



SUBMISSION TO THE NESF PROJECT TEAM ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

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Introduction

Even at a time when Ireland is experiencing the highest levels of economic prosperity for many years, Early School Leaving (ESL) still exists. Young people who leave school at primary level or before obtaining their Junior Certificate suffer lower economic prospects and the potential danger of falling into a poverty trap. The economic boom of the Celtic Tiger has also impacted on the qualifications of students who leave school before obtaining the Leaving Certificate and the lure of part-time work is having a serious impact on the educational outcomes of many students. Government policy to tackle ESL has occurred on a piecemeal basis and legislation, such as the establishment of the National Education Welfare Board under the 1999 Education Welfare Act, has yet to be effectively implemented to tackle some of the more pertinent issues that could combat ESL.

Although more and more students are opting to stay in formal education, The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) believes that ESL is still way too prominent, reducing the educational, economic, social and cultural prospects of many young people in Irish society.

The following paper examines the issue of Early School Leaving, how it is caused, the socio-economic consequences of those who suffer from it, which socio-economic groups are most affected by it, and what policies have been put in place to prevent it. Recommendations will be offered on how to combat ESL in order to create a more cohesive approach to the issue.

Background

Early School Leaving can be defined in many different ways. According to the 1999 Education (Welfare) Act, an Early School Leaver is someone who leaves formal education before the age of 16 or before the completion of three years post-primary education, whichever is the later. However, it must be pointed out that the mandatory school leaving age remains at 15 until a ministerial order changes it to 16, as

legislated under the Education (Welfare) Act. An Early School Leaver is still at risk if he or she chooses to leave formal education after the Junior Certificate, especially if their examination performance is poor. This situation becomes even more acute for the disadvantaged socio-economic groups who are statistically more likely to become Early School Leavers.

Significant factors influencing ESL include:

- Poor school attendance and poor school achievement
- Age variance where a student is older than the rest of his/her classmates
- Poor self-image
- Low motivation and limited family support
- Father's employment record.
- The cost of education, especially for those suffering from multiple disadvantage and the impact of the Social Welfare System.

Over the years, many reports have outlined the reasons as to why Early School Leaving occurs. A report commissioned by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 1997 clearly outlines the socio-economic consequences of ESL; one being the tendency towards of ESL to impact on youth unemployment trends. Hannan et al, in their evaluation of the ESRI's Annual School Leaver's Survey, found that it is not just those with no qualifications who experience high rates of unemployment but also those who failed to obtain five or more passes in their Junior Certificate (or equivalent). Therefore, the earlier an individual drops out of formal education, the greater the chances of low employment and economic prospects, which may eventually lead to poverty and increased social exclusion. ESL also has the potential to marginalise different social groupings within society, for example:

- young Travellers,
- young unskilled men,
- lone parents,
- young people in disadvantaged areas and,
- young people in rural settings.

The NYCI believes that a blanket approach to ESL is not effective and that recommendations must be targeted to different social groups in different social settings as well as recognising the cumulative effects of disadvantage within these social groups. In other words, steps need to be taken to both combat ESL as first principle but also to make provisions within the labour market for these marginalised groups if the formal education sector fails them.

The Joint Committee on Education and Science on Early School Leaving (1999) regards the issue of ESL as a very significant problem in Ireland. The committee estimated that 3,200 young people leave school without any qualification and almost 1,000 of these are at primary level. At this point, it is important to highlight that ESL statistics are only estimates because there is no official census conducted to establish the rate of ESL in the Irish school system. In the latter stages of this report, NYCI will reinforce the necessity for a nationwide tracking system to systematically monitor the pathways of potential Early School Leavers.

The following findings from the Joint Committee on Education and Science's report highlight the socio-economic groupings most at-risk from ESL:

- Almost half of the children who leave school with no qualification are drawn from households whose father is either unemployed or in an unskilled manual occupation. About 33% of children from such backgrounds do not proceed beyond the Junior Certificate.
- ESL is acute among the Traveller community and it is estimated that as many as 75% of Traveller children leave school with no qualification. Estimates from Traveller organisations would claim that this figure is even higher.
- ESL is also heavily concentrated among boys. Two boys leave school early for every one girl.

These statistics clearly highlight some interesting characteristics of an Early School Leaver. The literature on ESL shows that it is an intergenerational phenomenon that affects young people with disadvantaged backgrounds, that it affects a higher proportion of young men than young women, and that it is widespread in the Traveller community. It is clear that any initiative employed to tackle ESL must concentrate on

ways to both 'break the cycle' of intergenerational poverty but to also be aware of the cultural sensitivities that may lead to ESL.

As noted in the body of this paper, the problem of ESL among the Traveller community is particularly acute. Even within the primary system about 16% of Traveller children have dropped out. By the time they reach 15, 80% have dropped out. Overall only 44% of Traveller children aged 12-15 participate in any education. The annual dropout among the Traveller community of children with no qualifications is approximately 500. This small community with no more than 10,000 children of school-going age, representing only little more than 1% of the school-going population, account for 1 in 6 of all unqualified early school leavers. Even with the establishment of high level supports through government funding for the Traveller community, the problem of ESL persists. Specific recommendations to combat ESL within the Traveller community are therefore included in this position paper.

It is also important to highlight at this point that ESL and poor literacy go hand in hand. Ireland was noted in the OECD's Education at a Glance (2000), as having one of the poorest records on adult literacy; a quarter of all the adult population have limited literacy skills. To this end, the government has increased the Adult Literacy budget from £0.85 million prior to 1997 to £5.665 million in 2000. Nevertheless, this 'second chance' approach to adult literacy must also be matched at both primary and secondary levels. Poor literacy skills have the ability to stigmatise students and therefore impacts on their chances of completing second level education. Remedial education needs to be resourced much more effectively, and at the earliest stages of formal education.

Initiatives to Tackle Early School Leaving

According to the Report of the Joint Committee on Education & Science on Early School Leaving, there is a persistent and continuing lack of effectiveness in the initiatives targeted to combat ESL at both primary and secondary levels. This section describes initiatives in this area and how effective they have been to date.

Primary Level

In 1997, the overall scheme targeting disadvantage in one shape or another at primary level cost £46 million or 7% of the primary budget. The evidence suggests that the impact of those schemes is falling far short of evening up educational opportunities for children at risk of ESL. The impact of these schemes have not been formally evaluated more recently, adding weight to the fact that formal tracking, evaluation, and monitoring structures need to be established immediately.

Remedial education- At primary level, the main early intervention has been the remedial education service. This has a budget of approximately £30 million and employs over 1,300 teachers. About 55,000 pupils receive some remedial support, close to 12% of all primary level pupils. Although this is considered to be an effective measure, the scheme is under-resourced, under-staffed, under-supported and fails to really tackle disadvantage effectively.

Early Start & Breaking the Cycle

Early Start: A pre-school programme that is available in 40 schools and reaches about 1,600 pupils.

Breaking the Cycle: A programme that guarantees a pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1 in junior classes in 33 urban schools with just over 3,300 pupils benefiting. A similar number of pupils are reached by the rural Breaking the Cycle scheme spread over 123 schools.

In contrast to their predecessors, detailed monitoring and evaluation systems are being put in place for both of these programmes. Although the programmes are reaching very few pupils, they do involve significant resources costing close to £6 million

between them and deploying almost 180 teachers. The cost per pupil of Early Start is £1,300, while Breaking the Cycle costs £700 per pupil in urban schools, £280 in rural schools.

The main concern of the Department of Education is whether these costly schemes should be mainstreamed so that they reach all of the significantly deprived areas. The spending on these programmes would have to be increased at least £30 million before they could be said to be reaching even the priority areas and far more if made available in all designated schools.

Home School Community Liaison programme & Teacher Counsellor

Programme- Both of these interventions are aimed at supporting the children and families in designated disadvantaged schools rather than providing teaching instruction. Teacher Counsellors assist pupils to deal with the many problems that they encounter, while the Home School Community Liaison Teachers work with the parents explaining what the school is doing and encouraging involvement and offering parents personal development programmes as foundation for helping the pupil to say on in school. It seeks to build a stronger home environment to support the pupil and also encourage the school to take a broader approach that is more welcoming to pupils from disadvantaged areas and to their parents. Again, these programmes have yet to be formally evaluated.

Designated Schools- 318 schools containing about 17% of 'disadvantaged' primary schools have been designated. The designation scheme costs about £10 million in teaching and non-teaching expenditure to operate and involves almost 300 teachers. This scheme has yet to be evaluated and is considered to be too under-resourced to be effective.

Second Level

There have been fewer innovations from the Department to develop new approaches to targeting pupils with particular disadvantage at second level. The current budget of less than £20 million between remedial services and other programmes for disadvantaged pupils at second level is far from adequate, particularly against the background of the prevailing high levels of drop-out in the first couple of years at second level. It represents just 3% of the total second level budget to confront

problems affecting almost 20% of pupils. There is clearly a need for the development of well-resourced programmes to assist the transition of pupils from primary to second level. Described below are some measures to tackle ESL: in the formal education sector, at a local level, at an interagency level and at 'second chance' level.

Leaving Certified Applied Programme (LCAP)- A programme intended to meet the needs of students who are not adequately catered for by the Traditional Leaving Certificate programme or choose to opt-out from such programmes.

There are three main elements in the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme:

- Vocational preparation which is allocated approximately 25% of the overall time allocation and includes modules of vocational preparation and guidance, English and Communication.
- Vocational Education which is allocated 30% of the time and consists of modules of vocational specialist and mathematical applications
- General education having a time allocation of 30% and incorporating modules such as Social Education, Languages, including two modules in Gaeilge Chumarsaideach and two modules in modern European languages.

The remainder 15% is discretionary time and thus is intended for schools to adapt the programme to meet the particular need and strengths of the student.

Overall just under 6% of pupils take the LCA. However, in the schools offering the programme, it is quite popular with one and five pupils opting for it. The programme has also received good backing from employers who express satisfaction with the performance of its participants in the workplace. They have pressed strongly for its expansion. However, if it is to expand, the Department will have to give greater attention to the physical infrastructure in schools and the teaching time available to plan and implement the programme in schools.

8-15 Initiative & Stay in School Retention Scheme Initiative- Both programmes are/will be supported by support teams to facilitate training and help develop individual school plans to meet the needs of the individual targeted children – curricular, learning, social and personal needs. Individual school plans or contracts provide for additional resources and ongoing reporting and review mechanisms.

Fundamental to the schemes is the direct link between the continuation of resources and the achievement of agreed targets. Schools participating in the SSRI are required therefore to devise focused and targeted integration plans that involve local agencies in collaborative actions in support of the young people at risk.

Local Partnership Companies- The establishment of the 38 Partnership Companies has given a significant boost to local development. Education programmes have been a significant pillar of this approach. For the five-year programme up to 1999, a total of £10.5 million was earmarked for educational interventions aimed at disadvantaged groups. It is expected that by the time the programmes are completed, over 40,000 school going children and just under 20,000 adults will have participated in partnership education projects. In budgetary terms, roughly half of the budget will be spent on support to pupils still at school, and the balance to young school leavers or adults after they have left school.

These programmes have spawned a great deal of innovation. They have built local networks between schools and with communities that have traditionally been almost entirely absent from Ireland's centralised educational structure.

Comprehensive Pathway Approach- The Pathways Model is based on two assumptions, firstly, that the best place for a young person is in school, and secondly, that no one agency has the resources or the ability to respond to early school leaving completely. Therefore any response to ESL needs to be an interagency one, pooling the variety of networks, information and skills within the various organisations to form one coherent integrated service. The model is person centred and based on youth work principles.

The purpose of the model is to identify, track and assess ESLs through an Inter-agency and multi-strand approach resulting in the establishment of a proactive database, identify appropriate progression routes and enable ESL's to make informed career choices through the most effective and co-ordinated use of the resources in the area.

The four key stages in each young person's comprehensive pathway can be identified:

- Engagement- making contact, outreach, induction, acclimatisation
- Empowerment- assessment, confidence building, mentoring and setting goals and plans, tasting options
- Learning- skills, learning, work experience
- Integration and follow-up- placement and after-care

Youthreach- Youthreach targets the early school leaver. Administration of the scheme is divided between VEC and FÁS (through Community Training Workshops), although policy has now been consolidated in the Department of Education. Almost 70% of participants have no qualifications whatsoever and the balance no more than a Junior Certificate. Participants in the programme are made up of about one third who left before Junior Cert. The programme targets the 15-18 age group.

A recent ESF evaluation of Youthreach was critical, highlighting the lack of counselling, certification, literacy programmes and progression. Nevertheless, Youthreach is generally well regarded by participants who feel they are treated with greater respect than at school. Over 70% of participants are now believed to progress to employment, further education or training. Over 90% receive some accredited certification.

The cost of Youthreach is currently running at £32 million close to £7,000 per year per participant. One major difference is that Youthreach pays participants a training allowance starting at £28.75 at age 15 and rising to £70.50 at age 18. About 40% of the cost go on such allowances. Even allowing for this, the budget is sizeable at over £4,000 per person and in marked contrast to the poorly resourced schemes available to assist these pupils before they left school. It is perverse that a person has to leave school to be able to draw down income support and well-resourced suitable programmes. This contradiction in policy needs to be addressed.

Policy Concerns

Educational Disadvantage has been on the policy agenda for many years. In the most recent Budget 2000, some preventative measures to tackle ESL and educational

disadvantage were set out. These measures included an additional £5 million to intensify efforts to ensure that pupils complete their schooling and an additional £0.75 million to give extra grants to address disadvantage in primary schools. While these measures go some way to tackle the problem of ESL, with special attention to early-schooling preventative measures, clarification on the nature and scope of the measures is required. The allocations are an indication of some resolve to tackle educational disadvantage, but the government needs to go much further if real equity is brought to the Irish education system.

Fundamental to the success of any initiatives or schemes tackling ESL and educational disadvantage, is resource allocation. The **National Anti-Poverty Strategy** has set out the national targets for reducing ESL and these must clearly be backed up by sufficient investment at both primary and secondary level. There is an acceptance that achieving the overall targets have been problematic as the retention of pupils to upper second level has remained static at 81% for a number of years compounded more recently by the draw into low paid employment. Serious literacy problems at primary level also remain stubbornly static for 10% of children with little change since 1980. The **National Development Plan**, which has an overall budget of £40 billion, has allocated £5.35 billion of the total budget to tackling ESL and educational disadvantage. Also included in the National Development Plan is a School Completion Initiative. This initiative, which takes up £75.5 million of the budget, will have four strands:

- **Research & Evaluation:** To evaluate models of best practice and research on the early identification of potential school leavers.
- **Tracking:** The development of an integrated database for primary and post-primary pupils to identify pupils at risk of leaving school early
- **Whole School Support:** To target schools with retention rates 10% below the national average that will be required to agree to a programme of action tailored to their particular needs
- **Student Support:** To target pupils at risk of leaving school early, who do not attend that are below the national average.

Other initiatives such as the Early Education Initiative, the Early Literacy Initiative, Traveller Education and the School Guidance Service, are included in the plan. It is

imperative that these resources are distributed effectively in the lifespan of the Development Plan. The Department of Education & Science will distribute funds but the approach to eliminating educational disadvantage and ESL must be a co-ordinated one, especially at the local level.

The National Development Plan has also allocated £165.8 million funding for **Youth Services**. Included in this allocation is a scheme to allocate grants to special out-of-school projects for disadvantaged young people, facilitating the personal development and social education of youth at risk of drug abuse, juvenile crime, ESL, social exclusion, unemployment, welfare dependence, homelessness and marginalisation. At a policy level, it is important to note that a collaborative approach between the formal education sector and the youth work sector is essential. Without adequately funding the youth work sector, there is a risk that young people, who poorly attend school or have problematic relationships with teachers, can slip through the net. If an inter-agency approach is to be achieved, the youth sector must have an equal and formalised part to play in combating ESL.

Government thinking on Early School Leaving and educational disadvantage continues to evolve. The Department of Education's most recent strategy emphasises its enduring centralised approach to education. This strategy has three main platforms:

- A new, statutory Educational Disadvantage Committee
- A forum to address Educational Disadvantage
- The appointment of an acting Director of Programmes to tackle disadvantage in the country's 3,200 primary schools.

In 1999, the government launched a £194 million plan to tackle educational disadvantage. The plan, called 'The New Deal-A Plan for Educational Opportunity' involved every level of the education system, including pre-school and adult literacy and also provided the funding for a complete revision of targeted disadvantage funding for schools.

Included in the plan is funding for the National Education Welfare Board. Under the 1999 Education (Welfare) Bill, the National Education Welfare Board was established, among others, to:

- Ensure the provision of a prescribed minimum education to each child
- Assist in the formulation and implementation of government policy and objectives concerning the education of children
- Promote and foster in society an appreciation of the benefits to be derived from education
- Promote and foster in schools and environment that encourages children to attend school and participate fully in the life of the school
- Conduct and commission research into the reasons for truancy on the part of students and into strategies and programmes designed to prevent or discourage truancy
- Advise and assist parents of children with school attendance problems
- Assess the adequacy of the training and guidance provided to teachers relating to school attendance matters.

Moreover, provisions are made in the Act to address the situation where young people leave school early with inadequate qualifications in order to enter the workforce. It provides a framework that will ensure that all such young people under 18 years are identified. Once identified, the National Education Welfare Board will assist them to access continuing education and training. Employers will have a role to play in the identification of the young people concerned by employing only young people who have a certificate to show that they are registered with the Board and by informing the Board when they employ a young person. It is essential that this element is enacted as soon as possible and the NYCI has called for more careful monitoring of the Young Persons Employment Act to achieve this goal.

While the National Education Welfare Board will attempt to tackle some of the pertinent causes of ESL from a top-down approach, other approaches target the issue of ESL at a micro level. In other words, shifting the focus of education from the provider to the recipient. To encourage ESL's to stay at school over the age of 15, an Education Youth Wage of between £28 and £36 per week has been proposed. This will be means-tested and targeted at low-income families where the greatest financial

pressure to leave school early and go to work exists. A school leaver can get a paid job or can get unemployment assistance, someone who stays at school can lose out. Moreover, to encourage those who have already left school prematurely to return to school, an Education Credit Voucher scheme with an initial £2 million has also been proposed. The holder will be entitled to present the credit to either an employer or a training provider in order to avail of suitable training. The voucher scheme will be piloted in a particular geographic area with a high concentration of early school leavers. Third, a new initiative known as Liferforce will be developed within selected disadvantaged areas to promote adult education and develop support systems to help participants succeed.

This approach to Early School Leaving and disadvantaged education has been criticised as being idealistic and short-sighted in its approach to retaining potential early school leavers in the system. Nevertheless, the 'bottom-up' approach to tackling ESL makes sense. More attention and resources need to be given to efforts of community initiatives to address the problems of early school leaving, truancy, absenteeism, and literacy problems at a local level. Government-led pilot programmes and initiatives must be matched in funding and resources with local and organic initiatives that personally recognise the issues that may lead young people in their community to drop out of school. Again, youth organisations have a very important part to play in recognising the issues facing young people at a local level and working in partnership with parents, teachers, social workers and home liaison officers to offer the most effective way to keep a young person in school.

Recommendations

Below are a number of measures and recommendations that the NYCI believe are effective in tackling the issues of ESL and educational disadvantage. By no means is this list exhaustive but highlights priority issues that need to be addressed.

- 1. Review all initiatives targeted to marginalised groups most affected by early school leaving and educational disadvantage. Be aware of the changing nature of educational disadvantage, for example, are the children of refugees and asylum seekers experiencing educational disadvantage? If so, what needs**

to be done to combat educational disadvantage in this social group? What general lessons can be passed on?

- 2. The need for a national tracking system is well overdue. The 1999 Education (Welfare) Act established a National Education Welfare Board to monitor and track young people who are in danger of dropping out of formal education. The Welfare Board has just been established but there has been no further moves to implement the monitoring and tracking infrastructure. Traveller organisations have also called for a tracking system to monitor and track the transition of young Travellers from primary to secondary level that has yet to be established.**
- 3. The Irish education system must rectify its poor literacy record. Poor literacy abilities impact on the life-chances of people and lend to future child poverty. The education system is under-resourced across the board, but the lack of resources at pre-primary and primary level is unacceptable. Increased resources must be coupled with increased funding of remedial education and an increased number of remedial teachers.**
- 4. Tackling educational disadvantage through Youth Work is an essential element to an interagency approach. The Youth Work sector has a clear and defined role in enabling young people and children to learn skills, acquire knowledge, and interact with their peers in an informal manner. Such an environment can support young people from all different socio-economic backgrounds who are in danger of dropping out of school. The sector is currently inadequately resourced to effectively carry out this role.**
- 5. Flexibility at all levels of the education system is required. Not all children are academically minded and this needs to be recognised at the earliest stages of education.**
- 6. The use of breakfast clubs, homework clubs, school lunch programmes have proved successful. In the long-term, if these schemes prove to be an effective measure in combating ESL and educational disadvantage, they must be**

mainstreamed. In the short-term, wherever possible, provision should be made on a local and community basis. A formal review of the nutritional value of the food offered in these clubs should also be carried out.

Furthermore, free school meals and milk should be reinstated in primary and post-primary schools, particularly in disadvantaged/socially excluded communities.

- 7. The Department of Education & Science must review their definition of ‘free education’. The cost of sending children to school has been spiralling in recent times and more incentives are required to reducing these costs amongst families on lower incomes so that they can afford to retain their children in formal education.**
- 8. More Career Guidance Counsellors are required at both primary and secondary level. Recent evaluations have shown that the ratios of Counsellors to students are wholly inadequate within secondary schools. The use of Guidance Counsellors need to be extended to primary schools and special attention needs to be given to career and schooling advice to socio-economic groups most at risk of ESL and educational disadvantage.**
- 9. Additional funding through local partnerships for educational purposes should be implemented immediately. The over-centralised approach to education is insufficient to tackle the issues surrounding ESL and educational disadvantage. Partnerships have been quite successful in addressing problems and concerns at the local level and increased funding must be maintained to address ESL from the bottom, up.**
- 10. An Addiction Counsellor should be shared amongst schools in areas where there is a known drug problem. In areas of high economic and social deprivation, drug use can impact on the educational opportunities of many young people and their siblings. In an interagency approach to combating ESL, social workers, Home Liaison officers, addiction counsellors, and guidance counsellors must be made available to all schools as and when they are needed. Increased resources must also be made available to schools to**

follow-up all cases of drug-use by children in order to get them the necessary support.

- 11. Special-needs training needs to be reviewed. If necessary, teachers should be given in-house training or extra teachers with special-needs training should be supplied to schools.**
- 12. Positive discrimination is required. In order to achieve an equitable education system, extra rewards need to be distributed to those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised within the system. To this end, a comprehensive and nationwide review of the level of social exclusion in all schools is essential.**
- 13. Child Benefit Allowance needs to be doubled at all ages or in the early years taking the early development of children in all manners into account. Special attention must be given to targeting people on lower incomes and their specific needs.**
- 14. Increase the Back to School Allowance and adjust the Community Employment scheme to ensure lone parents do not miss out on this allowance. Early School Leaving for lone parents is predominantly a young women's issue. All steps need to be taken to ensure that adequate childcare allowances and facilities are offered to lone parents so that they can stay in the education system.**
- 15. Paying teachers for the supervision of after-school activities must be considered. Many teachers graciously give up their free time after school to supervise an array of extra-curricular activities. It is time that their goodwill is financially recognised and that an incentive scheme is implemented to attract more teachers into giving time to children they believe might be at risk. There is also the potential here to bring teachers, parents and children together after hours to tackle issues of concern that might not be addressed within school hours.**

- 16. A greater number of playgrounds, facilities and activities for young people need to be resourced, especially from the ages of 10 to 18 years, to reduce the dependence on health-damoting activities (for example, underage drinking, ‘hanging around on the street corner’ and the possibility of meeting with bad company). On a wider level, this can lead to the improvement of community spirit and cohesion among the young people of that community.**
- 17. Young people need to remain in education and training until they are 16 allowing for increased flexibility in the types of education and training that they receive. For example:**
- **School (LC/LCA)**
 - **NCVA- accredited courses (e.g. PLC’s)**
 - **Third-Level education**
 - **Apprenticeship schemes**
 - **FÁS, CERT and other government-supported training opportunities.**
- 18. Closer policing of the Young Persons Employment legislation is required by appointing more inspectors. As before, the National Education Welfare Board must be fully established to assist in this measure.**
- 19. Award a grant/allowance to those young people who have completed the Leaving Cert./Leaving Cert. Applied programmes. This would be a sizeable amount- £500- £1000.**
- 20. Every secondary school (or those with at least 200 students) should receive an additional teaching post. Evidence suggests that increased classroom numbers lends itself to truancy, absenteeism, and poor school performance. There is a definite need to reduce the student to teacher ratios throughout the education system.**
- 21. Reform of the senior cycle curriculum (Leaving Cert.) needs to continue. Students should have greater flexibility in choosing which subjects to take, as these decisions can have an important bearing on their future careers. This**

can be achieved by reducing the number of subjects that students have to take in the Leaving Certificate and further take-up of the Leaving Certificate Applied.

- 22. In areas of particular educational and socio-economic disadvantage, it may be appropriate to provide additional support in the form of financial incentives for young people to remain in school. However, this should only take place in limited areas and as a direct response to local needs. No national scheme of support should be created.**
- 23. The government should encourage homework clubs in schools throughout the country to use them as a means of supporting students who are finding it difficult to learn. In addition, the government should provide support for these by:**
- Providing funding for schools to pay teachers to stay behind after normal school hours and work with Homework clubs. If schools are unable to accommodate the clubs, then arrangements should be made for them to use local community centres.**
 - Providing funding to cover the cost of insurance for school/community centres to host homework clubs.**
 - Involving parents and others in the community in the running of homework clubs. For example, youth workers and youth clubs could link in closely with homework clubs and provide additional support. There could be a role for the Youth Service in supporting these.**
 - Encouraging third level students to act as tutors in homework clubs. Credit could be given to third level students involved in this way.**
- 24. Review the issue of rolling suspensions, particularly in areas of high economic and social disadvantage. Is there a need for a nationwide tracking system of suspension to monitor the underlying reasons as to why disruptive students continue to be suspended and how their specific needs can be addressed?**

- 25. There is an immediate need to look at the issue as to why low ability girls who complete second level schooling participate less frequently in the labour market than low ability boys who leave school early.**
- 26. Review the issue of bullying at school and how it impacts on the educational opportunities of students who are considered to be marginalised in the system. Demand the introduction of the CSPE (Civic, Social and Personal Education) at primary level due to the fact that discriminatory attitudes and opinions can already be formed at this stage.**
- 27. Bonus payments should be paid to teachers with the relevant qualifications to teach in schools designated to be disadvantaged in light of the fact that schools deemed to be disadvantaged are finding it difficult to recruit experienced teachers. All teachers should be offered training in how to deal with diversity, racism, and difference amongst school students.**
- 28. Students who are in danger of dropping out of the formal education system need to be listened to. All initiatives implemented to combat educational disadvantage and Early School Leaving must learn from the student voice. The NYCI welcomes the establishment of student councils in a majority of second-level schools and supports the establishment of the Union of Secondary Students (USS) as an essential partner in the education system. All efforts need to be made by the Department of Education and individual schools to create an environment where the student voice is considered.**

Recommendations for young Travellers experiencing ESL and Educational Disadvantage

The educational profile of Travellers in Ireland is very poor. Evidence that does exist points to poor levels of access, participation and outcomes in all levels of the education service, including primary school. Changing the culture of Irish education will not solely benefit members of minority communities but all communities. Bringing about the changes necessary to create equality of outcomes for Travellers

from the education system would signal a significant opening of the education system, which would enrich all society.

Recommendations

- ◆ The immediate establishment of the Traveller Education Service, as recommended by the Task Force on the Traveller Community 1995.
- ◆ Development and implementation of Traveller Education Strategy, this would contribute to the accomplishment of equality of outcomes for Travellers from education. It would mark out the challenges for the future and clearly identify ways to approach those challenges.
- ◆ A tracking system should be established to see how Traveller children and young people are progressing through the education system. Care is needed in how this system is established. Ethnic quality monitoring should be based on principles of self-identification and universal question i.e. all students should identify their ethnic background.
- ◆ An independent review of how resources are being used for Travellers in the education system. There is a need for extra resources and supports to be used in line with best international practice.
- ◆ Enrolment and integration into schools are still issues for Travellers. At local level, a multi-faceted approach to early school leaving is necessary with all local players involved: young people, parents, schools, youth services, home-school liaison, local Traveller groups etc. Schools need to be equality-proofed to combat prejudice and racism from parents, teachers, students' etc.
- ◆ Educational disadvantage that leads to ESL needs to be tackled at all levels and this needs to include an intercultural approach to education

from 'early-years' to third level education and training, with an emphasis on equality and anti-racism.

- ◆ It is essential that equality is a core value in evaluating schools and that subsequent and elaborated policies ensure equality is required of schools throughout the school planning systems.
- ◆ Specific research into best international practice re: education of minorities.
- ◆ Empowerment of Traveller parents to engage with and influence the education system needs to be addressed. There is a need for a Traveller branch of the National Parent's Council.
- ◆ Initiatives to promote education of children who are nomadic need to be developed. Recommendations in the Task Force report relating to this issue need to be implemented, for example, school record card.