

*Integration of policy via
universal provision for
3-6 year-olds.*

Dr. Noëlle Spring
Development Director
Katharine Howard Foundation

Start Strong Six Years Conference - Joining Up the Dots Workshop
Dublin, 13 December 2011

Provision for 3-6 year olds

Universal -

- **Primary School** - compulsory full-time education for all children between 6 years & transition to post-primary school;
- **Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE)**
January 2010 + Síolta (2006) & Aistear (2009).

Targeted –

- **Early Start** pilot pre-school programme (Oct 1994).

Comprehensive Education Legislation & Policies

- Green Paper (Government of Ireland, 1992);
- Education Convention (Coolahan, 1994);
- A White Paper on Early Childhood Education, Ready to Learn, 1999;
- National Children's Strategy 2000 – 2010;
- Education (Welfare) Act (Government of Ireland, 2000);
- Educational Disadvantage Forum (2002);
- DEIS action plan (2005);
- Office of the Minister for Children (OMC, 2005);
- Formation of the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (June, 2011);
- Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011).

Equality of Education

- Poverty & social exclusion are key factors for some children that influence educational outcomes (McCoy & Smyth, 2009);
- **Educational disadvantage** - a culmination of both in-school and out-of-school experiences (led to many targeted approaches focusing on equality of access, opportunity and outcomes (Kellaghan et al.1995);
- Poor attendance is one indicator of educational disadvantage & predictor of life-chances(Darmody, Smyth & McCoy, 2007);
- *Poor Attendance at Primary School Level: Day in Day Out* - A case study in an educationally disadvantaged setting (Spring, N. (2011, unpublished thesis).

Research Methodology

The research adopted a case study research strategy and applied a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design.

Two phases:

- Phase 1 - Quantitative method - the extraction of data from roll books of 2 primary schools over 2006/7 school-year (June '08);
- Phase 2 – Qualitative method - semi-structured interviews with seven respondents (Mar – April '09).

Focus of the study

- Patterns & trends of attendance
- Intervention & prevention strategies
- Findings are outlined within the broader legislative & policy context

Poor Attendance- a predictor of school engagement

- The highest % of absenteeism was among the youngest students; in junior (12.2%) and senior (11.8%) infant grades (2006-2007);
- The % figure of absenteeism for the 306 students for the year 2006 - 2007 was 10.2%, (10.9% nationally in DEIS schools);
- Days of the Week- Mon (11.2%) & Fri (14.5%);
- Time of the Year - September (6.7%) to June (15.5%).

Positive Beginnings: Improving Early Participation

- Patterns & trends of attendance in infant classes are a concern;
- Poor attendance is habit forming from the beginning of school life;
- There has been much emphasis on the identification of early risk factors as it is the critical point of intervention for successful outcomes;
- Much effort has been applied to address this through school-based strategies and initiatives with a focus on combating educational inequality;
- Many agencies are in contact with families of young children.

Ensuring the attendance of young children

Opportunities for integration –

- Child and family's needs at the centre of interventions – Children Services Committees at county level;
- Alignment of Intervention & prevention strategies, (Clear protocols to support integration & collaboration between the schools, other educationalists and agencies nationally & locally) NEWB, Literacy & Numeracy Strategy, DEIS review, upcoming NCS (forthcoming);
- The NEWB Pilot project (2009) offers a promising route to better integration and collaboration;
- Schools / ECCE Services / Child & Family Agencies need to cooperate to ensure implementation of EWA, 2000.

Conclusions

- Attendance is key to early engagement and participation;
- Early Intervention requires collaboration between providers of Early Childhood Care & Education and Primary Schools;
- Clear protocols required to support integration & collaboration between the schools, other educationalists and agencies nationally & locally.

Final Words

“Research increasingly has shown the benefits of early childhood education and efforts to promote the lifelong acquisition of skills for both individuals and the economy as a whole. The payoffs of early childhood programs can be especially high.” (Head US Federal Reserve- Ben Bernanke, 2011)