in Educare is to involve parents, teachers and pupils in an awareness-raising process and in developing and providing an intervention programme for use in the primary school. It enhances the knowledge and skills of all participants as well as providing a forum for parents and teachers in which to co-operate as partners.



Programmes used in schools are outlined, as is relevant information on drug prevention programmes. These sessions are facilitated by experienced practitioners, such as members of the Garda Drugs Squad. Pupils in fourth class from each of the participating primary schools attend a facilitated interactive session. They are engaged in discussions, computer activities and a drama workshop, which explores personal choice, the use of language about decision-making, and substance use. Each class teacher receives a folder with follow-up activities for use in the classroom as well as for homework. The programme is evaluated by means of feedback and questionnaires from facilitators and participants.

### **Linking with the Church**

Church links are important for some people when building up a caring and committed community. The HSCL coordinators can contribute to the formation of close links with the church bodies in their communities.

Some HSCL coordinators meet local clergy from the various churches and local church voluntary agencies to discuss projects or clubs that would benefit the children and families in their area who belong to those churches. This involves liaison with the various youth groups that are funded by church bodies and recruiting interested parents and community persons to work on these projects. Many HSCL coordinators, when visiting homes, can be presented with problems that affect the education of children. In circumstances such as bereavement or sickness it may be beneficial to the family to be linked with the care and expertise their particular church can offer.

In Catholic primary schools, opportunities arise whereby the HSCL coordinator can give parents practical help while preparing their children for the sacraments. This help could take the form of explaining what the sacraments involve and attending meetings and enrolment ceremonies organised by the Church and the class teachers. In post-primary schools the HSCL coordinator and chaplain work together as a support for pupils and families within the school, as appropriate. In co-operation with the HSCL coordinator, the chaplain provides a confidential service to pupils in need of personal support.

Certain families need the assistance of voluntary bodies, such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The HSCL coordinator may direct the family towards the society.

### **Society of St Vincent de Paul**

At the family cluster level, HSCL coordinators may liaise individually and collectively with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Through HSCL coordinators, the society supports the families selected through the Local Committee, MABS and adult literacy programmes with

- emotional development through funding and counselling, where required
- training in the areas of home management and stress management
- help with progress to third-level education in families where this is contemplated
- financial help for uniforms and books.

# Early Childhood Education: Early Start

### The role of the HSCL coordinator with Early Start

The Early Start pre-school project offers one year of pre-school to children in designated areas of disadvantage. Parents' involvement is one of the core elements of the programme. The HSCL coordinator works with the Early Start staff to develop a structured plan to support parents, ranging from initial contact with families to the enrolment of new pupils at open days. A programme of structured activities throughout the year is developed. The purpose of the parents' involvement is to develop the parents as prime educators, providing them with the relevant skills to maximise their child's participation in the pre-school process and thus laying the foundations for future educational achievement.

The coordinator grasps every opportunity to plant the seeds of pre-school involvement with the parents on home visits or in the informal contact in the school. It is vital to collaborate with local agencies, including pre-schools, family centres, Barnardo's, public health nurse, speech therapist, EWO and SCP personnel when children for Early Start are being identified. The challenge for schools is to ensure that places go to those most in need. The knowledge of the coordinator is crucial to the integrity of this process.

The process of involving parents begins with pre-entry visits to build valuable relationships with families and to give the parents information about Early Start. In some schools, parents working as home visitors bring pre-entry packs to the home. Advice on the settling-in process and common worries can be discussed between parent and parent in a safe, non-threatening way. The HSCL coordinator supports parents throughout the enrolment procedures, builds up relationships at open days, and assists in a consultative way in the allocation of morning and afternoon places in Early Start. The coordinator provides continuous support for the staff throughout the year. This support is crucial in September. The coordinator reassures parents when their children are settling in and also encourages good attendance. Links are made with local agencies, and procedures for sharing information are established.

The HSCL coordinator supports the integration of Early Start in early childhood provision. The sharing of resources and models of best practice is encouraged between Early Start, junior infants and senior infants, as is movement between groups, if appropriate. In one school a child who had difficulty settling in to junior infants found it reassuring to spend some time in Early Start. One coordinator worked on an Early Years committee to develop a shared reading area for parents, teachers and children from Early Start to senior infants. Funding from the City Partnership supported this project.

Programmes for parents maintain a balance between social and educational activities. Social activities include coffee mornings, Halloween parties, visits to Santa, to a farm or to the theatre, and involvement in sports days. Activities with an educational objective include toy and book libraries, art and craft workshops, parent and child computer classes, and invitations to parents to participate in the classroom in accordance with a rota. In some centres, parents have been trained to present Mathematics for Fun



Parents as partners.

and language development courses. As the year progresses, parents are encouraged to take part in leisure activities in the parents' room and to avail of opportunities for further education. While child care is a continuing challenge, some coordinators have gained access to funding to provide crèche facilities for parents.

### **Outcome**

Parents have a more positive attitude to their child's education. Barriers are broken down, and the parent becomes part of the school community. Parents have higher expectations for their children. On home visits, parents have expressed the view that they are determined not to repeat the mistakes made with older children. They develop good habits of attendance and punctuality. They are more aware of the general conditions required in the home for learning to take place: good health, nutrition, physical activity, and a stimulating learning environment.

Parents are more aware of their potential as educators and have a greater understanding of the learning process and of the activities used in the development of pre-reading and pre-mathematical skills. Having gained confidence from working with educational materials in the Early Start classroom, they are willing to bring educational activities, facilitated by book and toy libraries, into the home. They appreciate the value of play and language development with their children. They are empowered to engage in developmental activities at home, such as cutting and painting, with their child.

Parenting skills are fostered as teachers become real role models for parents. Parents learn to set limits and boundaries and get advice from teachers on dealing with challenging behaviour. The variety of social activities for parents has further enhanced parenting skills by providing opportunities for parent-to-parent support. A powerful indicator for success is the experience of some families where younger children are now reaching their potential. At the school level, teachers' understanding of educational disadvantage is developed. Attitudes have changed towards marginalised parents. Early Start personnel give positive feedback to other teachers on the power of parental involvement; this encourages the promotion of HSCL activities throughout the school.

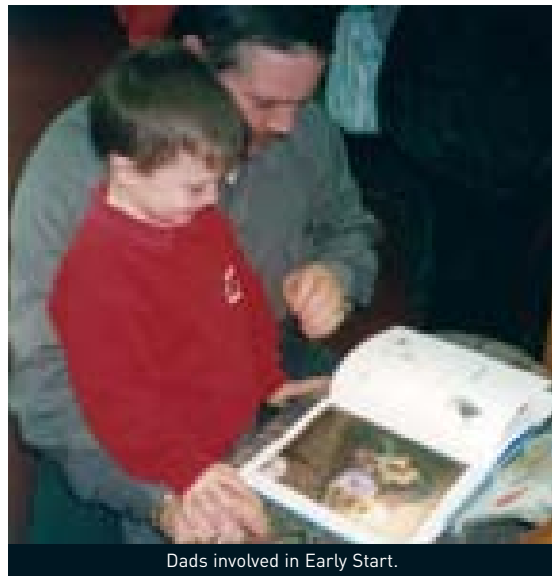
The one-to-one relationships developed between parents and teachers in an informal way at drop-in and collection times have greatly enhanced the confidence and self-esteem of marginalised parents. It is one of the greatest factors in their willingness to become involved. Parents involved with Early Start are more likely to participate in school activities as their child progresses through the school. They form a core group that can be relied on for policy-making and involvement in the classroom as well as home visiting and the Local Committee. In essence, the foundation for much of the HSCL coordinator's work begins at the door of Early Start.

### Case Study 1: A success story with Parents' Week in September

- Day 1:** Parents were welcomed and given an overview of Early Start and of the curriculum and advice on how to make the transition from home to school easier for parents and children.
- Day 2:** The community nurse spoke about the importance of good hygiene practices and the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise.
- Day 3:** The speech therapist outlined the referral procedures for speech therapy and gave advice to parents on helping their child at home.
- Day 4:** The HSCL coordinator discussed parents' involvement in the classroom and demonstrated a storytelling session and a variety of games and materials used in Early Start.
- Day 5:** A coffee morning provided an opportunity for social interaction.

#### Factors contributing to success

- Parents were asked to sign an acceptance form before entry, agreeing to participate in parents' activities.
- In September the coordinator personally invited the parents when they were bringing and collecting children.
- Grandparents and other family members were invited if the parents had work commitments.
- Sessions were short, at forty-five minutes.
- Refreshments were provided.



#### Teacher's comment

*"The Parent Week served to promote a comfortable relationship between parents and teachers, motivating everyone to make the most of the opportunities that Early Start has to offer."*

### Case study 2: A success story with the Book Start scheme

The aim of the Book Start scheme is to promote the importance of reading with children. It is a model of best practice, linking Early Start and junior infants.

- Week 1:** Parents were invited to a meeting with the speech and language therapist. Those who did not attend were visited by the coordinator and encouraged to participate.
- Week 2:** Parents were invited to see a teacher of junior infants modelling storytelling with a child from junior infants. The emphasis was on the language development that can take place during a story.
- Week 3:** Parents were invited to the Early Start classroom to read a story to their own child. All those who attended were given a copy of the book to take home.
- Week 4:** Early Start children and their parents were invited to a storytelling performance by a professional storyteller. The parents again received a copy of the book. This programme was funded by the City Partnership.

### Case study 3: A success story with the Childsplay scheme

The aim of the Childsplay scheme is to encourage parents to develop their child's physical, emotional, social and language skills through physical activity.

**Week 1:** Parents were given an overview of the Childsplay scheme. They were given a pictorial handout describing games that could be played with their child at home.

Then they went to the hall to help organise activities for the Halloween party.

**Week 2:** Parents went to the hall at drop-in time for twenty minutes to engage in balloon play with their child.

**Week 3:** Parent and child spent twenty minutes at ball skills together.

**Week 4:** Parent and child enjoyed twenty minutes of musical games.

**Week 5:** Parents and children took a trip to a local gym.

**Week 6:** Parents and children had an art and craft session, making handprints in clay.

#### Factors that influenced success

- Linking the introductory session to the Halloween party encouraged participation.
- The sessions were enjoyable and non-threatening.
- No literacy skills were required.
- Sessions were short and at a time that suited parents.
- Parents were welcomed even if they were unable to stay for the full session.
- Attendance was encouraged by giving the parents a simple toy to take home, for example a balloon or a ball, to encourage play with their child in the home.
- Children encouraged their parents to attend, and parents looked forward to playing with their child.

#### Outcome

- Parents were more aware of developing their child's skills.
- The confidence of both parents and children was developed.
- Children's vocabulary was improved.
- Parents were provided with an opportunity to learn some of the songs and rhymes done in class.
- Some parents were enabled to progress to FETAC child-care courses.
- A parent secured employment in a school crèche.
- One parent progressed to training as an SNA.



Early Start parents and children enjoying Childsplay programme.

#### **Case study 4: A success story with the Strollers project**

The Strollers project introduced parents to a healthy life-style and encouraged physical activity for all. It also provided a support network for new mothers, especially lone parents.

Each session consisted of

- a short talk by a health professional
- a thirty-minute walk with babies in buggies
- on return, floor exercises with the professional
- healthy snacks provided by the project.

This project was supported by the HSE.

# HSCCL and the Care Team



Within the individual school, especially in post-primary schools, the care team seeks to give effect to a shared sense of purpose in responding to the needs of individual pupils from marginalised communities who, for a variety of reasons, are considered to be at risk.

Disadvantage manifests itself in many different ways, so that the young people whom the care team seek to support often have complex needs, which can be educational, emotional, psychological, medical or developmental in character. The idea of a team approach within a school is intended to bring all the available resources of the school together to address, in a strategic and co-ordinated manner, the complex needs of disadvantaged pupils.

### **Role of the HSCL coordinator in care teams**

An integral part of the role of the HSCL coordinator in the community is to promote a cohesive approach to the provision of services to families in designated areas of disadvantage. This is done by encouraging and facilitating networking among the voluntary and statutory agencies that serve the local community.

The establishment of a care team is intended to promote a similar cohesive approach between the professionals within the school and the distinctive roles they fulfil in relation to individual pupils. In post-primary schools the care team facilitates professional collaboration between all or some of the following: HSCL coordinator, guidance teacher, chaplain, resource teacher, principal or deputy principal, SCP coordinator, year head, teacher for Travellers. A guidance counsellor stated: *“The team helps me to identify students at risk and in need of support. I get insights into individual cases from the HSCL coordinator, the deputy principal and the chaplain which I might not otherwise have. The care team is also a source of support and encouragement when needed.”*

Care teams are a relatively new concept at the primary level. HSCL coordinators, as one of their staff development initiatives, have pioneered the setting up of care teams in primary schools, and they have proved to be extremely successful. A principal's viewpoint is that *“for the first time we have a co-ordinated approach to working with pupils in need in the school. A key to the team's success is the regular timetabled meeting.”*

### **How the care team operates**

Schools differ in how care teams are organised. However, most care teams meet regularly. One or two 40-minute meetings a week is fairly typical at the post-primary level. Most meetings of the care team in primary schools take place during lunch time, as there is less scope for timetabled meetings.

There are differences between schools on the chairing of meetings. Some schools have a permanent chairperson, such as the year head, while others have a rotating or elected chairperson. In all cases the meetings are conceived as professional conversation among peers. Any member of the team may contribute to the conversation by raising an issue of general concern, such as bullying or drug awareness. They may express concern about an individual child or a group of pupils. In addressing the general issues or concern about a particular child, the member of the team looks to the collective wisdom of the care team. The outcome of the discussion often amounts to a school-wide response to help those at risk.

## Supporting pupils

The care team supports pupils experiencing a wide variety of difficulties. The response can combine interventions directed towards the pupil and towards the family. Interventions can be confined to the school or can involve agencies and support personnel from outside. The regular meetings of the care team raise an awareness from which a whole series of child-centred actions may flow, such as

- a consultation between the pupil and the school guidance teacher
- a family visit by the HSCL coordinator
- an arrangement for the family to meet a family therapist
- a plan for the reintegration of an out-of-school pupil.

A school chaplain had this to say: *“The care team, through its care, expertise, respect, support, and openness, accompanies each student and his or her family on the journey through life.”*

An SCP coordinator expresses value for the care team: *“The care team meetings help me to set an agenda for the week and to identify pupils who are in need of encouragement. Without the care team my work would not have the focus it has.”*

Within the school the care team, through the year heads and class tutors, can alert colleagues to changing family circumstances or the pressure on pupils from such factors as long-term unemployment, family difficulties, or illness.

The sense of care lies at the heart of teaching and the relationship between teachers and pupils within the classroom. The care team takes the ethic of caring and applies it throughout all aspects of school life. As Witherell and Noddings say, *“to educate is to take seriously both the quest for life’s meaning and the meaning of individual lives . . . which is to understand the primacy of the caring relation and of dialogue in educational practice.”*<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Witherell and Noddings, 1991.



# Transfer Support Programmes for Parents and Children

## Introduction

The HSCL Scheme seeks to maximise educational opportunities for pupils through parental and community empowerment. The HSCL coordinator supports families in the raising of their expectations for their children and in valuing the possibilities in education. Success at any stage in education is generally the result of a combination of factors, such as encouraging pupils, building their confidence, and carefully monitoring their behaviour, both in school and outside school, as well as respectful support for their parents. The HSCL Scheme strives to ensure that families enjoy a smooth and seamless transfer from one level of education to the next. This aspect of the HSCL Scheme has been one of the easiest to implement since the early 1990s. In recent years many other programmes and groups have provided funding for transfer programmes and in some instances have been involved in the actual process. This has added to the experience for children and their parents. The structure and content of these programmes may vary in the different school communities.

## Purpose

School transfer is a time of emotional and social challenge for many pupils and their families.<sup>35</sup> It involves a triple transition for pupils: the move from a familiar school culture to a new one, the informal move from established friendships and peer groups to new peer groups, and the natural developmental move from childhood to adolescence.<sup>36</sup> Four stages have been identified when adjusting to new educational settings. The pupil

- is fearful of the new situation
- tests his/her coping skills at the transfer stage
- may need support because of difficulties with settling in
- gradually settles in and accepts the new environment.

School transfer support programmes have been introduced by the HSCL Scheme to support marginalised parents and their children by

- providing and co-ordinating workshop opportunities for parents and pupils to erase their concerns, fears or worries about school transfer
- making arrangements so that issues raised at the consultative stage can be addressed
- informing parents and pupils and preparing them for the challenges they may encounter on transferring to a new school
- working with parents and their children to empower them to manage change
- familiarising parents and pupils with the new school, the school layout, important personnel, the curriculum, and timetables
- providing opportunities for groups of pupils to bond as a definite group before joining a new school, if possible.

## Process

School transfer support may be helpful at the transition stages in the education of pupils.

The HSCL coordinator's work in school transfer programmes includes:

- close networking with all the local HSCL coordinators well before, and continuing long after, the point of transfer to the new school

<sup>35</sup> Naughton, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996.

- home visitation and parent workshops, which identify specific concerns that families or parents encounter as children prepare to move on to a new stage in education; this requires establishing respectful structures to address such issues of concern
- meaningful consultation with parents and teachers; producing a “welcome booklet” containing all relevant information about the new school could also be part of the role
- ensuring that all parents receive and understand the transfer information sent by the school
- liaison with the school’s care team
- connecting closely with the marginalised and engaging them with local family support services and the School Completion Programme, as appropriate
- linking with access coordinators at third level.

### Outcome

Generally, a smooth relocation will follow a transfer programme that is based on the principle and practice of partnership. It is likely that pupils will then integrate in their new educational setting with greater ease. The positive outcomes of such programmes include the following, at varying levels:

- Parents’ and pupils’ fears about transfer to another school may be alleviated.
- Parents feel respected because they were consulted about their concerns.
- The welcome booklet empowers parents, as the material is relevant, helpful and factual but simple; in this way, open and respectful home-school communication is fostered.
- Parents recognise and appreciate the fact that structured and respectful support is established in schools for themselves and for their children. This support includes the HSCL Scheme, care teams and SCP as well as community support services for the family.
- Pupils often move forward with confidence and are empowered to identify the relevant support service when necessary. As a consequence, parents feel assured about the change of school.
- Pupils enjoy a sense of security in their new surroundings.
- Pupils recognise and trust the significant people in their new school more easily.
- Some pupils enjoy a sense of personal achievement in progressing to a new level in education.
- Pupils record at times, the development of healthy attitudes towards their personal, social, emotional and physical well-being.
- Pupils may feel a sense of personal acceptance in their new setting much earlier.
- Pupils leave the past behind more easily and become more involved in the new school.

A successful transfer programme will ensure that good communication and positive relations are established between the parents, the teachers in the primary and post-primary schools, and the community support services.



# International Parents





## Introduction

In recent years an increasing number of international pupils have joined our school communities. Many of their parents have little or no knowledge of English, and the need for some assistance in addressing this issue was quickly identified. In some areas adult learning centres have supported HSCL coordinators in providing English classes for their parents.

## Purpose

Classes are organised to provide parents who do not speak English with a foundation in the language and the communication skills necessary for everyday life. It is hoped that as parents improve their skills in spoken English some help might also be given to foster an understanding of the language of the school curriculum. Furthermore, it is envisaged that through welcoming these parents into the school in this way the programme will lead to their integration in the school community.

## Preparation

The HSCL coordinator meets parents and guardians in a variety of ways, mainly through home visitation and sometimes when they come to register the pupil in school. Application is made to the local adult learning centre for funding for a tutor. If it is in a position to do so, the ALC may even provide one of their own tutors for the programme.

## Process

Generally, the programme consists of a two-hour class, which takes place weekly in the parents' room and which continues from September until June. While parents are given the opportunity to learn English, the pupils are also being given extra help with their English in school.



Parents being presented with FETAC awards in childcare from Minister M. Martin. The multicultural nature of the parents' room is reflected in the participation of two traveller women and two international parents in this childcare course. The group also includes the tutor, a parent in the local school, who began participating in courses in the parents' room at the beginning of the scheme and has now progressed to working as a community tutor. The development of local tutors is vital in the process of encouraging and supporting parents in their path to education.

In one post-primary school the parents' tutor voluntarily met the pupils to give them additional assistance, specifically with the language of the curriculum. This was reflected in the classes with parents, in order that they might have a better understanding of their children's school work. Furthermore, the local partnership project worker for international families was helpful in adding an extra dimension aimed at emphasising the importance of family learning and integration in the school community. The pupils, their parents and their learning support and English teachers were invited to a lunch in the parents' room. Each pupil was asked to invite an Irish friend from their class to come along also. This gave the parents and their children an opportunity to share their experiences of school and of learning English.

## Outcome

As a result of such schemes the international parents have not only begun to learn and to speak English but have also joined cookery and craft classes in the parents' room as well as other courses, such as computers. During one computer class the child helped by translating for the parent.

In this way HSCL has provided a forum for intercultural communication and the integration of families in the school and wider community. Children have settled well into school, knowing that their parents have support from the coordinator. International parents have been able to meet and talk to Irish parents in a non-threatening social environment. This has not only worked wonders for developing their ability to communicate through English but has also been positive for Irish parents for whom the presence of people of other nationalities living in their communities is a new experience. Furthermore, intercultural activities organised through HSCL have helped to create an atmosphere in which cultural diversity can be both enjoyed and embraced.

## Case study 1: An intercultural club

The junior and senior schools, in this case study, are in a rapidly developing area that is experiencing huge social and demographic change.

In the academic year 2004/05 the proportion of international children was approximately 45 per cent. The decision to organise an Intercultural Club arose as a response to this emergent intercultural school population and a desire to emphasise this in a positive way. The schools wished to provide a forum for exploring issues of identity, combating racism, and celebrating diversity.

A committee was established between the two schools, which included HSCL coordinators, teachers, and parents. The committee took responsibility for planning and co-ordinating the projects; the HSCL coordinators were responsible for evaluation. The Intercultural Club was run in both schools over a five-month period. It involved children from second class to sixth class. Fourteen countries were represented, including native Irish and the Travelling community. The aim of the club was to bring children together in a friendly, supportive atmosphere where they could explore their identity and share life experiences.

The children engaged in various activities, including art, writing, discussion, and reading, as they explored their life journey. A teacher and a parent facilitated the process. Parents were involved at every stage, in researching the family tree, in obtaining photographs, and in providing materials for the project work. All the work generated in the club was displayed as part of Intercultural Week. During Intercultural Week each class developed projects for display, dealing with such themes as food, dress, customs, sport, music, and art.

Parents were invited to demonstrate traditions from their country, to view displays, and take part in workshops. The children prepared dances, which they performed for classes, and presented workshops. Families put together displays of food and artifacts relating to their country of origin. The initiatives were evaluated, and the outcome was judged to be overwhelmingly positive. Importantly, teachers noted a shift in attitudes. They noted that

children displayed an appreciation of other people's origins and the distances that children had travelled in moving to Ireland; parents judged it to be a unifying experience and a powerful tool for capacity-building in the community.

One comment by a pupil sums up the success of the project:

*"At home I'm Vietnamese, but when I'm in school I feel like I'm Irish; but during Intercultural Week I felt both of them come together."* She presented her responses to Intercultural Week at the Local Committee meeting.

### Case study 2: Intercultural sharing

The Local Committee decided to organise an International Week. The aim of the week was to link parents and children through activity, thereby leading to the building of relationships.

A range of activities took place in the school and in the community. Musical activities included concerts of music from different cultures, an African band performance by parents, and musical events in classrooms. An international pupil recognition ceremony, in which parents and pupils shared experiences of their culture and country, was well received. Other successful events included international flag competitions, international food days in different venues, and the creation of a mosaic mirror to celebrate the week. Young people interviewed older people in their communities in an effort to appreciate the changing nature of our society. An adult education course "Living in a Diverse Society," leading to a FETAC award, culminated in a display for International Week.

The week undoubtedly raised awareness and helped to further a greater respect and recognition of the many different cultures present in our schools and communities.

# Support Structures for the HSCL Coordinator

The provision of support structures for HSCL coordinators is taken very seriously by the Department of Education and Science. Support structures described in this chapter take the following form:

1.	cluster meetings
2.	in-career development
3.	visits to schools by the national team.

## 1. Cluster Meetings: The development of the “cluster group” in education

One of the support structures that started in education with the introduction of the HSCL Scheme in 1990 is that of the cluster system. The Department of Education had laid down some norms: “Depending on the demographic structure of the clusters or of areas within clusters, the HSCL coordinators will work on an inter-school, local and cluster level and will act as mutually supportive and co-operative teams using their complementary skills to the best advantage.”<sup>37</sup> The cluster group helps coordinators to stay within their role and to be supported in a position that can be stressful, demanding, and joyful, all at the same time. The cluster group setting enables the HSCL coordinators to self-manage, in that they each take responsibility for advancing an area of the scheme in which they have particular expertise. For example, one coordinator ensures the advancement of the Local Committee, another the promotion of home visitation while still another reminds the group of their responsibility in keeping parents close to the learning of children. Each of the basic principles of the HSCL Scheme has an advocate in the cluster group and the work is protected in this way.

The HSCL Scheme is unified and integrated in primary and post-primary schools in designated areas of disadvantage. Since its inception the scheme has promoted partnership between parents, teachers and the community in order to enhance the learning opportunities of young people and to promote their retention in the education system. The cluster system also ensures the dissemination of good practice among HSCL coordinators themselves.

### There are four different types of cluster groups:

- family cluster (HSCL coordinators)
- local cluster (HSCL coordinators)
- area cluster (HSCL coordinators)
- regional cluster (chairpersons/principals/inspectors/psychologists/coordinators).

### The family cluster

The family cluster is where coordinators of primary and post-primary schools in a common catchment area meet and work together to identify and respond to the needs of the families in a designated area of disadvantage. These meetings help coordinators to share resources, to organise common courses and classes for parents, and to prepare transfer programmes. Home

<sup>37</sup> Department of Education, 1991, 5.

visits are planned at the family cluster level so that no family will have more than one coordinator visiting.

Coordinators in the family cluster structure work with other schemes such as GCEB-r, SCP and Early Start and with voluntary and statutory bodies so that there is an integrated provision of services to parents and pupils in a particular area. The family cluster also ensures that there is an effective Local Committee working in the cluster area. The family cluster meets once a week, and it is a great source of support for the individual coordinators.

### The local cluster

The local cluster is made up of a multiple of family clusters, and it usually meets fortnightly. It is a forum for personal sharing of experiences, both positive and challenging, in a secure and confidential setting. Coordinators listen to new initiatives from coordinator colleagues and share information and examples of good practice. Occasionally, when needs dictate, time is set aside for coordinators to avail of extra skills training for themselves. This must be delivered by a fully qualified psychologist or counsellor. In general, coordinators are supported, informed and affirmed at their local cluster meetings, and this in turn enables them to be effective in the provision of services to parents, schools, and communities.



A local cluster of HSCL coordinators.

### The area cluster

There are thirteen area clusters in the HSCL Scheme. Each one comprises a number of local clusters within a wide region, and it meets once a term. At these meetings there is a sharing of good practice, and local issues are brought into a wider forum. The goals and basic principles of the scheme are worked through systematically, and a focus on the HSCL priority areas is maintained. Examples of topics discussed include:

- how best to raise awareness among parents of their own capacity to enhance their children's educational progress, and how to develop their skills to do this
- how to ensure that the positive outcomes of the scheme are disseminated throughout the school system
- how best to engage with the local community to enhance the education of the pupils
- the coordinator as an agent of change.

### The regional cluster

The regional cluster is convened and facilitated by the national coordinator once a year. It includes all the coordinators from the area clusters together with their principals, chairpersons, CEO,

department inspectors, and educational psychologists. The regional cluster meeting is a valuable opportunity for members of the school management to be updated on HSCL priority areas, such as Local Committees, parents as home visitors, joint policy formation, and the integration of international children in schools and how best to engage with their parents. It is also an opportunity to listen to ideas, share in the continuous development of the HSCL Scheme, make evaluative suggestions, and voice concerns.

## Conclusion

The cluster meetings at all levels follow the normal rules of any well-run meeting. A specific venue, time and agenda are decided in advance, and minutes are kept of each meeting. Planning, monitoring and evaluation are also built in to the meetings. Because of work done at family and local cluster meetings, resources can be pooled and families served in a planned way, so that they are not overwhelmed by multiple home visits or extra invitations to classes or courses.

## Clusters in rural areas

GCEB-r is a scheme introduced by the Department of Education and Science to encourage inclusive participation in primary schools. Under this initiative, participating schools are provided with extra teaching and financial resources so that their pupils can take advantage of quality education, no matter what their social or economic circumstances. In rural areas, schools are allocated a teacher or coordinator who works with clusters of four or five schools. GCEB-r and HSCL personnel work closely together on transfer programmes, courses and classes for parents, and the Local Committee.

# 2. In-career development (ICD) for HSCL coordinators

*(Concepta Conaty)*

The HSCL Scheme demands from professionals new attitudes and a different way of thinking that challenges their approaches and value system. The work of HSCL coordinators in strengthening family and community bonds with the school and in promoting the parent as prime educator has required the provision of a comprehensive in-career development programme. This has encompassed personal and professional development.

It is widely held that the gap between the attitudes, knowledge and skills required for a particular job and the levels at present possessed by the participants should be part of the consideration in providing effective in-career development. So too is the identification of needs. The existence of a training need states that a change is necessary—"a change from a situation or performance that is below that level required to at least the required level. The change agent is the training event."<sup>38</sup> Ownership of the training process will evolve if a "partnership is produced between the three parties, learner, boss and trainer, each contributing their own expertise."<sup>39</sup> A similar view holds training as a "systematic process with some planning control rather than random learning from experience . . . concerned with changing concepts, skills and attitudes . . . [improving the]

<sup>38</sup> Rae, 1997, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 16.

effectiveness . . . of the organisation.”<sup>40</sup> We find here, in synopsis form, four important questions relating to the design of in-career development sessions: Are the “training needs properly identified?” Are the “learning objectives relevant?” Are “performance standards correctly set?” Are the “right priorities established?”<sup>41</sup>

ICD training provided through the HSCL Scheme is linked with these findings. The purpose of providing ICD is to improve the performance of HSCL coordinators so that the effectiveness of the school, and ultimately of the marginalised child, will be enhanced. “The purpose of training is not to satisfy the trainer or the training function . . . but to provide the learners with the opportunity to improve their skills for the benefit of the organisation.”<sup>42</sup> When designing ICD, the national team constantly viewed and reviewed the expected changes resulting from ICD with regard to individual performance. In addition, it viewed how the perceived changes could link to the effective organisation of the school as a whole—principal, staff, and management—the parents, the Local Committee, and the wider community, and ultimately pupils’ performance. Finally, it analysed how these changes could bring about the vision of the HSCL Scheme, which is to maximise the potential of the child, the parents, and the community.<sup>43</sup>

During ICD sessions the rationale and current best practice of the HSCL Scheme are developed, combined with findings from HSCL-type schemes and relevant research evidence internationally. Interaction with the facilitator and the group takes place regularly to clarify issues and to promote the transfer of learning to the coordinator’s base.

Within the partnership module, aspects covered include:

- the clarification of roles, rights, and responsibilities
- the development of best thinking
- using people’s gifts and talents in ways of working that add value
- exploring collaborative advantage
- surveying the rationale of the HSCL Scheme
- working through the goals and basic principles of HSCL
- sharing the experience of partnership in other countries. (See also chapter 2.)

The personal development of coordinators has been concerned with the positive aspects of self-image, decision-making, experience of respect, empowerment and the ability to delegate as positive attributes of the coordinators themselves. It has also been concerned with being models of these qualities and influencing teachers and parents to develop the same skills. Coordinators are also trained and supported so that they can cope with negative feelings and blocks to progress and work to develop positive attitudes and hopefulness in others, and still maintain their energy.

Included in the skills development area for coordinators are such topics as

- active listening
- observation methods
- communication
- feedback process
- trust building
- sense of belonging

<sup>40</sup> Bramley, 1991, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Reay, 1994, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Rae, 1997, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Bramley, 1991, 1–35; see also Hayton, 1999; Galloway et al., 1998, and Smyth, 1999.



- counselling skills
- the understanding of and owning of feelings
- leadership, including change, attitudes, creativity, empowerment, motivation and delegation
- issues concerning power and the use of power, conflict resolution, liberation, and oppression<sup>44</sup>
- management
- exploring the planning, monitoring and evaluating techniques within the normal HSCL sequence of review-plan-implement-review.

As HSCL coordinators work both within and between groups and on committees, the setting up, functioning and characteristics of groups are examined. In the same way the reality of belonging to a group, inner circles, group turnover and stages in the development of groups are discussed. Rights and roles, with their inherent responsibilities, are described. The cycle of dependence, independence and interdependence within groups is considered essential material for ICD, as is the understanding of group defences. Training in the theory and practical aspects of meetings includes

- preparation for meetings
- the purpose of meetings
- processes used during meetings
- the importance of naming outcomes.

The conditions necessary for the implementation of outcomes is also considered.

Modern methods and approaches in education and their implications are always included. So too are the processes for identifying needs, gifts, and differences. The use of individual and group structures and evaluation models is prominent. Action research involves coordinators reflecting on their practice, reviewing strengths and weaknesses, revising the practice, acting on it, and reflecting, again in a cyclical manner.

### Outcome of ICD sessions

HSCL coordinators need sustained support so that the learning during ICD sessions does not lose momentum on their return to school. For new behavioural attitudes and practices to become routine, the importance of coordinators appropriating this learning cannot be overstated. The “incorporation into normal work of new ways of thinking or carrying out tasks” is vital.<sup>45</sup> The “analysis of situations which are likely to test the new learning and the consideration of strategies to enlist support and to deflect opposition” are carefully considered through leadership training and conflict resolution modules during ICD.<sup>46</sup>

The final phase of ICD, and yet one that started with the identification of its need, is evaluation. Evaluation runs throughout the process of ICD and afterwards into the work-place, through visitation by the national team, where the needs of future ICD are determined. To expand the process of evaluation more fully it can be stated that there is continuous review with participants during the modules, with opportunities for the group to change direction. Evaluation is at all times carried out *with* people: it is not done *for* them or *to* them.<sup>47</sup> (See also chapter 17.)

<sup>44</sup> Ruth, 2006-07-13.

<sup>45</sup> Bramley, 1991, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Freire.

### 3. Visits to schools by the national team

*(Concepta Conaty)*

As has already been stated, ICD for HSCL coordinators is one of their support structures. In addition, the visits to schools by the national team and their attendance at meetings of the Local Committee and at cluster meetings take place regularly. HSCL coordinators find this level of contact very supportive.

During visits to schools,

- successes are recounted and affirmed
- needs are expressed and discussed
- advice is often sought and followed by shared reflection
- difficulties are named and worked through
- realistic goals are considered and aligned with the vision of the HSCL Scheme
- monitoring and evaluation techniques are enlisted.

Another important aspect of school visitation is encouraging and facilitating school personnel, such as the principal, teachers, parents, and members of the community, to live out the shared vision of partnership in education as defined and exercised in each school community. Every effort is made

- to involve the principal and the staff in the HSCL Scheme
- to encourage in-career development for teachers
- to encourage closer liaison between schools and the homes and communities they serve
- to forge strong links between all DES initiatives and particularly between HSCL and SCP
- to acknowledge all efforts by the principal, staff members, parents, pupils, and community
- to encourage personnel in developing a whole-school approach.

The visits of the national team are also a conduit for data-gathering.

As already stated, school visits are an opportunity for promoting and supporting the integrated provision of service to young people and their families in marginalised areas. The integrated provision of service enhances respect for the family through providing more comprehensive services. It has encouraged a greater uptake of educational opportunity and has maximised personal resources such as shared thoughts and pooled talents. When working co-operatively and in an integrated way one is much more likely to establish effective, economical budgetary practices and to facilitate time management. Integrated work, when well established, should provide an in-built support structure for individuals and groups.



# Research and Evaluation

*Peter Archer, Educational Research Centre*

The HSCL Scheme has been the subject of research and evaluation since its introduction in 1990. This chapter contains an account of that work. A summary is also given by Weir and Archer.<sup>48</sup>

The Educational Research Centre carried out an external evaluation of the scheme during the first few years of its operation.<sup>49</sup> Although, as Ryan noted, “major effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL Scheme would be likely to be long term rather than short term,”<sup>50</sup> there were some positive findings in the second of the two evaluation reports.<sup>51</sup> The evaluation included an analysis of the reading and mathematics achievement, as measured by standardised tests, of pupils in third and fifth class after the scheme had been in operation for five years. Achievement gains were found for third class but not for fifth class. Ryan also reported a number of effects of the scheme on some pupils, as observed by coordinators and classroom teachers.<sup>52</sup> These included “improved behaviour, improved school attendance, improved scholastic achievement, greater care in their school work, and more positive attitudes to school and teachers, to themselves and to their parents.”<sup>53</sup>

Both of Ryan’s reports contain evidence of progress in relation to one of the scheme’s main aims, “to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies.”<sup>54</sup> A high level of activity involving parents had been generated by the scheme and there was a very positive reaction from parents to such activity. For example, Ryan presented evidence<sup>55</sup> that the scheme had brought about an increase in the number of times most parents visited the school and in the extent to which they became involved in classroom and other school activities. She concluded, on the basis of evaluation data gathered from coordinators, classroom teachers, and principals, that “parents had increased in self-confidence, knew more about what was happening in school, and had learned how to help their children with schoolwork.”<sup>56</sup> However, it is clear from the 1994 report that a substantial minority of parents in HSCL schools, considered by the school staff to be in need of help, remained uninvolved.

Ryan also reported an increase in contact between teachers and parents in most schools; and, “at a more general level, the HSCL Scheme made teachers think about the role of parents in the school and in education.”<sup>57</sup> These changes appeared to be resulting in teachers, at least in some schools, becoming more open and tolerant about co-operation with parents. An important feature of the scheme, according to Ryan, was the development of links between primary and post-primary schools in the same area. These links were seen as important in facilitating the transfer and transition of pupils from first-level to second-level education.

Another source of evidence about the HSCL Scheme was research conducted over several years by the scheme’s national coordinator and reported in a doctoral dissertation<sup>58</sup> and a book.<sup>59</sup> In her work, Conaty combined the findings of surveys in 1994 of HSCL coordinators, principals, classroom teachers and parents with her own experience of the evolution of the scheme and the results of a number of action-research projects conducted as part of in-career development workshops.

The two reports by Conaty provide an account of how thinking that underpins the scheme (particularly on the key concept of “partnership”) evolved. Some of the challenges encountered in introducing and developing the scheme (for example the resistance of some teachers to working closely with parents, and fears on the part of many parents arising from their own negative experience of schooling) are described, and data are presented on how schools went about trying to implement the main principles of the scheme.

<sup>48</sup> Weir and Archer, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Ryan, 1994, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Ryan, 1999, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Ryan, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Ryan 1994 and 1999

<sup>53</sup> Ryan, 1999, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Department of Education and Science, 2002, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ryan, 1994.

<sup>56</sup> Ryan, 1999, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Ryan, 1999, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Conaty, 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Conaty, 2002.

Conaty's earlier work confirmed the findings of the external evaluation about progress towards greater co-operation between school, home, and community. For example, coordinators, principals and classroom teachers were asked whether major changes had occurred in the school since the HSCL Scheme was introduced. More than 70 per cent of respondents reported that there had been such changes and these respondents were then asked to state the nature of the "most important" changes. Conaty listed the four most important changes as "attitude change by school towards parents," "parent enhancement/participation," "school development," and "school inserted into community."<sup>60</sup>

Conaty's research was also used to identify a number of aspects of the scheme that were to become priorities for development in recent years. These included increasing the amount of home visiting done by local coordinators, training parents as home visitors, providing opportunities for parents to become involved in the formation of school policy, and targeting the most marginalised families.

The most recent published evidence on the HSCL Scheme comes from the report of an expenditure review carried out by the Educational Research Centre as part of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI).<sup>61</sup> This report contains an attempt to place the scheme in the context of Government policy on tackling poverty and educational disadvantage. HSCL documents and publications are also analysed for adequacy of the aims and objectives of the scheme with regard to SMI guidelines.

Surveys of coordinators and principals were conducted for the SMI review. Data from these surveys was used to illustrate the wide range of activities that have been generated by the scheme and to chart progress in relation to some of the priorities for development identified in Conaty's earlier work (such as increasing the amount of home visiting done by coordinators and identifying the most marginalised families). Survey data also showed that large majorities of coordinators and principals believed that the scheme has had a positive effect on parents, schools, the community, and pupils. Apart from a clear tendency for coordinators and principals to view the HSCL Scheme in a favourable light, a number of interesting trends emerged. Firstly, although there are some exceptions, coordinators and principals tended to regard changes relating to attitudes as more common than changes relating to behaviour. Secondly, principals were slightly less positive in their judgements than coordinators, and post-primary personnel were slightly less positive than their primary colleagues. Thirdly, principals and coordinators seemed a little less convinced of the impact of the scheme on pupils than they were of its impact in other areas.

Like other SMI expenditure reviews, Archer and Shortt presented information on the cost of the scheme, and they concluded that actual cost is "low considering the large number of families targeted" and that "the opportunity cost . . . at least in terms of reducing class size, is very low."<sup>62</sup> The report concludes with proposals about performance indicators for the scheme (a feature of all SMI reviews) and more general proposals about the future development and monitoring of the scheme. Responses to some of these proposals are considered in other chapters of this book.

<sup>60</sup> Conaty, 1999, 336–338.

<sup>61</sup> Archer and Shortt, 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 112.



# Statistical Data

*Concepta Conaty*



**There are three elements in chapter 18, and they are in the following order:**

1.	the goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) of the HSCL Scheme
2.	the findings of a questionnaire sent to all HSCL <b>coordinators</b> in 2004
3.	the findings of an interview conducted with principals of the HSCL Scheme in 2006.

## 1. The goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) of the HSCL Scheme

The HSCL Scheme seeks to make a direct contribution to the achievement of the second of the department's five high-level goals, as set out in its *Statement of Strategy, 2003–2005*, namely "We will support through education, a socially inclusive society with equal opportunity for all."

The approach of the national co-ordination team is underpinned by a policy of continuous improvement and seeks to build on the scheme's strengths while also addressing any weaknesses identified either through feedback or through the formal evaluations.

**The five goals of the HSCL Scheme are as follows:**

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

The achievement of the five *goals* is supported by twelve *basic principles*. (See chapter 1.)

**Key performance indicators are provided for each basic principle or combination of principles, as follows:**

- a. that coordinators spend at least 33 per cent of their work time on home visitation
- b. that the HSCL Scheme is targeted and focused on the most marginalised families
- c. that individual parents are supported with their children's learning
- d. that HSCL coordinators run courses and classes for parents to help them support their children's learning
- e. that each HSCL coordinator is part of a Local Committee, which deals with issues in the community that impinge on learning
- f. that pupils become involved in the Local Committee, so that their concerns are addressed in a meaningful way
- g. that policies which address issues in the community that impinge on learning are developed collaboratively
- h. that each HSCL coordinator promotes new methods and practices to counter educational disadvantage
- i. that each HSCL coordinator enlists parents to support other parents, for example parents as educational home visitors
- j. that the positive outcomes of the HSCL Scheme are disseminated throughout the school system generally
- k. that HSCL coordinators produce term plans incorporating targets to meet the principal objectives.

**Recommended additional strategy for supporting the achievement of the five goals**

The following recommended strategy would provide key personnel in schools with necessary and helpful information. It could lessen or prevent the duplication of services, support the child, name adult responsibilities, and promote school planning, evaluation, and accountability.

- that an individual learning profile (ILP) for each at risk young person, served through specialised programmes (e.g. HSCL, SCP, JCSP, LCA) is available in each school
- that personnel in HSCL, SCP, JCSP and LCA would design and use a simple profile, constructed at local level, to meet the combined needs of the children in each area.

## 2. The findings of a questionnaire sent to all HSCL coordinators in 2004

The following tables report the perceptions of HSCL coordinators of their work. The response rate for HSCL coordinators to this questionnaire was 99 per cent.

The findings are worthwhile as statistical data on how the HSCL Scheme is performing and, coupled with the evaluative findings of the Educational Research Centre (given in summary form in chapter 17), provide a valuable tool or a menu from which activities may be chosen.

### A. That coordinators spend at least 33 per cent of their work time on home visitation

#### *time spent on home visitation*

The mean percentage score relating to time on home visits is 34%.

The mean score relating to the number of visits is 162.

The maximum time spent on visits is 80%.

#### *outcomes from home visitation*

(percentage of cases)

improved attendance at school 97.3

**example: 97.3% of coordinators named improved school attendance as an outcome of home visitation**

parent attended a course 96.7

parent called to child's teacher 95.9

parent helped child with homework 83.2

parent joined Local Committee 79.3

parent joined in policy formation 76.4

parent supported another parent 74.5

parent became a home visitor 50.3

parent obtained access to services 32.6

other outcome 32.6

parent helped in school 19.6

parent gained employment 1.4

**B. That the HSCL Scheme is targeted and focused on the most marginalised families**

55% of coordinators remained true to their target population.

*for further clarification and development:*

45% of coordinators visited families not in the target population.

However, the frequency is very low. The reasons given include

- (a) bereavement or illness,
- (b) not to make a distinction,
- (c) forms for psychological assessment.

**C. That individual parents are supported with their children's learning***ways in which parents were supported*

	(percentage of cases)
one-to-one parent-teacher meetings	87.4
<b>example: 87.4% of coordinators named one-to-one parent-teacher meetings as a way of supporting parents with their children's learning.</b>	
homework support	79.7
class-basis parent-teacher meeting	71.8
reading programmes	68.5
learning packs or equipment	60.0
maths programmes	53.2
study skills	51.8
other ways	29.3
assessment	23.8
attendance and punctuality	3.6

*See also outcomes at A, D, E, G, H, and I;*

**note in particular section I - "Parents as home visitors."**

**Transfer Programmes**

93.4% of coordinators have run transfer programmes

*according to HSCL coordinators, transfer programmes provided*

	(percentage of cases)
information	73.1
involvement of post-primary pupils	18.6
tracking opportunity	7.2

## Early Start

(percentage of cases)

### *vital aspects of Early Start according to HSCL coordinators*

parental development 66.7

*example: 66.7% of coordinators named parental development as a vital aspect of Early Start.*

programmes to assist with learning 61.7

home visitation 56.7

## School Completion Programme (SCP)

(percentage of cases)

### *vital areas in the role of HSCL coordinators relate to work with SCP*

working with and supporting SCP personnel 79.0

*example: 79.0% of coordinators named working with and supporting SCP personnel as a vital aspect of their work.*

links with SCP management 64.6

visiting homes of SCP target group 40.5

training parents for SCP Management Committee 15.4

## Giving Children an Even Break (GCEB)

(percentage of cases)

### *the aspects of work in which HSCL and GCEB-r coordinators link in rural areas are as follows:*

parental development 66.7

*example: 66.7% of HSCL coordinators named the sharing of parental development courses with GCEB-r coordinators as central to the work in rural areas.*

transfer programmes 44.4

sharing Local Committee 27.8

**D. That HSCL coordinators run courses and classes for parents to help them support their children's learning**

***Percentage of coordinators providing various courses/activities***

	(percentage of cases)
transfer programmes	93.4
parenting	69.1
leisure	66.7
personal development	63.4
substance awareness programmes	59.8
health issues	51.8
curriculum support	48.8
study skills	24.8
leadership skills	24.2
subject choice/exam skills	21.5
other courses	04.1

***the following detail relates to pre-literacy and literacy in 2004***

(see also section 3, question 1, this chapter.)

- 38 coordinators provided pre-school literacy development for parents.
- 153 coordinators provided literacy courses for primary school parents.
- 70 coordinators provided post-primary courses in literacy for parents.
- 208 coordinators provided adult literacy classes.

***number of parents who took part in literacy programmes:***

The mean per coordinator is 23 and the maximum is 287.

***outcomes from literacy programmes according to HSCL coordinators***

	(percentage of cases)
increased reading ability	50.9
bonding with child	41.6
access to knowledge	24.3
enjoyment of reading	23.8
use of library	04.7
availability of books at home	03.7

***Mathematics for Fun***

39% of coordinators have trained parents to present Mathematics for Fun. Of these, 34% trained between 2 and 12 parents; the remaining 5% trained between 13 and 74 parents. The mean for children's attendance was 20. The maximum number of children and young people who attended in any one school was 368.

***The comment from coordinators on the experience for parents and children with Mathematics for Fun:***

fair: 6%; good: 72%; excellent: 13%; other comment: 9%

**E. That each HSCL coordinator is part of a Local Committee, which deals with issues in the community that impinge on learning**

***The Local Committee(LC)***

95% of the schools in HSCL are part of a LC

***examples of topics dealt with by the LC are:***

(percentage of cases)

school attendance	77.6
<b><i>example: 77.6% of HSCL coordinators named school attendance as a vital aspect of their work.</i></b>	
substance use	67.2
anti-bullying	66.0
transfer programmes	63.1
health	50.9
homework support	48.8
unclusterable topics	45.6
good behaviour	35.2
special needs	26.2
family literacy	26.2
community development	25.6
training for pupils on Local Committee	20.1
after-school provision	16.6
environmental issues	14.0

**F. That pupils become involved in the Local Committee, so that their concerns are addressed in a meaningful way**

19.2% of Local Committees had primary pupils as members of the committee in 2004.  
55.3% of Local Committees had post-primary pupils as members in 2004.

# **G. That policies which address issues in the community that impinge on learning are developed collaboratively**

## **Policy formation: parents, teachers, pupils, community**

*All categories = parents, teachers, pupils, and community.*

	Anti-Bullying %	Behaviour %	Substance misuse %	Attendance %	Homework %	Literacy %	Numeracy %	Transfer %	Lifestyle %	Parent involvement %	Other %
parents only	1.1	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.6			0.6
parents and teachers	12.4	13.2	6.9	11.6	14.0	1.9	1.9	6.9	6.6	6.3	8.8
p/t/ pupils	21.5	17.1	11.0	7.4	11.8	2.5	1.7	9.1	4.4	1.7	8.0
all categories	18.2	9.6	30.0	8.8	8.0	1.4	0.6	6.9	6.9	1.4	5.5
teachers only	4.4	3.9	1.1	5.0	5.0	4.4	5.2	2.8	1.4	0.6	2.5
teachers and pupils	1.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.3	0.9				
parents, pupils and community	0.3		0.3					0.6			
pupils only	0.3	0.3									
parents, teachers and community	5.5	4.7	15.2	7.7	2.5	0.3	0.3	3.6	4.1	2.8	4.7
pupils and community			0.3								
teachers and community				0.8		0.3	0.3	1.1			0.3
pupils and community				0.3							
total % coordinators organising each policy	65.1	49.6	65.6	42.4	42.7	11.3	11.0	31.4	23.4	12.7	30.3



## H. That each HSCL coordinator promotes new methods and practices to counter educational disadvantage

### *work by coordinators to support teachers* (percentage of cases)

home visits by coordinator 98.6

**example: 98.6% of HSCL coordinators claimed that home visitation by them is a vital aspect of their work in supporting teachers**

support with attendance 94.3

transfer programmes 84.5

parent-teacher meeting 64.0

pre-entry programmes 59.7

shared reading 48.5

home visit by parents 45.8

mathematics for Fun 41.4

other work 40.9

homework club 31.9

study skills development 28.9

breakfast club 28.1

relevant information 4.9

*see also outcomes at A, C, D, E, F, G, and I*

## I. That each HSCL coordinator enlists parents to support other parents, for example parents as educational home visitors

### *number of parents as home visitors*

55% of coordinators have parents trained and working as home visitors.

More than half of these coordinators have between 1 and 6 parents trained and working.

The remainder have between 7 and 12 parents trained and working.

The mean number of homes visited by these parents is 31, while the maximum number is 300.

47% of the parents are involved in a wider network of parents with the coordinator .

### *reasons why parents visit homes* (percentage of cases)

information 75.3

**example: 75.3% of HSCL coordinators named information as a reason why parents visit homes.**

to encourage parents on courses 71.2

transfer to post-primary 48.4

child starting school 35.8

to encourage on to Local Committee 28.4

other reason 26.0

delivering school policy 18.6

reading packs 14.4

learning material 14.4

**J. That the positive outcomes of the HSCL Scheme are disseminated throughout the school system generally**

*No specific question was asked in relation to this objective; but the length of time a coordinator spends in the role can contribute to the depth of understanding that the teaching staff has of disadvantage.*

83.3% of coordinators lie within the strongly recommended six-year cycle.

This publication has the dissemination of good practice as one of its objectives.

**K. That HSCL coordinators produce term plans incorporating targets to meet the principal objectives**

*HSCL coordinators claimed that targets were realistic for the following reasons:*

	(percentage of cases)
precise targeting	97.6
appropriate time frame	55.3
adequate support and resources	52.9

*HSCL coordinators claimed that targets were unrealistic for the following reasons:*

	(percentage of cases)
imprecise targeting	45.3
unrealistic timeframe	49.3
inadequate support/resources	66.3

*HSCL coordinators' comment on the value of planning and evaluation in their role*

	(percentage of cases)
keeps focus on HSCL role	93.8
assists precise targeting	73.1
maintains quality	70.0
keeps focus on outcomes	26.9
promotes efficiency	16.5
promotes effectiveness	12.0

### 3. Findings of an interview conducted with principals of the HSCL Scheme in 2006

Factual information and the views and perceptions of the principals of the HSCL Scheme were sought through an interview process.

94 per cent of principals agreed to be interviewed. They responded to two factual questions, one relating to literacy and the other to numeracy. These areas of the HSCL Scheme are at an advanced stage in both primary and post-primary schools. It is extremely helpful and interesting to note the perceptions of principals to the Likert-type items<sup>63</sup> that they were questioned on. These items relate to such areas as behaviour, attendance, support, children's learning, inter-school partnership, and school-community relationships.

The findings are self explanatory. It is noted that the great majority of principals' responses lie in the "I strongly agree" and "I agree" categories. However, a note of caution is needed. While the principals have answered from the standpoint of outcomes of the HSCL Scheme, it must be borne in mind that in recent years other departmental programmes (SCP and NEWB) have been involved with similar issues. This is where a strong commitment to integration in theory and in practice is required.

#### Actual responses of principals in the HSCL Scheme

1. Number of family literacy programmes reported by principals, such as pre-reading, paired reading, the novel, Reading for Fun, that the HSCL coordinator has organised or directed parents towards at the pre-school, primary, post-primary or adult level **from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2005:**

Type of reading activity organised for parents by the HSCL co-ordinator	Number of programmes organised by HSCL co-ordinators
<b>Pre-school</b> language programmes for parents	98 programmes
<b>Primary literacy</b> paired reading, the novel, Reading for Fun for parents	502 programmes
<b>Post-primary</b> paired reading, the novel, Reading for Fun for parents	228 programmes
<b>Adult literacy</b> programmes for parents (in order to stay close to children's learning)	525 programmes

(see also KPI (D), section 2, this chapter.)

<sup>63</sup> A Likert scale is one of the most widely used methods of measuring personality, social and psychological attitudes (*Journal of General Psychology*, 1998, and *Social Work Research*, 2003).

2. Number of HSCL coordinators who trained parents to present Mathematics for Fun between **1 January 2005 and 31 December 2005** = 224.
3. Perception of principals regarding outcomes from the HSCL Scheme
  - (a) *Pupil behaviour has improved*  
I strongly agree: 132; I agree: 257; no opinion: 33; I disagree: 13; I strongly disagree: 2.
  - (b) *Attendance of pupils has improved*  
I strongly agree: 142; I agree: 250; no opinion: 23; I disagree: 16; I strongly disagree: 2.
  - (c) *Parents support their child's teacher(s)*  
I strongly agree: 184; I agree: 221; no opinion: 25; I disagree: 3; I strongly disagree: 0.
  - (d) *Many parents are more close to/support their children's learning in the home*  
I strongly agree: 162; I agree: 230; no opinion: 38; I disagree: 13; I strongly disagree: 0.
  - (e) *The community supports the learning of young people*  
I strongly agree: 134; I agree: 233; no opinion: 52; I disagree: 16; I strongly disagree: 2.
  - (f) *Inter-school partnership has strengthened during the past five years*  
I strongly agree: 241; I agree: 170; no opinion: 17; I disagree: 8; I strongly disagree: 2.
  - (g) *The voluntary and statutory bodies contribute to the life of the school*  
I strongly agree: 186; I agree: 226; no opinion: 20; I disagree: 7; I strongly disagree: 4.

The information gleaned from principals and coordinators in the findings presented above is extremely helpful in the provision and planning for the HSCL Scheme under DEIS. The data will also be of great benefit in securing the integration of service for parents-families who did not achieve in the education system in the past but who clearly want their children to do so today.



# Planning for Success

*Marian Heeney*



For any organisation or enterprise to be successful, continuous planning and evaluation must be part of its normal *modus operandi*. For it to become the norm, planning must be done in a systematic and consistent way, so that it is integrated in all aspects of work. In the school setting, development planning takes place at a macro-level, where the school's core mission, vision and aims underpin all aspects of curriculum and how it is provided. At a micro-level, each department should develop a model of planning, monitoring and evaluating that suits its particular characteristics and focus. For the Home, School, Community Liaison function, successful planning must stem from a school-wide approach to how disadvantage is addressed.

### A framework for planning

The school's mission, vision and aims form the core from which all planning should start. With regard to disadvantage, the starting point has to be a review of what the school as a whole community does to promote equality of access and participation by all its pupils in all aspects of the education offered. The commitment of the Department of Education and Science to reducing and preventing educational disadvantage has seen a substantial number of initiatives introduced and developed in recent years. The multiplicity and complexity of factors that affect the teaching and learning environment in schools serving disadvantaged areas demand the imaginative, creative use of resources that come through these initiatives. The variety of activities undertaken under the auspices of HSCL means that they have to be planned carefully, monitored constantly and evaluated regularly to ensure maximum success.

An important element of this process is that all staff members have an understanding of the factors contributing to educational disadvantage. The development of this understanding should be an integral part of a school review, so that school culture, which encompasses relationships, norms, attitudes, and values, reflects a genuine care and concern for those on the margins of society.

### From review to implementation

Any school that undertakes a systematic review of its operation will not only have to ask itself how well it is fulfilling its mission, vision and aims but will also have to acknowledge what is working well and also what opportunities and threats are presented by the school's changing environment. Referred to as a SCOT analysis, this approach allows for possibilities to be explored, needs to be arranged in accordance with priority, realistic targets to be set, and long-term goals to be specified. The core question that must be examined is how the school will be brought forward. Specifically, what precisely does it want to achieve, what is the best course of action to help it achieve its objectives, what resources will be needed, who will implement the action plan, and how will progress be judged? The mission and vision of the school should be the constant frame of reference in guiding all activities. With regard to HSCL the goals of the scheme are:

- to maximise the active participation of children in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure
- to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children
- to raise parents' awareness of their own capacity to enhance their children's progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills

- to enhance the children's uptake of education, their retention in the education system, and their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third-level education, and also to enhance their attitudes to lifelong learning
- to disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

These goals underpin all activities and link directly to the mission and vision of the school.

### Target-setting

Strategic thinking and planning, which is fundamental to the success of any organisation, implies imagining the future and scanning trends that have long-term implications. Inherent in this process is giving priority to action or activities and the setting of precise and realistic targets. All objectives, targets and priorities should flow from the review process and should be aligned to the mission, vision and aims of the school. In the case of schools that participate in the HSCL Scheme the goals outlined above also underpin how targets are developed. Coordinators, at the family and the local cluster level as well as in their individual schools, are encouraged to formulate action plans for each area of the role. The targets they set have to be –

#### **SMART**

**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**chievable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**imed.

This approach provides for using past experience to build on successes and also to modify targets; it organises and schedules work in a more efficient and effective manner; and it raises the awareness of central issues and concerns and allows for variation in timing and the size of targets.

Defining tasks and setting out a time scale, as well as allocating appropriate priorities, and deciding on where to start, what is to be achieved, what exactly must be scheduled, who will do what, what resources, both financial and human, will be involved, how communication will be done and, finally, what problems might arise, all these are fundamental to effective target-setting and planning.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Moving from the planning stage to an action plan for the implementation of any project or activity will imply the clear and concise communication of what is intended, so that participants, the staff and the management feel part of the plan and are supportive of what is undertaken. Motivating people, which is often the most challenging aspect of any project, is the key to its success and sustainability. Allocating time, people, resources and training is also an essential element of any action plan. Continuous evaluation ensures that any plan that is adopted is addressing identified concerns and is directly related to priorities, is understood by all, is achievable within a time limit, and allows for modification where necessary.



## Successful change

For coordinators who undertake planning in a systematic way work becomes more structured; a more efficient use of time is evident; and successes are more easily identified, as are pitfalls that must be avoided. The sharing of plans at the cluster level is highly desirable, so that future development is structured, information and best practice are shared, and accountability is clear. Above all, planning is collaborative and therefore involves the expertise of many in implementation. Successful action and change is predicated on the correct diagnosis of situations and therefore implies those involved in change initiatives formulating various options and taking cognisance of a range of possible alternatives before deciding on a particular course of action. In this way, through a process of consultation and participation, individuals are more likely to be committed to outcomes.

Cummings and Huse (1989) identify a number of important activities that contribute to bringing about effective change.<sup>64</sup> Firstly, the groundwork must be laid, through creating a readiness, overcoming resistance, and positive motivation. Secondly, the creation of a desired vision and outcomes, as well as developing support and influencing stakeholders, is necessary. Activity planning and managing structures, together with building a support system among colleagues, management, and participants, is essential. Finally, sustaining momentum, developing new competence and skills and reinforcing new behaviour underpin all effective change strategies. It is evident from this model that considerable strategic planning and communication at all levels of school or organisation must become the norm.

When we are looking at changing and developing school culture so that it becomes more inclusive of all it is useful to consider a number of important principles identified by Robbins (1991) in his study of organisation behaviour:<sup>65</sup>

- respect for people: individuals are perceived as being responsible and conscientious and should be treated with dignity and respect
- trust and support: the effective and healthy organisation is characterised by trust, openness, authenticity, and a supportive climate
- power equalisation: effective organisations de-emphasise hierarchical authority and control
- confrontation: problems should not be swept under the carpet but openly confronted
- participation: the more that people who will be affected by change are involved in the decisions surrounding that change the more they will be committed to implementing the change.

It has long been argued that culture is a fluid concept that is virtually impossible to interpret, never mind manage or change. However, cultures can inhibit healthy growth and renewal in complex, dynamically changing environments. As educators we must recognise that cultural change is concerned with developing values, beliefs and norms that are appropriate to a school's mission, environmental conditions, and strategic direction.

<sup>64</sup> Cummings and Huse, 1989.

<sup>65</sup> Robbins, 1991.

### Key performance indicators

“Key performance indicators” (KPIs) are quantifiable measurements that reflect the critical success factors of an organisation. They will differ considerably according to the organisation. A school might focus its KPIs on the completion rates of its pupils or examination results. Whatever KPIs are selected, they must reflect the organisation’s goals; they must be the key to its success; and they must be quantifiable or measurable. They are usually long-term considerations; the goals and targets for particular KPIs may change, depending on success rates or organisational change. Once developed, KPIs can be used as a performance management tool but also as a way of giving people a clear picture of what is important and what they need to make happen. Everything that is done should, in some way, be focused on meeting appropriate KPIs.

The HSCL Scheme has developed a number of KPIs, which are very much in line with its core principles and vision. Examples of these are:

- Coordinators spend 33 per cent of their work time on home visitation.
- HSCL is aimed at the most marginalised.
- Parent development leads to the setting up of Local Committees.
- Policies which address issues in the community are developed.
- Courses and classes are run for parents.
- Positive outcomes of the scheme are disseminated. (See chapter 18.)

In organising their year’s work coordinators are advised and encouraged to align their targets realistically to these KPIs. In so doing they are enabled to provide a more effective service to marginalised communities while at the same time acknowledging that many aspects of their work are not amenable to strict, quantifiable measurement.



# The Way Forward

*Marian Heeney*



### **Home, School, Community Liaison: Planning for the future**

The HSCL Scheme is at all times informed and guided by the most up-to-date research, nationally and internationally, on educational disadvantage and on the changing nature of family and social structures. In our striving to make a real difference to the life chances of marginalised families it is essential that this level of relevant, contextual knowledge and research be shared with school management authorities, HSCL coordinators and the Department of Education and Science as a whole so that plans for the future of schemes that are dedicated to addressing educational disadvantage can include consultation, can remain focused, and are realistic but also radical and challenging.

Wide-ranging discussions have taken place at the regional cluster level and at ICD with school chairpersons, principals, HSCL coordinators and the national coordinators with a view to ensuring that all of us are thoroughly informed and aware of the ever-changing models of family life. The complexity of needs will demand planning with courage, insight, commitment and constant review in order to bring about meaningful change to those on the margins of Irish society.

### **Supporting and empowering families**

The development and building of positive, trusting relationships with families is seen as a cornerstone of efforts to address issues of educational and social disadvantage. However, this cannot take place without real co-ordination and multi-agency co-operation at all levels among those who work with marginalised families. Very early intervention, almost from the moment the child is born, by health and other family support systems and involving the extended family, particularly grandparents, would mean that a more preventive approach to problems is adopted and that the necessary supports, such as counselling, mediation, assessments, parenting skills, healthy life-style, behaviour management, and money management are established before the child reaches school-going age. Community centres, professionally staffed and providing a full range of services, including crèche facilities, would ensure that parents could obtain access to courses and support as needed and that outreach activities with an educational emphasis could be successfully implemented. Breakfast and homework support clubs, as set up by HSCL coordinators and now run in schools and some community centres, would become a means of involving parents from a very early stage in creative and focused educational activities and so would help them to be more committed to the development of their children's education.

The core purpose of home visitation by HSCL coordinators, that of bringing parents closer to the child's learning and building bonds of trust, would be enhanced, as would co-operation between school and home, if such a model were to be explored.

Any efforts to support and empower families must at all times be respectful of the individual and the community and should not try to impose solutions that exclude those for whom plans are made. In this regard, parent-to-parent programmes and the active encouragement and involvement of parents in the design and provision of programmes, as well as their participation in back-to-education initiatives, literacy and numeracy development, leisure-time activities, and preventive programmes is necessary. The importance of parental participation in Local Committees that address in meaningful ways issues in communities that impinge on learning cannot be overestimated. It builds self-esteem and self-confidence and gives people a sense of value and of having a meaningful contribution to make at the local level. In addition, the skills training provided by HSCL coordinators and their continuous work and contact with local parents

and agencies in the community brings an invaluable dimension to the role of educators in building up and empowering the family. In turn, the sharing of problems and the common exploration of possible solutions serves to enhance understanding of the difficulties on all sides and provides for greater co-operation, less fragmentation of services, and real dialogue.

### **Improving literacy and numeracy**

The vital importance of the development of literacy and numeracy has always been a central concern for HSCL coordinators. Through co-operation and links with class teachers, literacy coordinators, librarians and providers of adult education they obtain and adapt suitable materials, books, games and packs that are used with families, both in the home and in school-based initiatives, such as Mathematics for Fun, Shared Reading, and Science for Fun. To build a positive atmosphere of reading in the home and so to develop parents' interest in education, early intervention cannot be overestimated. In this regard the involvement of health service personnel, such as community nurses, who have access to homes during the important first months of a child's life, could help identify family needs regarding literacy and could also help parents to stimulate their child through appropriate play and attention. They could also bring age-appropriate material and equipment to the home through links developed with the HSCL coordinator. These materials could be of immense benefit in preparing children in the basics of literacy and numeracy.

In addition to this level of direct intervention, the imaginative development of incentives for parents to attend courses on parenting, home management, homework support and self-esteem may have to be considered. This could be done as part of the child benefit system, where some portion of it would be dependent on enrolment in and completion of such courses.

The introduction of early childhood education in all schools serving disadvantaged areas could offer great potential for early learning and socialisation skills among pre-school children. It would also encourage the involvement by parents in school activities from a very early stage. This involvement is crucial to the building of strong and positive relations between home and school and would greatly add to the work of HSCL. In addition, the sharing of resources and expertise in localities, based on the HSCL cluster model, would build a real sense of teamwork and would help identify families in need of more direct intervention by other agencies. The transition from pre-school to mainstream education would be made easier, and schools would be better equipped to tailor programmes to suit the identified needs.

HSCL coordinators are in many instances the driving force behind literacy and numeracy initiatives in their schools. Whole-school support for these initiatives is extremely important. This means that continuous testing, monitoring, evaluating and target-setting has to become the norm in all schools. Close working relations with learning support and resource teachers in the design, development and evaluation of short and specific programmes that have a parental element would improve literacy and numeracy. Evidence of this can be seen in the great success of the Forward Together programme, where parents work both at home and in school on a chosen book. Similarly, the Mathematics for Fun programme has not only demystified the world of mathematics for children but has encouraged many parents not only to become directly involved in classroom activities but also to return to education themselves. Many are now pursuing Junior Certificate level Mathematics or English.

The creative use of school libraries in which parents have a section with relevant information easily available can entice them to participate and become involved in storytelling sessions with children. The availability of attractive and colourful books and audio books that parents can borrow improves oral language skills and also provides a useful incentive to parents to involve themselves in initiatives such as Storysacks, Reading Challenge, Write a Book, Forward Together, CAPER, and many others.

The JCSP and LCA programmes at the post-primary level have scope for active contribution by parents in children's literacy and numeracy. As part of in-career development, HSCL coordinators have explored and shared with the support teams for these programmes the various methods of literacy and numeric skills development. Shared and paired reading, post-primary pupils working with primary and junior pupils, literacy games, book fairs, appropriate reading packs delivered to homes, reading and writing challenges, the use of hobbies as tools for literacy improvement, are all proving successful. In addition to actively assisting parents in the home with such initiatives, HSCL coordinators constantly link with and refer parents to appropriate support services, such as the NALA and VECs.

Within the school system the continuous development of teachers at the personal and the professional level is essential. The teaching of reading, as opposed to the hearing of it, must be properly developed and monitored, as must the use of modern technologies in classrooms, libraries, and homework clubs. This has implications not only for investment in schools but also in teacher training and whole-school review.

### **School value system**

During the coming years schools will be faced with some serious soul-searching about what type of value system is being propounded. Mission statements that reflect a largely Christian value system are being rewritten, re-evaluated and debated at length to see whether they are relevant to a rapidly changing world. There is growing pressure on schools from the media and society at large to discard much of what was held sacred in the past and sometimes to respond to a more economy-led model of progress.

It is important for schools, in the midst of pressure for change, competition, the rapid rise of cultural diversity, and conflicting values, to hold on to a leadership role for young people. The levels of uncertainty, isolation, negativity, inadequate parenting, early sexualisation and confusion experienced by many children mean that there is even more responsibility on schools to model certain values and to offer these without apology. A culture of relativism will not serve any society well. Self-respect, respect for others and for the universe, honesty, courage, diligence, generosity and loyalty are values that enhance all our lives and ultimately contribute to a more healthy society. These can be modelled, taught and developed by our education system, particularly by teachers who are in a position to have a significant effect on children's development.

As well as having a leadership role in society, schools in the future will have to become real community resources. In many ways they are becoming an extension of home, where pre-school and after-school meals, homework support and sports and cultural events take place. The next logical, if somewhat imaginative, step would be for all relevant child-centred and health-related services to be based in the same premises as the school, and this to be provided with adequate resources and equipped to deal holistically with the full range of children's needs: counselling, child care, family and behaviour therapy, speech and language therapy, family literacy, and money

and home management, as well as leisure-time activities. In this way parents could become a much more vibrant resource for the wider community and could spearhead initiatives to harness and build social capital in their immediate area.

### Building community through integration and partnership

In his book on American society *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam charts the disintegration of social structures and the increasing alienation and disconnection of people from each other and from their communities.<sup>66</sup> He analyses the harm to physical and civic health brought about by this twentieth-century phenomenon, which is becoming more and more a feature of many contemporary western societies. Increased wealth and acquisitiveness, radically altered family and social structures, declining social cohesion and civic engagement, allied to individual and collective alienation, pose serious questions about the cost of progress for community spirit and the common good. The changing nature of work has had far-reaching implications for family life and the nurturing of children. Urban sprawl, two-career families, long commuting times, high-technology entertainment in the home and generational changes in values mean that there is a social capital deficit in the Ireland of the twenty-first century. This decline in connectedness to community and to neighbours may explain some of the more serious anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, suicidal tendencies, apathy and disengagement that are evident in contemporary Ireland.

To build social capital we need to promote and develop partnership in its widest sense. This implies vision, solidarity, empowerment, goal orientation, and transformation. It demands time, commitment, and an ability to share power, to listen and above all to relate to others. Empowering people gives them the confidence and skills with which to contribute meaningfully to their community, work-place and school and to look to their own strengths in bringing about change. It gives them a sense of belonging, dignity, power and self-awareness as well as awareness of the wider society.



The way forward.

As educators we have a responsibility to explore ways of responding to needs through a partnership model. This implies that we respect difference, understand and accept new models of family, and plan interventions and solutions that are inclusive.

HSCL tries to build relationships of trust and support not only at the individual family level but with the wider community through networking with statutory and voluntary agencies. The Local Committee, with its broad representation of parents, pupils, and community members, is a powerful means of harnessing and directing energy towards examining issues that have an effect on learning, thus allowing people to identify and appropriate the relevant interventions and plans. Enhanced co-operation with various agencies helps to provide meaningful services, whether courses, information, family and community support or diversionary activities for young people, as

<sup>66</sup> Putnam, 2000.



well as homework and leisure-time clubs. As it grows and becomes more a part of community-building, the Local Committee should forge stronger links with business, youth services, arts officers, Gardaí, health services and education establishments so that preventive action can be taken before social problems become manifest and so that the duplication and replication of services can also be avoided.

### **The future for the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme**

The past decade has seen big changes at all levels of Irish society. This is particularly evident in the ways that people interact with authorities and the state. In relation to the school system, the rights of parents, as the primary educators, to be consulted, involved and central have been enshrined in legislation. Schools now have structured links with communities and are seen as central to the development of lifelong learning. The continuing emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education is a cornerstone of DEIS, the new action plan for educational inclusion published by the Department of Education and Science. Inherent in the various strategies outlined in the action plan is the importance of building on successes already evident through the HSCL Scheme. These are particularly evident in the many interventions to improve literacy, numeracy and oral language skills, the variety of ways in which parents' involvement is encouraged, the integration between primary and second-level elements of the scheme, the model of cluster support, networking with and harnessing the skills and resources of local communities, employers, and agencies, the development of key performance indicators, and the collection and analysis of data on achievement and outcome.

Prof. A. M. Pettigrew, an expert on change management and strategic development, uses the metaphor of the nineteenth-century wagon train, heading west towards California from the relative safety and security of the eastern seaboard, to characterise change journeys.<sup>67</sup> The four main characters of the wagon train journey are the enthusiasts who join and persuade others to join the wagon train, the power system that provides the financial and political support to equip the wagon train, the scouts who act as guides on the long journey, and the bystanders who observe this next wave of enthusiasts but who mostly choose not to participate in the journey themselves. The enthusiasts provide much of the early energy and commitment to drive the wagon train forward on its journey.<sup>68</sup> Transformational journeys start with a vision of what is possible. They develop through hard work, commitment, good leadership, and constant review and reassessment of the challenges, together with financial and political support from the power system. HSCL, underpinned by a vision of a just and more egalitarian partnership model of education, will continue to open up paths that have the power to enrich lives and bring about a more inclusive Ireland.

<sup>67</sup> Pettigrew, 1998.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



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# Abbreviations



<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Science
<b>EW0</b>	Education Welfare Officer
<b>GCEB-r</b>	Giving Children an Even Break-rural
<b>HSCL</b>	Home, School, Community Liaison
<b>JCSP</b>	Junior Certificate School Programme
<b>JLO</b>	Juvenile Liaison Officer
<b>LCA</b>	Leaving Certificate Applied
<b>LC</b>	Local Committee
<b>NALA</b>	National Adult Literacy Agency
<b>NEWB</b>	National Education Welfare Board
<b>SMI</b>	Strategic Management Initiative
<b>SNA</b>	special needs assistant
<b>TY</b>	transition year
<b>VEC</b>	Vocational Education Committee



# Explanation of Terms Used in the HSCL Scheme



### HSCL coordinators

HSCL coordinators are teachers on the staff of the school(s) which they serve. The coordinators are released from all teaching duties and engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community. It is expected that these posts will be occupied for an initial three years, which can be renewed for a maximum of six years. While working in the HSCL Scheme, coordinators retain their teaching post and seniority on the school staff.

### Clusters

The *family cluster* is a group of HSCL coordinators serving the same catchment area.

The *local cluster* is a multiple of the family cluster.

The *area cluster* is a multiple of the local cluster.

Thirteen *regional cluster* meetings are held each year. They provide an opportunity for chairpersons, principals, co-ordinators, inspectors and psychologists in a particular region to make a contribution to the evaluation and continuing development of the HSCL Scheme.

### Home visitation

Home visitation, which might be seen as a dramatic symbol of the whole HSCL Scheme, is a significant part of the work of the coordinator. It is emphasised in the scheme for the purpose of forming bonds of trust between home and school and of fortifying all families and pupils in a supportive and self-reliant community.

### Parents' room

The parents' room is an integral part of the life of the school. Situated in the heart of the school, it provides an accessible and welcoming forum for parents in realising their role as the primary educators of their children.

### Core group

The core group is a group of parents who stay close to the HSCL coordinators and their work. They are generally a group of parents who have been involved in courses and classes for parents through the HSCL Scheme.

### Local Committee

The Local Committee consists of a group of school personnel, voluntary and statutory agencies, marginalised but developed parents and primary and post-primary pupils who work on issues in the community that impinge on learning. The Local Committees, initiated and developed by the HSCL Scheme in 1990, have proved to be a valuable and creative tool in the difficult task of integrating services to families and the community.

### **Parents, pupils, teachers and community working on policy formation**

A central element of the HSCL coordinator's work is joint policy-making with parents, teachers, pupils and members of the community to give all parties a voice in what is contained in the policy, to draw on the life experience of the school community, and to give a sense of ownership of the policy. HSCL coordinators have worked with the education partners on a variety of policies, including anti-bullying, substance misuse, homework, attendance, nutrition, numeracy, and literacy.

### **Parents as home visitors**

Parents are the primary educators of their children. Educationalists acknowledge that parents who stay close to their own children's learning and to the school have immense social, cultural and educational capital to invest in their children and in the community. The HSCL Scheme, which trains parents as home visitors, recognises that experienced trained parents acting as agents for the school are in the best position to engage with other parents. Parents who act as home visitors support other parents, and they disseminate information. They enlist other parents, especially young parents, for courses, classes, committees, and meetings, especially parent-teacher meetings. They also encourage them to participate in classroom-based HSCL initiatives.

### **Literacy initiatives**

The HSCL Scheme aims to enable parents to become active participants in their children's learning and to stimulate learning in the home. The scheme acknowledges parents as partners and encourages them to take an active part in improving the literacy of their children. It also helps to inform them about curricular content and about the schools' educational aspirations for their children. This is achieved through the implementation of a range of literacy initiatives by HSCL coordinators.

### **Mathematics for Fun**

The involvement of parents in classroom-based numeracy initiatives has been developed through the HSCL Scheme in the past six years at primary and post-primary level. This initiative is now integral to the Scheme's practice. Activity-based emphasis in the teaching of mathematical concepts is central to learning at the primary level since 1971.

### **Care team**

Within the individual school, especially in post-primary schools, the care team seeks to give effect to a shared sense of purpose in responding to the needs of individual pupils from marginalised communities who, for a variety of reasons, are considered to be at risk. An integral part of the role of the HSCL coordinator in the community is to promote a cohesive approach to the provision of services to families in designated areas of disadvantage. This is done by encouraging and facilitating networking among the voluntary and statutory agencies that serve the local community. The establishment of a care team, and the support of those already in existence is intended to promote a similar cohesive approach between the professionals within the school and to the distinctive roles they fulfil in relation to individual pupils.

### **Transfer programme**

The HSCL Scheme seeks to maximise educational opportunities for pupils through parental and community empowerment. The HSCL Scheme strives to ensure that families enjoy a smooth and seamless transfer from one level of education to the next. HSCL and SCP work in close co-operation to achieve this. School transfer is a time of emotional and social challenge for many pupils and their families. It involves a triple transition for pupils: the move from a familiar school culture to a new one; the informal move from established friendships and peer groups to new peer groups; and the natural developmental move from childhood to adolescence.

### **Early Start**

The Early Start pre-school project offers one year of pre-school to children in designated areas of disadvantage. Involvement by parents is one of the core elements of the programme. The HSCL coordinator works with the Early Start staff to develop a structured plan to support parents, ranging from the initial contact with families to the enrolment of new pupils at open days. A programme of structured activities throughout the year is developed. The purpose of parents' involvement is to develop the parents as prime educators, providing them with the relevant skills to maximise their child's participation in the pre-school process, thus laying the foundations for future educational achievement.

### **School Completion Programme**

The School Completion Programme provides a wide range of targeted supports on an individual and group basis to young people who may be at risk of early school leaving. SCP is a DES initiative that aims to have a significant positive impact on levels of pupil retention in primary and post-primary schools and on the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or equivalent. SCP is based on the concept of integrated services. Effective supports include multi-faceted actions that respond to the young person's needs and must be both preventative and supportive. SCP is a collaborative programme that works in partnership with the HSCL Scheme, the family, the community, youth, and sporting organisations and with relevant statutory and voluntary bodies.