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Baseline Research for the Development of the Rialto Learning Community

Final Report

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Rialto Learning Community (RLC) was initiated in January 2009 and merged three separate organisations that had a long history of provision of OST services to young people in the Rialto area: The Dolphin Homework Club, The Fatima Homework Club and the Rialto Youth Project. The RLC primarily serves a population of children and young people who live in public housing at the Dolphin House flat complex, and a new housing development of social and affordable housing at the newly regenerated Fatima (formerly Fatima Mansions).

The main purpose of the research is to provide baseline data on the provision of out of school time activities (OST) for young people aged 11-14 years in the Rialto area which is to be used to inform the development of the RLC and its future evaluation. Specifically the research involved:

- the collection of data from two groups of young people in relation to various aspects of their well-being

- obtaining the views and perceptions of stakeholders on OST activities

- determining the nature of young people's relationships with OST service providers

- recorded observations of OST staff engagement with children and young people in two OST settings

- making recommendations for the future evaluation of the RLC.

Methodology

The research aims were addressed through a mixed methods approach that involved a literature review, analysis of secondary data, quantitative surveys, qualitative focus groups and interviews, and observation.

The approach to the research was also underpinned by a principle of *inclusiveness*. All of the relevant stakeholders who are involved in OST activities in the RLC were included: young people, parents, teachers and OST practitioners.

The preliminary stages of data collection consisted of compiling secondary sources of data. In particular, this involved reviewing documentation that existed on the RLC.

Primary data collection consisted of the following:

Quantitative	*Qualitative*
Student survey (n = 142)	Focus groups with young people (n = 15)
Parent survey (n = 40)	Focus group with parents (n = 6)
School data collection from 8 schools (n = 122)	Interviews with teachers (n = 11)
Pilot observations of 2 OST activities	Interviews with OST project leaders (n = 3)
	Focus groups with OST project staff (n = 13)

Key findings

Young people

Formal education and schooling

School attendance	• The average number of days absent from primary school was 9% in 2007/8, compared to the national rate of 6%. Similarly, for secondary school students, school absence was 13% compared to 8% nationally. Serious absences (20 days or more) were also higher than the national average.
	• School absence rates were in line with national trends for schools designated as disadvantaged.
Literacy	• Primary school students were just as likely to score 'average' in reading tests as the national population. However, they were more likely to score 'below average' than would be expected nationally.
	• Similarly, the reading age of secondary school students was on average 2.3 years *below* their chronological age.
	• In relation to numeracy (primary students), the study group were more likely to score 'below average' than the comparison group.
Learning support	• 43% of young people received some form of learning support.
	• 30% of secondary students were taking the Junior Certificate Schools Programme.
Attitudes to school and learning	• Overall, attitudes to school and teachers were generally positive. Where this was not the case, the study group were more likely to have less positive views than the comparison group.

Homework	• 86% of survey participants reported that they got their homework done on time - this was less likely for the study group than the comparison group.
	• 56% of survey participants asked for help with their homework – the study group were more likely to get help from a homework club than the comparison group.
Future education aspirations	• 89% of participants expected to sit the Junior Certificate.
	• 82% of participants said they expected to take the Leaving Certificate. However, boys in the study group were at greatest risk of leaving school before sitting the Leaving Certificate.
	• 4 out of 10 young people in the study group expected to go onto further education.

Participation in OST activities

Aspects of participation	• 79% of survey participants had attended an after school club in the previous week.
	• The study group were significantly more likely to go to a community homework club, youth club or youth project than the comparison group.
	• Young people had typically been attending at least one after school club for a number of years, with the study group attending over a longer period of time than the comparison group.
	• Secondary students with literacy difficulties were less likely to attend a homework club than primary school students.
Attitudes to OST	• The majority of young people held positive attitudes about the clubs they took part in.
Benefits of after school clubs	• Young people tended to report social benefits rather than educational benefits. Although, the survey results showed that their involvement in after school clubs was positive for their education. This was more likely for boys than girls.
	• The main reason for attending a homework club was to complete homework and avoid getting into trouble at school. Educational benefits were perceived in the short-term only.
Choice of homework club	• Young people showed a preference for the community homework club rather than one based at school; welcomed the greater freedom, chance to do other activities and greater provision of one-to-one homework support.

Relationships with staff	• The majority of young people had positive attitudes to staff.
	• There was evidence of young people feeling able to confide in staff about issues that might be bothering them.
Relationships with peers	• Attending a homework club gave young people the chance to spend time with friends and to make friends.
	• There was an issue with discipline, where some young people reported that others could be disruptive in the homework club.
Reasons for non-participation	• The most common reason given by young people was that the club activity did not interest them, followed by their friends not attending (especially for girls).

Other aspects of well-being

| Self-esteem | • Both the study and comparison group showed high levels of self-esteem |

Parents

Attitudes to homework clubs	• Parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with homework clubs, e.g. the activities offered, safety and staff relations.
	• Just over one half of parents said the clubs helped them to connect with their child's school.
Benefits of homework clubs and OST activities	• Most felt it helped their child to get their homework done on time.
	• Many reported social benefits for their children, e.g. self-esteem.
	• Supports to parents themselves were also identified. In particular, relieving the pressure to help with their children's homework.
Attitudes to child's school	• Generally, a positive picture emerged. All parents surveyed said they felt comfortable talking to their child's teacher.
	• In contrast, some parents in the focus group spoke of a history of poor relationships between the schools and the local community.

OST practitioners

Benefits of OST activities	• Educational and social benefits were highlighted. For example, young people's participation in other activities helped to build their confidence to engage with education.
Relationships with young people	• The quality of relationships between staff and young people is deemed to be crucial to their work. Positive relationships developed over time and were key to sustaining young people's participation.
Barriers to educational attainment	• Young people's attainment is strongly influenced by the school system. Barriers included streaming, subject choices, approaches to educational support, and lack of homework
Relationships with teachers	• Staff described mixed experiences and felt that better links needed to be developed between schools and OST activities.
	• Staff considered that there were different approaches to supporting young people's education amongst schools and homework club staff.

Teachers

Barriers to educational attainment	• Factors are multifaceted but parental influence is key. Parents' own negative educational experiences may have a negative impact on their child's education.
	• Other factors include: social /physical environment and poverty.
Homework clubs and OST activities	• Apart from one school, teachers did not have a detailed knowledge about the homework clubs or of the children who attended.
	• Benefits of participation related mainly to social and psychological development. Teachers did not directly associate participation in OST with improvements in educational outcomes.
Relationships with OST activities	• Teachers welcome greater links with the homework clubs.
	• There is a need for schools and homework clubs to develop complementary approaches to support young people
Relationships with parents	• Some teachers reported difficulties with engaging parents.
	• Teachers with a role of HSCL or within the JCSP describe very positive relationships.

Issues for consideration

Arising from the research findings and discussion, issues for consideration were identified to contribute to the future development of the RLC.

Links with schools and parents

- There was clear agreement among teachers and OST practitioners about the need for better linkages. While several suggestions were made during the research, there may be a need for both groups to work on building a common ground before embarking on structural changes.

- Parental involvement in the OST services is extremely limited. A first step that might be taken would be to provide more information to parents whose children attend the local OST activities.

- There is also potential for schools and OST staff to work with parents on approaches to supporting their child's education. One potential role for OST practitioners would be to facilitate parents to link in with their child's school in a more positive way.

- Developing greater links with other OST activities in the community, which are attended by the same young people who take part in activities run by the RLC, could contribute to the future development of the RLC.

Rialto Learning Community target group

- In addition to children in the Fatima and Dolphin communities the Rialto Learning Community aims to provide OST services to children in the wider Rialto area. One fifth of young people who live in the wider Rialto area are from non-Irish families. This has some implications for the future work of the RLC.

- It is important to consider which young people would benefit the most from taking part in OST activities provided under the RLC in relation to improving their educational outcomes. In particular, educational aspirations were found to be lower amongst males, and secondary students with literacy difficulties.

- Approaches taken to maintain young people's participation in OST should be appropriate to adolescents' stage of development. Work with secondary students could focus on encouraging and supporting the development of positive educational aspirations.

Future delivery of OST activities under the RLC

- The structure and delivery of homework club support might be considered in relation to pressures of time for staff and students.

- Discipline was an issue that arose in relation to current OST activities. While the informal environment in community homework clubs was welcomed by young people, it is important that the environment is conducive to completing homework.

- It is important to consider the appropriateness of the physical environment and space in which OST activities take place.

- The nature of future OST activities can be informed from this research. Swimming was the most popular activity that young people wanted to do. Amongst young people, there was a general consensus that art and creative activities were enjoyed immensely.

- Agreeing complementary methodologies for homework support is important. There is merit in developing a shared protocol for homework support among schools and homework clubs.

- Despite extensive provision of school and community-based educational support young people in the area are at risk of poor educational outcomes. This suggests that there is a need to align the strength of the formal and informal education sector to work towards a common goal.

- School absence is an issue of concern and suggests that schools, OST services and parents need to work with young people to find a common approach to address this issue.

- There is a need for innovative work in relation to literacy and numeracy that involves school and community. In particular, there is potential to draw on the strengths of the community arts programme and draw upon creative arts programmes that have the potential to address these issues.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Invitation for Tenders to undertake baseline research and an evaluation strategy for the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) was issued by the Fatima Regeneration Board in March 2008. On completion of a competitive tendering process, the contract to undertake the research was awarded to the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin. This research commenced in August 2008. Fieldwork took place in a number of stages between November 2008 and April 2009. This final report was completed in July 2009[1].

Research aims

The aims of the research were set out in the Invitation to Tender (13 March, 2008) and were further developed by the research team in the proposal submitted to the Fatima Regeneration Board. The research proposal and subsequent discussions with the Expert Advisory Committee guided the development of the methodology which is outlined in chapter three. The methodology was revised in accordance with the availability of and access to data, and the needs of the research commissioners. The main purpose of the research is to provide baseline data on the provision of out of school time activities (OST) for young people aged 11 – 14 years in the Rialto area, which is to be used to inform the development of the Rialto Learning Community, and its future evaluation. Specifically the research involved:

- the collection of data from two groups of young people in relation to various aspects of their well-being, including self-esteem, relationships with peers and other adults, aspirations and attitudes to learning. School level data on young people's school attendance, literacy, educational supports and discipline record was also gathered

- obtaining the views and perceptions of stakeholders on OST activities. Stakeholders included young people, parents, OST staff and teachers in local schools

- determining the nature of young people's relationships with OST service providers

- observations of OST staff engagement with children and young people in two OST settings.

- making recommendations for the future evaluation of the Rialto Learning Community[2]

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[1] Two preliminary reports were issued to the FRB; (1) results of the student survey on 7 April and (2) results from schools data collection 8 May 2009
[2] A final evaluability report was issued to the management of the RLC on 6 April, 2009

In order to fulfil these requirements, the research sought to:

- place the Rialto Learning Community in the broad context of OST activities nationally and internationally through a review of literature and best practice

- develop research instruments to gather relevant qualitative and quantitative data outlined above

- analyse the findings

- review RLC programme documentation and undertake stakeholder consultation to determine programme evaluability and provide recommendations for future evaluation of RLC

- report the research findings and draw out key issues for consideration for the development of the RLC

Background and context to the Rialto Learning Community

The RLC primarily serves a population of children and young people who live in public housing at the Dolphin House flat complex, and a new housing development of social and affordable housing at the newly regenerated Fatima (formerly Fatima Mansions). Both areas are approximately 3km south west of Dublin city centre, close to the Grand Canal and Luas Red Line. For many years the people living in the Fatima and Dolphin House estates have experienced poor social and living conditions.

Fatima

Since the 1970s a variety of factors contributed to the poor social and economic conditions of those living in Fatima: the loss of local industry; the lack of support to address unemployment; the replacement of stable families who moved out of the estate with individuals and families in crisis; and the public landlord's neglect of the estate, allowing the deterioration of the environment to become normal through poor maintenance service (Dorman 2006: 7).

Fatima's problems were exacerbated by the 1980s heroin epidemic in inner-city Dublin. Fatima was notorious as an area where there was a high-level of open drug dealing and usage. Corcoran (1998) vividly portrayed people's lives in Fatima at that time as akin to a prison sentence. Fatima ranked high on a number of deprivation indicators: early school leaving, drug use, prison incarceration and ill-health (FGU, 2006). More recent census data indicates the persistence of social and economic deprivation in terms of high numbers of lone-parents and low levels of educational attainment (see 'A profile of the Rialto Area in the South Inner City of Dublin' by the Fatima Regeneration Board).

A masterplan for the physical regeneration of Fatima was agreed in 2001 through a Public Private Partnership agreement (PPP). The PPP process also underpinned financial investment in a social regeneration plan. The flats complex was demolished and provision was made for mixed tenure of social, affordable and private housing on the original Dublin City Council public estate. This occurred after many years of community activism expressed in the work and documentation of Fatima Groups

United. It worked to empower community members to ensure that they were at the centre of the regeneration process. An important part of this process was the need to connect existing community members with new residents and avoid the marginalisation and gentrification that has been a marker of other urban regeneration projects (Haase & Byrne, 2007).

From the beginning, equal emphasis was placed on both the social and physical regeneration of the community. A five-year social regeneration plan was published by the Fatima Regeneration Board in 2005. The plan contains a wide range of measures aimed at supporting children, young people and adults across a range of areas including education, health, training and employment, sport and recreation, the environment, and arts and culture. The development of the RLC is an important component of the Fatima social regeneration programme.

The original Fatima residents have been moving back into their new houses in phases since 2005. The area has been physically transformed and a sophisticated social regeneration programme is underway. Fatima has had a long and difficult history but is now generally hailed as a successful model of inner-city urban regeneration (FGU, 2006).

Dolphin House Estate

The Dolphin House Estate is a 1950s Dublin City Council flat complex located 1 km from Fatima. It accommodates approximately 1000 people and is one of the largest public housing estates in Dublin. The history of the social and economic decline of the estate is similar to that of Fatima. It has experienced and continues to experience: problems with the estate infrastructure, high levels of unemployment, drug pushing and use, violence and criminality. Unlike Fatima, which is commonly regarded as a regeneration success story, the residents of Dolphin House continue to live in poor physical surroundings. The estate has received and continues to receive much negative publicity in the media as a result of a continuing problem with drugs. Despite this there is a strong community development infrastructure in the area. The Dolphin House Community Development Association offers a range of health, social care, education and recreational services to the residents of the estate.

Residents of the estate, through the Dolphin House Community Development Association have been involved for a number of years in negotiations with the City Council about the future development of the estate. In 2006 Dublin City Council planned to undertake regeneration of the estate using a public private partnership deal with developers. In common with a number of other inner city public housing estates the economic downturn has halted this process. However, the Joint Regeneration Board established in Dolphin House under the Chairmanship of Fergus Finlay is in the process of developing a Masterplan for the regeneration, which is to be launched in September 2009.

Statistical profile of Rialto[3]

The preceding section provides contextual background to the development of the RLC. This section considers the RLC in terms of socio-economic indicators of unemployment, education and numbers of lone parents, for Rialto, Dublin and nationally.

Between 2002 and 2006, the Census showed a slight increase in the overall population of Rialto, with some parts experiencing a 14% growth in population. However, other areas including Fatima experienced a fall of 5.5%. The reduction in Fatima was a result of the temporary relocation of households during the rebuilding of the area. The population is likely to return to previous levels when the building at Fatima has been completed.

The analysis of Dublin city census data shows that there are clusters of complex and sustained deprivation in areas where there are large local authority flat complexes. This is the case in Fatima and Dolphin. While the Irish economy has until recent times been expanding as a result of a construction-fuelled economic boom, in Rialto were communities who had not reaped the benefits of the expanding economy. They continued to face major socio-economic disadvantages characterised by high levels of unemployment and early school leaving, while also being further impacted upon by processes of gentrification (Haase, 2007).

The 2002 Census shows that there were 385 young people aged between 10-14 years living in the wider Rialto area. This cohort increased to 456 in the 2006 census and is projected to continue growing.

The unemployment figures for Rialto are 25% higher than the rest of Dublin and the country as a whole and the level of female unemployment is similar to that of males. Between 1995 and 2005 women's participation in the wider labour force increased from 39.7% to 51.5%

Unemployment fell in the area between 2002 and 2006 with a reduction of 20% in one district but the figure remains very high at 20%. The average fall was around 6%, but five of the eight districts in the Fatima/Dolphin area are above the national rate of unemployment, and in Dolphin House unemployment has increased by almost 4% to 27% which is three time the national rate. In terms of housing tenure, the most notable changes between 2002 and 2006 were the gentrification effects in some parts of Fatima which accounted for the change in employment levels, and the increase in private rented accommodation in some parts of the wider Rialto area.

Lone parenthood in Ireland has been rapidly increasing over the past decade however Rialto has always had a very high level of lone parent households. In 1996, almost 52% of households were headed by lone parents compared to 19% in Dublin as a whole. In 2006, 42.5% of households in Rialto were made up of lone parents compared to 18% nationally.[4]

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[3] This information has been taken from Rialto Learning Community documentation
[4] Census 2006

Statistics on third level education in Rialto provide an indicator of educational inequalities. In the more affluent Dublin postal districts of Dublin 18 and 14 attendance at third level institutions is 73% and 79% respectively, while in 2006, the proportion of the adult population in the Rialto area who have attended third level education amounted to 21.4%, compared to only 12.9% in 1996.[5] It is more than likely that this improvement over a decade is as a result of an influx of new more educated communities. Such is the case in other areas that have undergone regeneration, e.g. the Dublin docklands.

Research carried out in 2001 showed that just 14% of the Fatima population had a Leaving Certificate or higher qualification, compared with 24% in the wider Rialto area, 32% in the Dublin area, and 51% nationally. However the proportions of the adult population in the Rialto area with primary education only has dropped by 18.4% in a 10 year period, although it is still higher than the rate in Dublin or nationally (Collins & Lyons, 2001). Although some improvement in the number of young people staying at school to sit the Junior Certificate was reported by local services who work with young people, there remain a high number of young people in the area who leave without any formal education qualifications (Whyte, 2005).

The statistical profile for the area and the legacy of socio-economic marginalisation has been accompanied by a range of services for children and young people in the area. These are outlined in the following section.

Services for children and young people in the Rialto area

School Completion Programme

In recognition of the fact that early school leavers are statistically more likely to experience social exclusion and unemployment or underemployment, the Department of Education and Science established a programme aimed at improving pupil retention in schools: the School Completion Programme (SCP). It operates in areas where young people are experiencing educational disadvantage and incorporates two initiatives - the Early School Leaver Initiative and the 'Stay in School' Retention Initiative.

The SCP is organised around 'clusters' of schools that are designated as disadvantaged. The majority of children living in Fatima and Dolphin attend schools that are located in the 'Liberties Dublin 8' cluster which comprises seven primary and three secondary schools. Young people also attend schools in the Crumlin Dublin 12 cluster. The SCP seeks to address some of the factors that contribute to low school attainment and early school leaving. Schools taking part in the SCP are required to submit a plan for funding each year, detailing a range of services and activities aimed at young people identified as being most at risk. In order to qualify for funding for their work with these young people, projects must address the following criteria:

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[5] Fatima Regeneration Board Social Policy Context for Young Peoples' Services in Ireland

• Building up self-esteem

• Improving levels of literacy ability

• Improving school attendance.

The Homework Clubs

Fatima Homework Club

A homework club was established in Fatima in 1994, with the aim of developing and delivering a range of educational interventions aimed at supporting children and young people to reach their full potential. Its emphasis was on addressing educational disadvantage and its causes. It was initially operated by the religious order of nuns, The Loreto Sisters, however following their decision to close the club it was re-opened in January 2005 by the Fatima Regeneration Board.

In 2008, 120 children were registered for the service, of which 60-70 attended every day. The club is open from 2pm until 7pm and as well as support with homework, it provides social and recreational activities such as computer facilities, swimming lessons and guitar lessons as well as a hot snack for each child. The club has also introduced a literacy programme.

Dolphin House Homework Club

The Dolphin House Homework Club was established in 1997. In 2008 the club employed five staff but also involved volunteers, students and project workers as needs dictate. In 2008 approximately 100 children were registered, with up to 70 being regular attendees. The Homework Club caters for children and young people aged 5-13 years who reside in the Dolphin House flat complex. Each child attends for a specific period that lasts from 50 minutes to an hour, depending on the age group. The groups are organised by age: junior and senior infants, first and second class, third and fourth class, fifth and sixth class. Secondary students attend from 4 to 6pm.

As with the Fatima Homework Club, the main focus is on homework support, although other programmes are provided including a music programme (guitar and keyboard tuition), arts and crafts, cooking classes and extra support for young people taking exams. The Homework Club is also involved in the planning and delivery of special summer and autumn projects.

Rialto Youth Project

The Rialto Youth Project (RYP) was established in 1981 to provide services to young people at risk in the area. It aims to promote education for those at risk of early school leaving and under-achievement. The RYP is responsible for the management of both homework clubs and carries out 'face to face' youth work, and youth service support work. The project caters for children and young people from 10-21 years and uses a variety of approaches that include group work, individual sessions, and joint work with other agencies in areas such as self-esteem, bereavement, sex education, drug education, relationships and friendships.

Core funding fro the Rialto Youth Project comes from the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB). In addition to this the Youth Project receives funding through the Special Projects for Youth, (funded by the Department of Education and Science and operated by the Vocational Educational Committees), the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs) and the Health Service Executive. It employs eight full-time staff with two part-time workers and ten volunteers. The RYP works with approximately 90 young people in the area - with approximately half of those on an intensive level. In 2000 it developed outreach projects in Fatima and Dolphin House to provide a youth work service to young people living on these estates. In 2003, the RYP, in conjunction with the Regional Youth Service and Canal Communities Partnership, piloted a structured programme of tuition to a group of five young people from across the Partnership area, two of whom were living in Fatima. This programme resulted in three of the participants taking subjects in the Junior and Leaving Certificates.

Rialto Learning Community

The Rialto Learning Community (RLC) was initiated January 2009 and merged three separate organisations that had a long history of provision of OST services to young people in the Rialto area: The Dolphin Homework Club, The Fatima Homework Club and the Rialto Youth Project.

The RLC was established with the aim of improving the educational outcomes of young people aged 11-14 years living in Fatima, Dolphin House and Rialto through the integration of formal and informal services and the provision of a range of activities and facilities during out of school time, including visual arts, drama, dance, music and sports. The specific focus of the RLC Out of School Time Project is to improve children and young people's well-being.

Arklink

The Rialto Learning Community has grown out of a strong foundation of cultural and arts work in Rialto, stemming back over the last twenty-five years. Of particular importance was the establishment in 1999 of the Arklink Project which provided access for children and young people living in Fatima Mansions to high quality arts processes and projects for over eight years. Funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Irish Youth Foundation as an outreach project of the The Ark – A Cultural Centre for Children, it aimed to provide well-designed, well resourced and high quality community arts practice in order to contribute to the personal and social development of the children living in the area. In an independent evaluation of the Arklink Project (Tweedie, 2007), the improved outcomes reported for children and young people included:

- improved self-esteem
- enhanced cognitive stimulation and skills development
- improved analytical and problem-solving skills

- improved communications, language, concentration and application

- greater competencies in artistic skill

- improved capability to use art as a means of self expression

- increased awareness of the needs of and compassion for peers

Other recreational facilities[6]

The children in the 11-14 age group take part in a variety of additional recreational activities in the Fatima and wider area that include the following:

Fatima Boys' Football Club

The Fatima Boys' Football Club was established in 1993. In its early years there were up to seven teams, with the decline in the population of Fatima there is currently just one under-11 team. The team participates in the Dublin District Schoolboy League and trains one night a week and is managed by a voluntary committee.

Fatima Youth Club

While a youth club has been operating on an informal basis in Fatima for many years, arrangements to provide a more structured approach to mainstream youth club provision were put in place in 2003, with a dedicated management committee established the following year. Three mainstream clubs are provided: a Wednesday Club for 12–14 year olds coordinated by a Youth Worker from the Rialto Youth Project; a Thursday Club for 9–11 year olds coordinated by a Project Worker from the Fatima Youth Initiative; and a Hip Hop Dancing club coordinated by a worker from the Arklink Project.

Fatima Majorettes

Fatima Majorettes was established in 1995 and in 2005 had a membership of over 60 children and young people aged from four years to 20 years living in Fatima and the surrounding areas.[7] Although the majorettes rely heavily on voluntary management and fundraising, the majorette troupe is strong as older participants assume leadership and training roles. In 2005 the majorettes relocated to Dolphin House.

Rialto Football Club

The Rialto Football Club was established in 1943 and fields three teams (the first team, under 17s, and over 35s). It is part of the Leinster Football League.

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[6] Whyte (2005)
[7] Fatima Regeneration Board (2005) *8 Great Expectations*

Ferrini Youth Club

The Ferrini Youth Club was established in 1960 by the local conference of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. Staffed by volunteers, it offers activities for young people aged 10–18 years that include table-tennis, snooker, indoor football and basketball, and opportunities to participate in interclub events with other St.Vincent de Paul clubs.

Rialto Variety Group

The Rialto Variety Group was established in 1976 and is based in St. Andrew's community centre. The group attracts children, young people and adults of all ages and is funded entirely through voluntary effort. Each year it produces a pantomime and play, as well as running drama and dance classes for young people.

Overview of the report

The report consists of 10 chapters. The next chapter, *chapter two* sets the research in the context of national and international literature on policy and best practice in OST service provision.

Chapter three systematically outlines the methodological approach and methods used in the study. It outlines the sampling procedures and characteristics of the participants and individual elements within the quantitative study that included structured questionnaires and observation, and qualitative components that comprised semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The approach to data analysis is outlined. The ethical considerations that were incorporated before embarking on the research are also discussed.

Chapter four presents the first of three chapters on the findings for young people. It presents findings from structured surveys undertaken with 142 11-14 years olds who attended schools in the Rialto area. Of these, 73 comprised a study group of students who were at the time of the research registered with the Fatima and Dolphin homework clubs. The remaining 69 students comprised a comparison group of young people that attended schools in the wider Rialto area. Findings are presented on young people's demographic characteristics, their life at school in terms of attitudes to school, relationships with peers and teachers, and various aspects of their participation in OST activities. In addition, findings are presented on aspects of young people's well-being that include self-esteem and their relationships with family and friends.

Chapter five provides the results from data provided by schools on aspects of young people's education. Data was collected for 122 young people from the schools they attended. It reports findings on students' school attendance, performance on standardised numeracy and literacy tests, discipline, and on levels of learning support.

Chapter six provides a descriptive and interpretative account of three focus group discussions conducted with young people who attended the homework clubs. It outlines their views on how they use the clubs, what they like about them, the significance attached to homework and other enrichment activities, and the nature of their relationships with staff and peers.

Chapter seven provides the results from the survey undertaken with 40 parents of children registered with the Fatima and Dolphin Homework clubs. It reports parents' perspectives on the OST services attended by their child, and on their relationship with their child's school.

Chapter eight is a descriptive and interpretative account of the interviews and focus groups conducted with the OST staff and leaders in the Fatima and Dolphin homework clubs and the Rialto Youth Project. It presents their perspectives on the barriers and facilitators to educational attainment, what they consider to be the benefits to young people from participation in OST activities, and views on relationships between young people and OST staff

Chapter nine provides a descriptive and interpretative account of 11 semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers in eight schools in the Rialto area. The interviews explored teachers' knowledge of and attitudes to OST provision, perceived benefits of OST provision and perceived barriers to educational attainment for children in their schools.

Chapter ten draws together the key findings of the research in the context of its aims. It discusses the findings under five thematic areas: school attendance, literacy and educational outcomes; barriers to educational attainment; aspects of young people's participation in OST activities; relationships; and links between OST activities. It is supported when appropriate by relevant literature. It also outlines some issues for consideration for the development of the Rialto Learning Community.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter presents an overview of literature that places the Rialto Learning Community research in the context of national and international literature on out of school time activities (OST). The review comprises five sections:

- Description of OST activities
- National policy context for OST provision
- Benefits of OST activities
- Best practice in OST provision
- The Arts and OST provision

Description of OST activities

Out of school time activities (OST) is a broad term that is used for a diverse range of formal and informal supervised before and after school activities. Activities include homework supervision and support, sports, arts and crafts, music, drama and dance. Other terms such as after school care, after school clubs and extracurricular activities are commonly used to describe the provision of before and after school services.

In Ireland the Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS) network is a group of stakeholders[8] with a remit to enhance and develop out of school services to influence and enable positive educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage. For this group OST services:

> refer to a range of structured programmes, clubs and activities for school-age children and young people (4-18) which take place within supervised environments during the times that they are not in school (QDOSS, 2006: 2).

Although the QDOSS definition emphasises 'structured' programmes, OST activities are more likely to encompass a variety of structured and unstructured activities in the same setting. Therefore, in some settings, the activities that are offered to children may lie somewhere along a continuum from highly structured to unstructured. According to Pechman et al., (2005) the features of structured OST activities are that they are well organised, that they challenge students intellectually, creatively, developmentally and/or physically and involve the practice or progression and development of analytical skills.

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[8] The QDOSS network comprises Barnardos, Border Counties Childcare Committee, Children's Research Centre Trinity College Dublin, Educational Disadvantage Centre St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Foroige, Limerick City Childcare Committee, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, TIDE, Youth Work Ireland.

Further difficulties with defining OST services and activities arise when considering their primary objective and the settings where activities are provided. For example, privately provided before and after school childcare may also be considered within the ambit of OST provision, but the primary objective of such services is the provision of supervised childcare to working parents who pay for the service. In practice though, children who attend such care may also participate in a range of enrichment activities including homework supervision and arts and crafts activities. Organisations such as Barnardos, who have a remit to provide services for children and families at risk, also offer after school services to these groups. OST activities are also provided by schools themselves on the school premises, and may include, inter alia, homework supervision, sports clubs, drama, music, and arts activities. In particular such provision is found in schools that have been selected to be a part of the Department of Education and Science School Completion Programme. Schools in this programme support students who are at risk of early school leaving and there is a requirement to offer after school and holiday programmes to their students.

Notwithstanding the variations that are found in OST contexts, and motivations for the provision of OST activities, in Ireland community-led OST services have been established for many years in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Such community-based OST services are funded through a range of sources that include the National Development Plan, the AIB Better Ireland fund, area partnership bodies, and city and county councils.

The growth in community OST services in areas of disadvantage such as homework clubs, breakfast clubs and complementary educational activities has been noted in the Report of the Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordination Committee (2005). It notes that these services provide a significant childcare element yet the Committee did not consider that these services should be within the terms of reference for the review of school-aged childcare services:

> These services usually incorporate elements of physical care through the provision of a meal and a welcoming environment together with social supports and formal or informal educational supports. Notwithstanding the fact that a care element may be found in school-based provision, or more commonly, community based provision, these clubs sometimes define themselves as Out of School Support Services. Their key focus is on educational attainment and social inclusion and therefore they cannot be regarded as school age childcare within the scope of this review (DJELR, 2005: 15).

The Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordination Committee made several recommendations related to governance, standards, quality, funding and sustainability, all of which are directly relevant in the OST sector. The decision not to include the OST sector within the review may be considered as a missed opportunity for the development of the sector.

Placing OST activities in an Irish social policy context

There are several key policy documents that are relevant when considering OST activities in an Irish context.

The National Children's Strategy

One of the goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000) was to contribute to Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland ratified in 1992. Learning and education was one of the areas identified that needed to be addressed as part of the Strategy. These areas emerged from preliminary consultations that involved children and young people themselves. Three national goals were developed as part of the consultation process, one of which stated that 'children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development' (National Children's Strategy, 2000: 6). In order to achieve this national goal, the Strategy stressed the importance of developing appropriate services and supports that met children's needs in child friendly environments accessible to all children. The Strategy identified fourteen objectives as part of this national goal. One of these objectives stated that children should have access to play, sports and recreation activities, recognising the importance of such activities to their overall development.

Towards 2016 The Partnership Agreement

The Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016* (Department of An Taoiseach, 2006) is relevant to understanding the context of OST provision. The Agreement contains a section on education and training and sets out goals to be achieved over the next ten years. A more specific commitment is given to developing initiatives to reduce early school leaving and to improve school attendance, educational progress, retention and attainment at both primary and second level. The section on children in the Agreement contains a commitment to ensuring that all children can access quality recreational activities. This commitment has been advanced in the National Recreation Policy.

The National Recreation Policy

The National Recreation Policy (2007) aims to provide State-funded recreational activities for young people aged 12 to 18. It encompasses both structured and unstructured activities. The Policy recognises the importance and value to young people's development during adolescence from their participation in recreational activities. A key principle of the Policy is the concept of the 'whole child perspective.' This advocates looking at children's lives in a way that is 'holistic, child-centred and integrated' (p.11).[9] Seven objectives were identified in the National Recreation Policy. While all are important in relation to developing OST activities,

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[9] This concept is taken from the National Children's Strategy (2000)

one has particular significance and relates to the need for ensuring that recreational activities are available for young people who experience any form of disadvantage.

Educational disadvantage context and policy

As noted above, the National Partnership Agreement emphasises the need for improvements on educational disadvantage indicators. In addition to citing early school leaving, educational retention and attainment, the Agreement emphasises the importance of *literacy and educational attainment across the lifecycle*. Education and training goals for all groups are established for the next decade, but children attract special attention: they are encouraged 'to be active agents in their own learning and to engage in collaborative active learning' (p.31).

> There is a commitment to the development of initiatives to reduce early school leaving and to improve school attendance, educational progress, retention and attainment at primary and second levels. A specific goal is outlined in terms of literacy: 'every child should leave primary school literate and numerate' (p.41).

Specific actions are proposed that aim to improve educational outcomes for children, with particular priority accorded to those in disadvantaged communities.

Despite evidence that Ireland performs well on international educational league tables (OECD, 2006), there is much evidence in Ireland of the maldistribution of educational inequalities. The most recent Department of Education School Leavers' Survey is the 2007 Survey which is based on young people who left school in the academic year 2004/5. It indicates that young people who come from backgrounds classified as manual or unemployed have a much greater likelihood of leaving school before completing their Leaving Certificate. For those who left school with no formal qualifications just under one fifth left school in first year of secondary, 34% in second year and 37% in third year (Byrne, McCoy & Watson, 2008).

The same study also reported clear class differentiation in the type of Leaving Certificate programme undertaken by students in different class groups. While three quarters of students from professional employer/manager backgrounds leave school having taken the established Leaving Certificate programme, just one third of students from unemployed backgrounds take this programme. In addition, McCoy, Kelly and Watson (2007) based on their analysis of the 2006 School Leavers' Survey point to the lack of improvement observed in school completion rates, despite significant policy efforts:

> The survey found no improvement in levels of second-level completion, which continue to remain at levels found in the early 1990s, despite much policy focus and considerable resources allocated towards combating early school leaving and educational underachievement. Socio-economic difference in second-level completion and performance remain wide (McCoy, Kelly & Watson, 2007: xi).

The main government policy effort aimed at tackling educational disadvantage is the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Programme* (DEIS). This programme provides for a system of identification and reviewing of the status of schools in terms

of disadvantage and the provision of an appropriate package of educational supports that include literacy, numeracy, additional teacher support, book grants, curriculum development, teacher training, special needs assistance and a variety of other initiatives. It has involved numerous schemes and has undergone integration over the period 2005-2006 into the School Support Programme. Previously, according to the Department of Education and Science, 32 separate initiatives were aimed at educational disadvantage in the primary and second-level sectors. The School Support Programme under DEIS includes the following schemes:

- The Home School Community Liaison Scheme

- The School Completion Programme

- Support Teachers Project

- Early Start Pre-School Scheme

- Giving Children an Even Break

- Breaking the Cycle

- Disadvantaged Area Scheme

In a recent announcement by Sean Haughey TD (18th May, 2009), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme will come under the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board.

There is a considerable amount of research that has examined educational disadvantage in the context of reading literacy generally, and in the context of schools that have acquired disadvantaged status. Eivers, Shiel and Short, (2004) reveal that children in schools with disadvantaged status have much lower levels of reading literacy when compared on a standardised measure with children from non-disadvantaged schools. Furthermore, the higher percentages of children in disadvantaged schools that were at, or below, the 10th percentile indicated that between 25% and 30% of these students qualified for learning support. Very small proportions (less than 5% of first class, third class and sixth class students) in disadvantaged schools had high levels of reading achievement. Such findings are important when considered in the context of the current policy responses aimed at addressing educational disadvantage and in particular those that pertain to literacy. Weir and Archer (2004) point out that the literacy performance of students in schools designated as disadvantaged continues to fall below those of other pupils. In particular, there are concerns among educational researchers about programmes such as Reading Recovery which aims to bring students to the average level of the class, in a context where the schools involved serve low income and minority children, thereby reproducing inequalities and maintaining low expectations for these groups (Archer & Weir, 2004). These concerns are validated by data on reading literacy among disadvantaged schools that shows low levels of reading literacy to be more likely and high levels of reading literacy to be exceptional, with a need in these schools for substantial learning support. The extent to which the DEIS programme can adequately impact upon literacy outcomes has been questioned by Eivers et al., (2005) who point

to systemic problems that include overloaded learning support teachers, and a lack of qualified learning support teachers in remedial education, such that there is a call for other, more innovative approaches (Archer & Weir, 2004).

Benefits of OST activities

As the previous sections have shown, Irish OST provision is situated within and supported by strong evidence about educational disadvantage and a number of social policies that are aimed at social inclusion for children and families who experience socio-economic disadvantage. As noted earlier there has been a growth in OST provision at a community level in areas of disadvantage. It is therefore important to consider research evidence about the benefits that OST activities provide for young people. This research, mainly from the US, reveals that young people's participation in OST activities generates a wide range of benefits for those living in areas of disadvantage in particular, but also benefits young people's psychological development, their educational attainment and peer, community and family relationships. In the following section we present an overview of research literature that illustrates how participation in OST activities brings a range of benefits to young people.

In the US, Eccles and Barber (1999) suggest that during the high school years participation in extracurricular activities supports both academic performance and protects against involvement in risky behaviours. A longitudinal study by Eccles and Barber (1999) examined both the potential benefits and risks associated with participation in the following activities: performing arts, prosocial, team sports, school involvement and academic clubs. Results indicate that those adolescents who were involved in performing arts at Grade 10 were less frequently engaged in risky behaviours at both Grade 10 and 12 than those who were not. This was particularly true for alcohol-related behaviours. Participation in performing arts activities for male students was related to lower increases in alcohol and drug use, as well as to lower levels at both Grades 10 and 12 (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In addition, females were more likely to be involved in performing arts, prosocial and school involvement activities. It was also noted that males but not females engaging in performing arts were less likely than their peers to drink alcohol and skip school in grade 10 and to drink alcohol in grade 12 (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Hansen et al., (2003) report similar findings stating that school clubs such as performing arts, academic organisations and service activities tend to be more frequent contexts for experiences related to identity formation for the development of prosocial norms.

Areas of socio-economic disadvantage

Although there is a broad range of benefits for children who attend OST activities, research indicates that there may be even more pronounced benefits for children who experience social and economic disadvantage.

The Harvard Family Research Project evaluations of US OST activities concludes that participation in such activities can potentially have positive outcomes in various areas including academic, social/emotional, prevention, and health and well-being - particularly to children and young people who experience social disadvantage (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). For example, Caldwell and Baldwin (2003) argue that leisure and recreation time activities can help to counter some of the challenges to positive development that young people may face.

Despite the evidence pointing to the positive outcomes of participation in OST activities, young people who live in more socially and economically disadvantaged areas are less likely to have the opportunity to take part in such activities compared to their peers from more affluent backgrounds (Spielberger & Lockaby, 2008). Research carried out in Ireland supports this finding (De Roiste & Dinneen, 2005; Connor, 2003). Furthermore, Byrne and Greene (2007), in a needs assessment that examined out of school time activities in Rialto, noted that parents and children perceived a lack of leisure and recreational facilities in the area.

Educational attainment

Participation in OST activities has been found to have a potentially positive impact on children and young people's participation rates in education. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found evidence to suggest that where young people took part in out of school or extracurricular activities, this was associated with lower early school leaving rates for boys and girls, particularly for those who were deemed to be at the highest risk of drop out.

In the US there are a number of longitudinal studies that demonstrate the impact of extracurricular activities on academic outcomes. While much of the extracurricular activities in these studies are school-based, they are nonetheless useful as they have examined such factors as the influence of different types, patterns of usage, and quantity of participation in extracurricular activities on educational achievement. Using US longitudinal data, Broh (2002) examined the effect of student participation in extracurricular activities on school achievement. Students who participated in sports in the 10th and 12th grades had higher maths scores, spent more time on homework, and had increased self-esteem.

Another longitudinal study conducted over three years involving more than 3000 California high school students, examined the impact of *school-based* extracurricular activities on health behaviours and academic outcomes. Year-to-year variations in substance use, and academic performance were associated with participation in extracurricular activities. When adolescents were involved in extracurricular activities they reported lower levels of smoking, substance use, higher grades, more positive attitudes and higher academic achievement (Darling, 2005).

Heath and Roach (1999) examined the impact of three types of community programmes, athletic-academic, community service, and art on young people's academic performance. Their study showed that adolescents participating in community arts programmes develop a greater range of skills and dispositions that enable them to cope and succeed in school and in their daily lives. Furthermore, adolescents involved in arts programmes were doing better in school than those in programmes that focused on sports and community alone (Heath & Roach,1999).

Roeser and Peck (2003) demonstrated that young people at risk of an incomplete high school education are twice as likely to graduate from high school if they participate in positive extracurricular activities more than once a week in the 11th grade. Peck et al., (2008) extend this examination of extracurricular participation and its link to educational attainment to sub-groups of young people deemed to be at risk of poor educational outcomes, but who have been successful in terms of educational attainment. Using data from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study they attempted to account for 'educational resilience' in at risk sub-groups of young people. They found that adolescents who were at risk of poor educational outcomes are differentiated from other vulnerable adolescents who do not go on to college by their pattern of involvement in extracurricular activities during high school. College enrolment rates were significantly greater for at risk youth who were involved in both school clubs and organised sports than other at risk young people. The authors conclude that:

> Our results suggest that when vulnerable youth are exposed to a broad distribution of extracurricular activity settings that afford them constructive, developmentally appropriate opportunities (e.g. to befriend healthy peers, develop competencies and skills, exercise some autonomy, develop long-term mentoring relationships, and explore their commitment to education more generally) then their chances of being educationally resilient are enhanced (Peck et al., 2008: 149).

In contrast, Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez and Brown (2004) indicate the limited success of homework programmes and after school activities on school success for at risk young people. They review research that shows that participation in after school study support may not result in improved academic outcomes for these groups, but may serve as a protective factor by preventing further school disengagement.

Zief, Lauver and Maynard (2006) conducted a systematic review of the impact of after school programmes on student outcomes. The review included five studies that examined student outcomes in terms of student location, supervision and safety, participation in enriching activities, behavioural, social and emotional, and academic outcomes. The meta-analysis showed that just one of the studies (Lauver, 2002) found that participants had a greater aspiration to attend college than non-participants. The US middle school programme (Cooke Middle School After-School Recreation Programme) offered a range of activities that included dance, computer games, basketball, fitness, board games, homework, and arts and crafts. This finding also supports the much earlier study of Holland and Andre (1987, cited in Feldman &

Matjasko, 2005) that indicates extracurricular activity participation to be positively associated with increased educational aspirations.

Psychological development

A number of studies have examined the impact of extracurricular activities on adolescent psychological development (for a review see Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Feldman and Matjasko (2005) note that although most studies of extracurricular activities report a positive association between participation and self-esteem, gender differences are apparent. There is a positive association between participation in most extracurricular activities and self-esteem for boys, but for girls this association only relates to specific activities. Feldman and Matjasko (2005) drawing on Holland and Andre (1987) point to the need to consider structural factors in the school environment that have been found to impact on self-esteem. That study found that self-esteem was linked to the size of the school and the pressure to participate and be successful. This was particularly the case for successful males in small schools where participation in extracurricular activities was found to be predictive of higher self-esteem. Unsuccessful male students in small schools had lower levels of self-esteem and a higher degree of alienation.

There is a considerable amount of research that indicates the impact of negative life events on increased psychological symptoms such as depression and substance use, and evidence that extracurricular activities can provide a buffer for adolescents through the social support networks that they provide (Darling, 2005). For example, Darling (2005) in a cross-sectional and longitudinal study of 3,761 California high school students found that although effect sizes were small, adolescents' participation in extracurricular activities was a protective factor for the effects of life events stress (eg school suspension, bereavement, relationship difficulties, parent losing job etc) on their use of tobacco, marijuana and other drugs. In addition, the association is greater when more time is spent participating in activities and when high levels of stress are experienced.

The psychological developmental impact of extracurricular activities has been reported by Fredericks et al., (2002) in qualitative research involving 41 adolescents who had been involved in athletics or the arts since middle childhood (Fredricks et al., 2002). Although the adolescents who continued to participate over time perceived that they had skills in particular activities and felt that they were 'good at it', finding that they were good at the activity in turn boosted their self-confidence. This was particularly the case for adolescents who had not been high achievers, either socially or academically (Fredricks et al., 2002: 78).

Australian research echoes much of the US based research that shows that extracurricular activities have the potential to promote a positive self concept in adolescents. Blomfield and Barber (2009) found that adolescents who participated in both sports and non-sports reported a more positive social self concept compared to those who only participated in one activity type (Blomfield & Barber, 2009).

Shernoff and Vandell (2007) suggest that extracurricular activities provide a context for positive youth development. Using students' self-reported information, their study explored middle school students' experiences of a variety of after school activities. Findings revealed that students were engaged, interested and showed concentrated effort particularly in sports and arts enrichment activities (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007).

Research by Barber et al., (2001) emphasises that the long-term psychological benefits that youth derive from extracurricular activities may stem from the type of activities that they are involved in. While Barber et al., found generally that participation over time reduced feelings of social isolation and increased self-esteem, negative psychological outcomes were found for those who had long-term participation in performing arts. However, Feldman and Matjasko argue that it is difficult to separate out the causal mechanisms involved in extracurricular activities. Where improvements have been found for at risk adolescents it is difficult to ascertain if the impact is derived from the activity, the mentoring relationship or both (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

The Arklink Initiative (1999) set up in Fatima Mansions for primary school children supports international findings that participation in extracurricular activities provides positive benefits for participants (Tweedie, 2007). The evaluation of Arklink showed positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem, greater confidence, greater ability to help others and be supportive, problem solving skills, increased creativity and collaboration between children (Tweedie, 2007).

Relationships: community and family

OST activities are deemed to have wider benefits for local communities and society. Where young people are actively engaged in OST activities, this means that they are less likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour. Thus, OST activities can be seen as 'potentially powerful tools' to enhance young people's development and counter negative behaviour and poor outcomes (Chaskin & Baker, 2006).

Although Irish research on OST provision is somewhat limited, two studies confirm the benefits that after school provision brings for parents who live in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Ryan evaluated a third class homework support programme in a disadvantaged area of Dublin where there was low educational attainment and high absenteeism among school children. This study found that parents reported benefits for themselves and the wider family through their child's involvement in the homework club. Parents felt less pressured because of the support provided. In particular the support was greatly welcomed by parents who themselves had difficulties with reading and were unable to help their children with school work (Ryan, nd). Similar findings are reported by Hennessy and Donnelly in their study of four community-based after school projects in disadvantaged areas (Hennessy & Donnelly, 2005). Benefits for parents were derived from having free time for themselves. This was particularly so for parents of younger children. Assistance with homework alleviated the pressure on parents to help with homework, and this in turn benefited the rest of the family. Benefits were also reported by parents from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In Zief, Lauver and Maynard's (2006) systematic review that included five high quality US after school programmes, just one study, the national evaluation of the 21st century community learning center programmes (Dynarski et al., 2001) reported on the impact of parental involvement on student outcomes. That study found that participants' parents were significantly more likely to help their children with homework, and attend an after school event than parents of non-participants.

Peers

The OST environment provides the opportunity for young people to interact with their peer groups, which provides direct and indirect benefits. Chaskin and Baker (2006) conducted an in-depth study of 99 10th grade students who attended Chicago public schools to determine the factors that influenced their participation in OST activities. They observe that peers and siblings who are involved in after school programmes act as important sources of information that leads to the invitation of other young people to join programmes. In addition, this relationship with peers also impacts upon young people's decision-making about remaining in the after school programmes over time (Chaskin & Baker, 2006).

The important contribution OST activities make to the development of peer relationships has been noted in Bailey and Thompson's evaluation of a UK out of school time study support programme that involved a wide range of activities for children and young people aged 6-18 (Bailey & Thompson, 2008). Young people reported that the programme had given them the opportunity to form new friendships with children of different age groups, and from other schools. This increased their confidence in their ability to make friends when they were in new situations. As one child reported:

> This year I haven't got so many friends. So it improves confidence by helping you so you can get new friends. You also make friends with people here that you wouldn't normally talk to outside because you are not in the same lessons or they hang around with a different crowd (Bailey & Thompson, 2008: 289).

There is a strong connection between the types of activities in which adolescents participate and the formation of certain types of peers. Adolescents who participate in prosocial activities, team sports, performing arts and school promotion activities and academic clubs are significantly more likely than non-participants to have academic friends (Eccles et al., 2003). In addition, adolescents who participate in prosocial activities and the performing arts are significantly less likely to report having peers involved in risky behaviours (Eccles et al., 2003). The time spent on activities means that young people become linked to peer groups in which they spend additional time outside of the activity. This contributes to the formation of peer-group culture and identity (Eccles et al., 2003: 875).

Staff

Outside of the classroom extracurricular activities provide opportunities for young people to have regular contact with non-familial adults (Darling, 2005). Notwithstanding the benefits of contact with adults, Eccles et al., (2003) emphasise the importance of having contact with the 'right adults'.

Participation in extracurricular activities provides young people with the benefit of additional adult support in terms of advice about future plans and personal problems. Compared to peers not involved in extracurricular activities, young people who are involved are able to draw upon a greater range of non-familial adults for such advice and more frequent educational advice from teachers and occupational counsellors (Eccles et al., 2003).

The Boys and Girls Club of America programme provides an opportunity for low income young people to learn academic skills in a safe environment and participate in recreational activities with their peers and staff. Research has demonstrated that relationships between staff and boys contributed to higher self-esteem and reduced behaviour problems among young boys. In addition, relationships between older boys and staff impacted positively on the potential for older boys to get in trouble (Roffman et al., 2001).

Best practice and effectiveness in OST programmes

As noted earlier, while there is a wide variation in what constitutes OST services, from highly structured programmes to the provision of relatively unstructured activities such as youth drop in centres, much of the evidence on OST provision is based upon structured programmes (Mahoney, Eccles, Larson, 2004). While outcome studies of structured programmes are useful, less is known about the social processes within these structured contexts that make programmes effective or ineffective for participants (Fredericks et al., 2002). Mahoney, Eccles and Larson, (2004) suggest that despite the limited evidence on social processes, there are a number of key characteristics of after school programmes that are associated with positive developmental outcomes for young people:

> Stable participation in after-school programs that are housed in a safe environment, directed by an adequate number of qualified staff, and provide a social climate characterised by warmth and positive interactions among staff and participants is associated with positive development for the participants (Mahoney, Eccles & Larson, 2004: 122).

Based on their compilation of evaluations on OST activities in the US, the Harvard Family Research Project identifies three common aspects of effective programmes:

- young people having access to and continuous participation in such activities

- quality programmes, and

- strong partnerships between all the different stakeholders involved (Goss et al., 2008).

In the following section we examine research evidence that can guide good practice in OST provision in areas such as participation, quality of service provision, partnerships and parent involvement.

Participation

There are notable gender differences in relation to young people's participation in OST activities. Irish research with a representative sample of students in fifth and sixth class in primary school, and first and second years in secondary school that examined school children's participation in sport has reported clear gender differences in extra-curricular sports activity: 'overall there is a considerable gulf between the way that boys and girls approach sport' (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005: 37). The study also finds that there is a tendency for students to decrease participation in extracurricular activities as they progress through secondary school. Students, in particular girls, who participated in music and singing in the early years of secondary school tended to have lesser engagement in the later years as they did with sport (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005).

Similar findings have been reported for middle and high school students in the US. Significant differences were found for students participating in athletics, choral music and dance in the direction of gender-stereotypical expectations (Worrell & Bucknavage, 2005). For example results indicated females reported significantly higher participation rates in music, dance, drama/acting and debate, while males participated in higher numbers in all the major sporting activities in school (Worrell & Bucknavage, 2005).

Roffman et al., (2001) report gender differences in relation to young people's experience of participation in the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and their well-being. While positive associations were reported for boys in terms of their reasons for attending the clubs and not getting involved in trouble, no associations were found between girls' well-being and mentioning club activities. The authors concluded that there was a need to determine why activities did not have an impact on girls' well-being and whether the activities themselves attract and engage girls.

The level of young people's participation is important in evaluating the impact of OST activities on academic outcomes. Compared to similar young people who did not take part in OST activities those with high levels of participation had more favourable educational outcomes, in the form of lower failure rates for core subjects and also

higher graduation rates (Goerge et al., 2007). The importance of continuous participation was highlighted as such benefits were found to disappear after young people stopped taking part in OST activities (Goerge et al., 2007).

Mahoney, Cairns and Farmer (2003) using results from a longitudinal study of US students found that consistent participation in extracurricular activities impacted positively on students' educational status, college attendance and was also associated with low rates of school dropout and low rates of criminal arrest in young adulthood.

While benefits accrue to young people as a result of sustained participation, it is important to understand the processes that determine participation. Fredrick et al., (2002: 76) note the start of high school to be 'a major turning point' for young people's commitment to extracurricular activities. They highlight that participation is more easily sustained where adolescents find the activities to be appropriately challenging.

Chaskin and Baker's study examined why young people become involved in OST activities and found that that many did so because of the opportunity to develop leadership skills. The chance to state their opinions and ideas, the ability to make a valuable contribution by using their skills and having a sense of responsibility all helped to facilitate young people to attain a leadership role, where appropriate. In terms of maintaining young people's participation in OST activities, Chaskin and Baker (2006) argue that this is most likely where there is a wide range of activities available which match their interests.

Chaskin and Bakers' study echoes research by Mahoney, Larson and Eccles who suggest that after school programmes that are successful in maintaining young people's participation over time offer opportunities that take account of the maturing adolescent. Such programmes offer opportunities for young people in leadership, decision-making and provide them with meaningful involvement (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005).

The stage at which students participate in after school study support programmes may have a positive impact on academic attainment. Understanding the impact of student participation in after school programmes requires a nuanced understanding of programme context in terms of who received what, and when. In a study of the impact of a three-year homework project designed to provide students with homework assistance and help with study skills that did not target students at risk of school failure, Cosden et al., (2004) found no overall differences between the intervention group and control group on ratings of school belonging, teacher ratings on student behaviour, grades, and results in standardised tests. Importantly though, the study examined which elements of the programme were associated with academic achievement. Rather than overall programme attendance, attendance in the fourth grade was found to be a significant predictor of students' academic outcomes in the sixth grade. In particular there was a significant relationship between homework programme attendance in fourth grade and study skills, which affected homework completion and test scores in maths and reading in sixth grade. The authors conclude that skills developed in the fourth grade were harnessed successfully by students in later years.

Fredricks et al., (2002) support Cosden et al's view about the importance of understanding the contextual conditions of extracurricular programme delivery. They advocate that there is a need to conduct process-oriented research that considers how and why individuals choose to participate in activities or not.

For Cosden et al., (2004) the impact of young people's participation in after school activities and after school homework programmes is best understood using a risk and resilience framework (see Table 2.1 below). This allows for an understanding of the circumstances in which young people's participation in after school programmes may have positive or negative impacts.

Table 2.1 Risk and protective factors associated with participation in after-school extracurricular activities and homework programs

After-school activities	
Risk	Protective
• Extra curricular activities can interfere with homework completion • Participation in too many extracurricular activities detracts from academic work	• Some after-school activities provide opportunities for parent involvement • After-school activities support student talents in non-academic arenas • Student is connected to positive peer group through school sponsored activities • Academic minimum requirements to participate in non-academic activities can motivate students to achieve • After school activities provide supervision when parents are working

After-school homework programs	
Risk	Protective
• Taking parents out of the homework 'loop' may reduce parental opportunities to communicate with child about school • Homework support may not be co-ordinated with classroom teachers • Required participation in homework activities after school may prevent participation in other activities that would benefit student bonding to peers and school	• Homework assistance may not be available at home • Homework support at school relieves stress at home • Students in homework programs see other students studying; norm of academic achievement is reinforced • Early training in after-school homework programmes may establish good study habits • Student is better able to participate in class with homework support

Source: Cosden, M., Morrison, G., Gutierrez, L. & Brown, M. (2004). 'The effects of homework programs and after-school activities on school success'. *Theory into Practice,* 43 (3): 220-226.

Quality of service provision

The quality of provision is also critically important to the potential effectiveness of OST activities. Durlak and Weissberg (2007) identified four key aspects of OST activities that helped to promote the personal, social and academic development of children and youth aged five to eighteen. These were:

> 'sequential' – an ordered set of activities is used to achieve the goal or skill development;

> 'active' – active forms of learning are used;

> 'focused' – at least one component of the programme was aimed at developing a personal or social skill; and finally,

> 'explicit' – the personal or social skill to be learned was identified (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007: 8).

Other aspects of quality OST service provision are staff-related in terms of those who design and deliver the services. Vandell and Shumow (1999) point to the importance of staff education and training and of a high staff-student ratio and low staff turnover.

According to Pitman et al., (2004) curriculum development, innovative programme design and professional development are 'front burner issues' for those who organise OST programmes. Staff within OST services should have the necessary skills to perform their jobs and this requires enhancing the quantity and quality of professional development. Rosenthall and Vandell (1996) similarly emphasise the importance of staff education and training.

While staff professional development and effective curricula are important for the delivery of quality and effective OST services some researchers advocate that OST providers engage in systemic change processes (Pittman et al., 2004; Reisner et al., 2007). Systemic change processes in OST service provision seek to bring about a joined-up approach among mainstream educational providers, community OST providers and the wider community where they collaborate and share goals.

Pitman et al., (2004) call for *intentional partnerships* among parents and OST staff to improve the capacity among families, schools and communities to support learning. A key feature of the systemic change process involves content alignment. To this end teams made-up of out of school time providers and school representatives collaborate on an alignment plan that specifies how they intend to work together to support children's learning in and out of school hours.

Similarly Reisner et al., (2007) point to the limitations of OST services that operate as 'silos' only taking account of the students that they have enrolled and only concentrating on their own goals. There is much more to be gained when all those with interests in youth development collaborate and work to a shared goal and build collective capacities. The alternative as, Reisner et al., suggest is for OST providers to compete with other community organisations for young people's attention (Reisner et al., 2007: 2).

Parent involvement

OST activities that are deemed to work emphasise the development of positive relationships between different stakeholders, especially parents.

The involvement of parents in OST services has been associated with young people maintaining participation over time, but there are gender differences in the level of parental participation. Where fathers were involved over a number of years their child was most likely to be male, but the involvement of mothers was not mediated by their child's gender (Denault & Polin, 2008).

A good deal of the research evidence on parental involvement relates to the formal education sector. Nevertheless, research that has explored barriers to parental involvement in the formal education sector may be useful to understanding parental involvement in the OST context. Lareau (1987) compared the level of involvement of US parents from working class and middle class backgrounds and found different responses to participation in their child's education. Middle class parents viewed the education of their children as a 'shared enterprise' and closely observed and contributed to their child's school experience. By contrast, the working class parents viewed the educational experience of their child in a more hands off way. Schooling was the job of the teacher. In addition, there were differences between middle class and working class parents' social networks. Middle class parents' networks provided them with greater levels of support and information about their child's schooling. While the middle class parents had fewer contacts with relatives, and more contact with other parents in the school community, the working class parents maintained closer links with family members and siblings living in the same area over several days of the week. This group of parents rarely had contact with other groups of parents in the same school, even when families lived on the same street. Lareau concluded that 'educators and policy-makers may seek to increase parental involvement in schooling by boosting the educational capabilities and information resources of parents' (1987: 83).

While US research has demonstrated that young people's involvement in OST activities increases parents' involvement in their child's education through having more contact with teachers (Massachusetts 2020; 2004), Cosden et al., (2004) in the case of after school homework programmes, highlights the potential for reduced parental involvement. For parents with few resources, and in particular those with low educational attainment or of non-English speaking backgrounds, the home work programme acts as an important source of support to parents for their child's education. After school homework clubs can also reduce parental involvement as they can hinder other non-academic activities that encourage students' attachment to school and the community and run the risk of reducing parental involvement in the schooling process (Cosden et al., 2004).

Structured versus unstructured programmes

There is some debate in the research literature about the impact on young people from involvement in structured or unstructured OST activities. Miller (2003) notes that a common goal of many after school programmes is to form connections with schools, however the majority of programmes are unsuccessful in their endeavours. The structure of some after school programmes can hamper making this connection (Miller, 2003). Programmes vary from being informal or formal in structure.

There is some disagreement in the literature about whether the out of school time programme environment should become more like schools or be different. While some researchers are of the view that progammes should be different in some way to the school environments that students leave behind (Whalen & Wynn, 1995, cited in Vadeboncoeur, 2006: 271), others argue for a clear alignment between learning in nonschool contexts and learning in schools (Miller, 2001). Vadeboncoeur (2006) supports this call for greater alignment stating:

> that the boundary between school and after school could and should be reduced or eliminated, given the argument that "more school is better" (Vadeboncoeur, 2006: 271).

Other US research supports the benefits of attending formal out of school time programmes as opposed to self-care. Vandell and Posner (1994) found that children who attended formal programmes spent more time in academic activities, for example homework help and enrichment lessons such as music and dance. These children spent less time watching TV or hanging out. Other findings suggest that third grade children who spent more time doing academic and enrichment activities had better relations with their peer group and their behaviour and emotional adjustment at school were better than children who spent less time in these activities (Vandell & Posner, 1994). Building on previous research, Vandell and Posner (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of students from 3rd to 5th grade to investigate after school activities and the development of low income urban children. They found children who attended after school programmes spent more time on academic and extracurricular activities as opposed to children in informal care settings who spent more time watching TV and hanging out.

There is some evidence that involvement in structured or unstructured activities is mediated by gender. Mahoney (2000) found boys involved in unstructured activities had more challenging behaviours. In addition, those who participated in unstructured activities were characterised by deviant peer relationships, poor parent child-relationships, and low levels of support from their activity leaders.

Birmingham et al., (2005) examined the features of high performing after school projects in New York City. Specifically they investigated 10 after school projects where students had made improvements on standardised reading and mathematics tests. The projects were found to have 24 shared features that contributed to student learning in areas of programming, staffing, and support systems. The projects offered a combination of structured and unstructured support that were not targeted specifically on academic outcomes but were more oriented to a wide range of learning opportunities and supports (see box below)

1. A broad array of enrichment opportunities
For many participants, the after-school project provided their first exposure to new learning opportunities in areas such as dance, music, art, and organized sports. Enrichment activities introduced participants to experiences that could spark interests and expand their goals for their own schooling, careers, and hobbies.
2. Opportunities for skill building and mastery
Each after-school project created opportunities to build participants' literacy skills through reading, story-telling, writing activities, and use of formal curricula, such as KidzLit and Passport to Success. In addition, these after-school projects integrated a focus on mastery into arts-based activities. Because arts activities involved practicing new skills in preparation for an exhibition or a performance, participants gained experience in practicing a skill to the point of mastery.
3. Intentional relationship-building
This process began with each project fostering positive relationships with the host school, followed by steps to set a positive tone with staff through orientation, training, and establishment of participant norms. Throughout the year, the site coordinator worked on relationships with the project's primary stakeholders through ongoing classroom-management training for staff, conflict resolution classes and team-building activities for participants, and regular communication with and the provision of support services to families.
4. A strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff
First and foremost, the site coordinators at these high performing projects brought with them experience in youth development and a strong connection to the community, the children, and the families they served. Through orientations at the beginning of the project year, ongoing staff meetings and supervision, and consistent feedback on what worked and what didn't work, all 10 site coordinators made efforts (and budgeted the time) to communicate and reinforce their vision of effective programming with their staff.
5. The administrative, fiscal and professional-development support of the sponsoring organisation
The relationships between after-school projects and their sponsors built the foundation for the projects' success and sustainability. In each partnership, the sponsor gave the site coordinator the autonomy and flexibility to manage the after-school project day-to-day, while providing administrative and fiscal support to the project. Each site coordinator was then able to use his or her expertise to select activities and make staffing decisions.

Source: Birmingham, J., Pechman, E., Russell, C. & Mielke, M. (2005). Shared features of high performing after-school programs: A follow-up to the TASC Evaluation
[www.sedl.org/pubs/fam107/fam107.pdf]

Another project 'Learning by Art', a season of structured arts activities, was promoted by Portsmouth city schools in England (Matarasso, 1997). This programme involved a series of participatory activities, from half day art workshops for infants, to week long stays for sixth classes. While the main focus was on art as a part of the curriculum, the season also offered an opportunity to look at the contribution which participation in the arts might make to the general development of school students. Teachers assessed students in language development, observation skills, creativity and imagination and social skills development. Results demonstrated that the arts activities had a positive educational impact on most children. Teachers noted an increase in the level of concentration and effort their students were prepared to give the art activities, in particular, the commitment of unexpected children. There was a general recognition that increased confidence came from a sense of achievement from having done something that was valued. Teachers also observed a change in group dynamics, such as collective success gave students the same sort of pride as having made something of their own (Matarasso, 1997).

Summary

The preceding sections have provided a review of literature that locates the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) within a policy and research context. This may be used to inform current understanding, future development and evaluation of the RLC. First we set out to examine definitions of OST activities and have found these to be wide ranging. Second we considered the national policy context for OST provision. This shows that the provision of OST services is supported, albeit indirectly, by a number of government policies and policy initiatives. In addition, the provision of OST services is supportive of government policy aimed at addressing educational disadvantage and social inclusion.

The third section of this review outlined international and national research literature on the benefits of OST activities. Although much of the available research evidence is based upon US programmes, we have attempted to include Irish, UK and Australian research, but this is somewhat limited. The evidence presented here shows a wide range of benefits to young people from participation in OST activities, in particular for young people living in socio-economic disadvantage. Participation in OST activities is also beneficial for educational attainment, psychological development, and positive relationships among youth, families, peers and OST staff.

The fourth section of the review examined evidence on best practice in OST service provision. Here a number of indicators of effective practice were reported related to participation, quality provision, parental involvement, and structured and unstructured programmes.

In the final section of this review we focus on research evidence that specifically relates to arts-based OST service provision.

The Arts and OST provision

The focus of this section is on arts-based and performing arts programmes that engage young people between the ages of 12-18 years in after school programmes and community based youth organisations. As with the previous sections of this review much of the evidence is based upon US studies, however, there is some evidence from the UK on the social impact of arts programmes on the community and the individuals involved.

According to Dierking and Falk (2003) arts-based extracurricular activities that are situated within community organisations are part of:

> a vast infrastructure that helps to support the ongoing and continuous learning of students and their families in providing more educational opportunities to more people, more of the time (Dierking & Falk, 2003: 78).

Arts-based or arts-enrichment programmes include a wide variety of activities such as classes in dance, music, drama, painting, pottery etc.

This section also highlights research that provides evidence of the benefits of participating in dance, cheerleading and drama activities. Participation in arts activities can also lead to enhanced social cohesion in the community. In *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) reports on a number of studies that have integrated the arts in the classroom as part of the teaching methodology. These not only demonstrated positive outcomes in literacy and comprehension skills but also in student motivation, engagement and social competence.

The benefits of dance

In *Critical Links* a research compendium of US arts-based studies (Deasy, 2002), there is consistent evidence of the beneficial effects of participation in the arts. Research studies have found that dance is effective as a means of developing three aspects of creative thinking namely fluency, originality and abstractness (Bradley, 2002). Minton (2000) examined the relationship between dancing and creative thinking. Two hundred and eighty-six high school students (15 years old) were enrolled in dance and non-dance courses. Dancers participated for about five-to-eight hours a week, in and out of school, for a term. The study found that high school students who studied a variety of styles of dance for a school term scored better than non-dancers on elaboration, originality and abstractness tests (Minton, 2000). This evidence suggests that dance is a valid way for students to develop creative thinking skills, especially in the categories of originality and abstract thinking (Minton, 2000).

Further evidence from *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) demonstrates the positive effects of dance instruction on a group of disenfranchised adolescents. Ross (2000) conducted a qualitative study to explore the relationship between arts (dance) and social and community service. Sixty 13- to-17 year old at risk and incarcerated adolescents participated in 45 minute jazz and hip-hop dance classes twice weekly for 10 weeks. The study found that students reported gains in confidence, tolerance and persistence related to dance instruction. These results suggest that dance may be a medium

particularly well suited to fostering positive self-perception and social development for disenfranchised adolescents (Ross, 2000).

Barnett (2006) conducted a qualitative and quantitative study of high school girls who tried out for competitive cheerleading and dance teams. Interview findings revealed how the successful girls spoke about the prospect of strengthening their relationship with their mothers. The findings also indicated that the audition process had implications for the girls and their school identity. For example, some of the girls mentioned that they felt more positive towards their school community as a direct result of successfully auditioning for the dance or cheerleading teams (Barnett, 2006). This finding supports Marsh (1992) who argues that school identity is related to many of the positive effects that have been found with healthy adolescent psychosocial functioning. Barnett's cheerleader and dance team study substantiates the connection between involvement in school-related extracurricular activities and school identity.

The benefits of drama

According to Heath and Roach (1999) participation in drama in community-based organisations can have direct personal benefits for young people. For example Matarasso (1997) argues that many young people:

> use the framework offered by an arts project to extend themselves, to break with existing habits or social links and to move on a stage in their lives (Matarasso, 1997: 17).

Finland's youth service can be cited as an example of helping young people achieve these goals of breaking with undesirable habits and moving on in their lives. In 1993 the youth service in Finland wanted to respond to the misuse of alcohol and drugs among girls in the city of Lahti. Toward this end, a total of 15 girls aged 12-16 years took part in the 'Crazy Girls' project. The project was based on the concept "You can be crazy without intoxicants" using a variety of creative media to explore the girls' ideas. All of the girls were successful in leading a drug-free life for the three-month duration of the project. This experience greatly helped and encouraged the girls to reassess their lives. It also had a very positive impact on their relationships with their parents. As a result of its success the project was copied in other Finnish cities (Matarasso, 1997).

In *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) a number of studies in the classroom demonstrated how drama increased student literacy and comprehension skills. DuPont (1992) examined the effectiveness of creative drama as a teaching strategy to enhance the reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade students in remedial reading classes. The findings revealed that fifth-grade remedial reading students who were engaged in a six-week course of literature-based creative drama showed significantly greater gains in story comprehension than students in a discussion-based programme and a control student group (DuPont, 1992). This study suggests that creative drama can engage with children and improve their attitudes toward reading by associating reading with a fun activity, which in turn may encourage more reading and also enhance mental imagery of written material (DuPont, 1992).

Similarly, Parks and Rose (1997) studied the impact of a reading comprehension/drama programme on the reading skills of fourth graders. Results demonstrated that those

exposed to drama improved significantly more than control students in reading comprehension, drama skills and nonverbal expression of information inferred from a written text (Parks & Rose, 1997). Schaffner, Little and Felton (1984) conducted qualitative research on the effects of drama on fifth and sixth graders' language development. Two hundred and eighty students in nine different schools participated. Teachers were asked to engage children in dramatic activities of their own design, but to avoid working from written texts. Schaffner et al., (1984) found that drama influenced students' expressive language use, which provided them with opportunities to imagine, predict, reason, and evaluate their own learning.

Further evidence that drama enhances critical thinking skills is revealed in a year long study which took place in a New York City high school. Horn (1992) explored self-confidence and self-image among at risk secondary students. They became engaged in dramatic writing as a way to help them develop critical thinking and collaboration skills. In the senior year class, students were encouraged to write and perform an original play that addressed something of relevance to themselves. Despite their initial struggles, students ended up writing far more than they could address in their dramatic productions. The findings provide evidence of development in self-perception and behaviour over the year. Students increasingly saw themselves as leaders and as important members of the class. The study argues that it is not just dramatic writing but also the process through which students are taught that is important, for example dramatic writing requires critical thinking skills (Horn, 1992).

The benefits of music

Two schools in the US, one in Brooklyn and the other in the Bronx, demonstrated the benefits of integrating students' popular culture of hip hop/rap music into the school curriculum. Both schools were part of a 17 year critical analysis project which gave rise to two extracurricular groups (Holder, 2007). In these schools students and teachers used the classroom to explore the connections between the curriculum and their lived realities. They did this by using the music of hip hop/rap to enhance their understanding of the curriculum. As a result, students' popular culture and their everyday social interactions were integrated into the general curriculum, thus releasing students' creativity. It also provided students with opportunities to 'construct a space for self and to view themselves as part of a larger community' (Holder, 2007: 283). At the Brooklyn school an annual concert was held where students read their poems and performed their raps, while students in the Bronx started lunchroom concerts named One Mic! According to Holder (2007) students not only developed a deeper interest in learning but these concerts facilitated the release of students' creative potentials and demonstrated the positive role of hip hop in the lived realities of students.

Social cohesion

Not only have the arts demonstrated positive outcomes for adolescent students, British research has shown beneficial effects on the community in the form of social cohesion. A 1997 British report examined the social impact of arts programmes which culminated in the publication of *Use or Ornament?* (Matarasso, 1997). According to Matarasso (1997), arts projects represent a valued and supportive environment which makes significant contributions in bringing people together. Matarasso considers that arts can help foster good relationships between individuals and groups and promote understanding of different cultures and lifestyles. Matarasso exemplified this with a case study in Batley which is located in a small town near Leeds in the UK.

In Batley, projects endeavoured to create links between different generations and demonstrated that arts projects made a real contribution to changing the minds of both young and old about each other. This feeling of social cohesion between the generations was further enhanced as several school-based projects came on board and invited local older people to share their experiences. In addition, on Batley Carr housing estate, the art project helped transform perceptions of local children, formerly seen as a nuisance (Matarasso, 1997). The artist involved on this project developed a successful initiative based on the theme of Batley Carr past and future, which created ongoing positive contact between the generations (Matarasso, 1997). As a result of this initiative the young people were recognised as one of the resources that helped rejuvenate the estate. The Batley arts project demonstrated that participation in the arts can lead to social cohesion within the community (Matarasso, 1997).

Summary

Arts-based extracurricular programmes provide a rich learning environment for young people. The studies above show evidence of how the arts work to broaden students' social, psychological and academic lives. Community arts projects demonstrate more broad-reaching outcomes but have made important contributions to the development of more socially inclusive societies.

Research on student participation in dance programmes provides evidence of the beneficial effects on students' creative thinking, self-perception and school identity. Studies in drama participation demonstrate a significant contribution to children's language development and reading comprehension. The positive effects of integrating students' music in the form of hip hop/rap into the curriculum were evident in schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn in the US. British research has demonstrated that participation in community arts projects can lead to the development of community networks, promote contact between the generations and develop co-operation and tolerance among participants.

The review of arts-based extracurricular activities provides a context for youth development and that participation in the arts can increase student's confidence, positive self perception and contribute to educational attainment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the study's methodological approach and research methods. The study aimed to examine various aspects of well-being among a group of 11-14 year old young people who attended the services offered by the Rialto Learning Community (RLC). Areas examined included young people's self-esteem, educational aspirations and selected educational characteristics, which included school attendance and literacy. It also sought to understand the perspectives of a range of stakeholders involved in the delivery and receipt of OST activities in the local community, including young people, parents and OST project staff. In addition we examined the views of teachers in schools attended by the young people in relation to community and school OST activities, and what they considered to be key factors that impacted on young people's educational outcomes.

The aims were addressed through a mixed-methods approach that involved a literature review, analysis of secondary data, quantitative surveys, qualitative focus groups and interviews, and structured observation.

The approach was also underpinned by a principle of *inclusiveness*. The aim was to provide a comprehensive picture of all stakeholder views on OST activities in the RLC, incorporating the experiences of those who participate in such activities and those who are responsible for delivering them. The information gathered has the dual purpose of informing the development of the RLC and being a benchmark for future programme development.

Research methods

Secondary data collection

The preliminary stages of data collection consisted of compiling secondary sources of information. In particular, this involved reviewing documentation that existed on the Rialto Learning Community that included information on the type of OST activities delivered and a socio-economic profile of the local community, as well as the results of previous research on OST activities commissioned by the Fatima Regeneration Board. This information contributed to developing a good understanding of the project and its aims. In addition, a review of relevant literature on OST activities was undertaken. This consisted of national and international research that focused on theoretical, methodological and policy issues. This also informed the design of research instruments for the primary data collection.

Primary data collection

Table 3.1: Overview of quantitative and qualitative research methods employed during primary data collection

Quantitative	*Qualitative*
Student survey (n = 142)	Focus groups young people (n = 15)
Parent survey (n = 40)	Focus group parents (n = 6)
School data collection from 8 schools (n = 122)	Interviews teachers (n = 11)
Pilot observations 2 OST activities	Interviews OST project leaders (n = 3)
	Focus groups OST project staff (n = 13)

As shown in Table 3.1 quantitative surveys were conducted with young people and their parents. Other quantitative data was compiled from the eight schools attended by the majority of young people. Some observations of two OST activities were also carried out, but these were done with the aim of pilot testing an observation instrument to help inform any future evaluation of the RLC. All stakeholders were involved in the qualitative elements of the research. Focus groups were carried out with young people, parents and OST project staff. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with teachers and OST project leaders. Each of these components will be detailed below.

Survey of young people

The student survey aimed to compile baseline data on various aspects of young people's well-being, which included self-esteem, attitudes to learning, and educational aspirations. It also provided information on the nature of young people's participation in OST activities and their opinions on certain aspects of OST activities, e.g. relationships with OST project staff. It comprised the following sections:

- Section 1: You and your family, e.g. gender, age, place of birth, parents' occupation

- Section 2: School life, e.g. whether attended primary or secondary school, attitudes to school, relationship with teachers and peers, attitudes to learning, educational aspirations

- Section 3: Participation in OST activities, e.g. nature of spare time activities, participation in after school clubs, attitudes to after school club attended most often, reasons for non-participation in after school clubs

- Section 4: Relationships with others, e.g. family relationships, nature of friendships, general well-being using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

The survey was a structured questionnaire and largely consisted of closed-ended questions that required a tick box answer. This facilitated the comparability of the data across the population and also made it easier for completion. On average, questionnaires took between 30-40 minutes to complete. It was piloted in the first school that took part in survey administration.

There were two main criteria for the inclusion of young people in the population to be surveyed. Firstly, that they met the age range targeted by the RLC, that is they were aged between 11 and 14 years old. Secondly, that they lived in the catchment area for the RLC, i.e. the Fatima/Dolphin community or in the wider Rialto area, which is envisaged to be the catchment area for the future delivery of OST activities under the RLC.

A total of 142 young people completed questionnaires. There were two main groups of participants: firstly, the *study group* (n = 73) which consisted of those young people who lived in the Fatima/Dolphin communities, and secondly, a *comparison group* (n = 69), of young people who lived in the wider Rialto area. The majority of young people in the comparison group were in the same class/year as the study group.[10]

There were two rounds of student survey administration:

- *Round 1 of survey administration - Schools*

Eight schools were asked to take part in the research and all agreed. A member of the research team met with the Principal or a teacher in the school, which was typically the Home School Community Liaison teacher, to discuss the research and what it would involve. This first round of survey administration took place over a period of four months, November 2008 to February 2009. It involved a total of nine school visits (one school had two survey administration days), usually by two members of the research team. In total, 112 surveys were administered in schools in round one – all of the comparison group, i.e. 69 and 43 of the study group.

- *Round 2 of survey administration – Homework clubs*

A second round of survey administration took place in the homework clubs as an attempt to enhance the participation of young people in the study group. An additional 30 surveys were completed, 21 in the Dolphin Homework Club and 9 in the Fatima Homework Club. Staff in the homework clubs obtained parental consent. The second round of survey administration involved six additional visits to the homework clubs by a member of the research team in February/March 2009.

The total survey population for the study group was based on a master list of young people that was passed to the research team from the RLC Management Committee in September 2008. This consisted of 124 young people who were on the books of the Dolphin Homework Club (n = 80) and Fatima Homework Club (n = 44). During the course of survey administration in schools, some young people on the master list were found not to be attending the school listed. In addition, the school attended was unknown for 15 young people. During the course of the second round of survey administration in the homework clubs, it emerged that some young people who were on

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[10] One secondary school agreed to surveys being administered with the study group only. Therefore, another school was chosen in the same catchment area where a comparison group were surveyed.

the original master list no longer lived in the area and/or no longer attended the homework club. Also, some young people were deemed ineligible as they were in 3rd year of secondary school (although five of these young people had already been surveyed in their school). In light of this, the homework clubs revised their attendance lists and this was passed to the research team in March 2009. There were now a total of 95 young people in the study group (53 in Dolphin and 42 in Fatima). This list formed the revised study group who would form the survey population of young people aged 11-14 years living in the Fatima/Dolphin communities. Figure 3.1 shows the breakdown of the total survey population for the study group.

Figure 3.1: Breakdown of total survey population for the study group

Original survey population (September 2008)	124 (80 Dolphin 44 Fatima)
Revised survey population (March 2009)	95 (53 Dolphin 42 Fatima)
No. of completed surveys from revised list	68
Response rate for study group	72%
No. of additional completed surveys done with young people from the original list	5
Total no. of completed surveys in study group	73
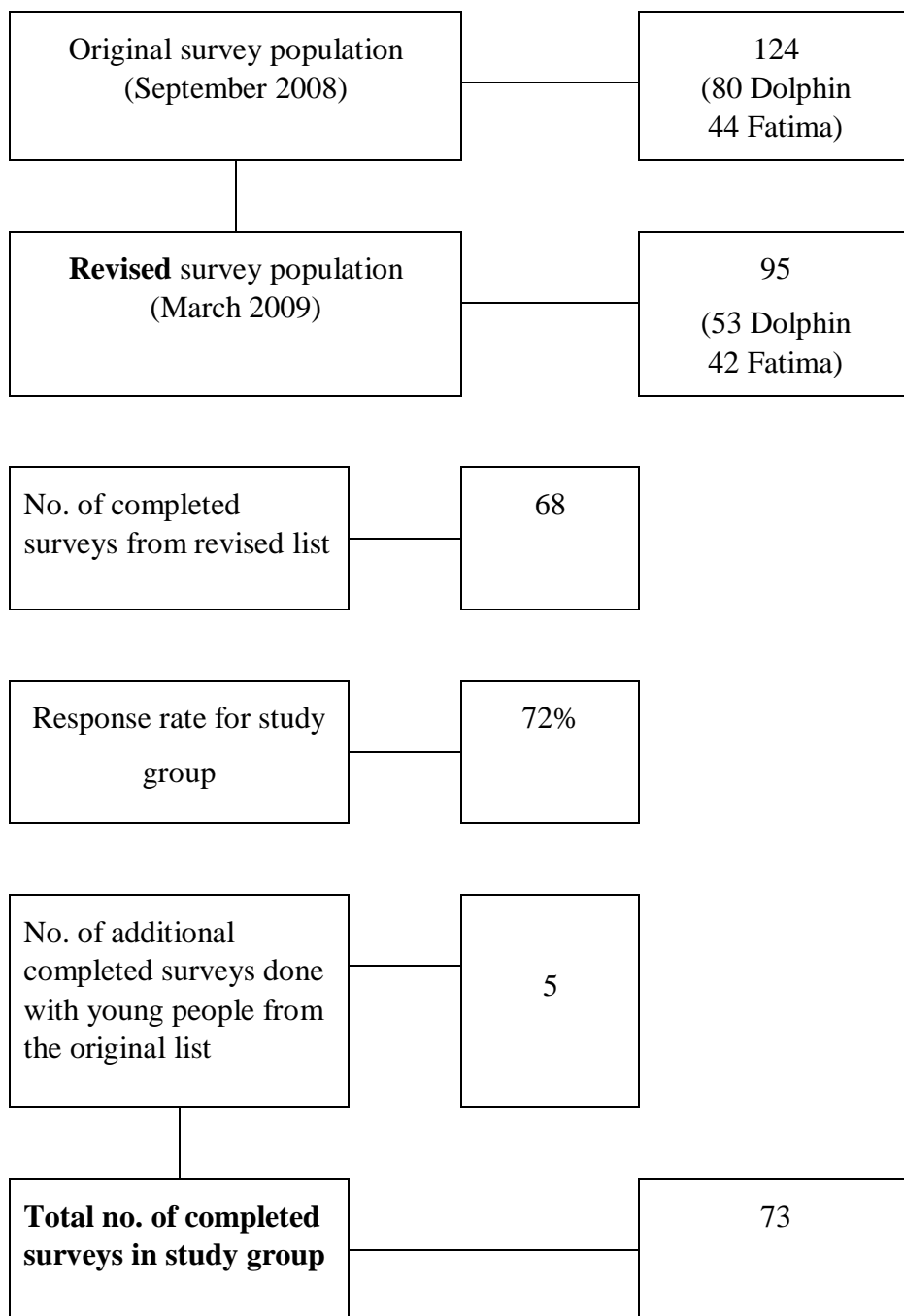
Figure 3.1 shows that the revised survey population of young people in the study group was 95. In total, 68 surveys were completed with young people from this list, giving a response rate of 72%. However, five additional surveys were completed with young people who were on the original list but not the revised list. After consultation with the research commissioners, it was decided that these surveys should be included and analysed accordingly. So, a total of 73 surveys had been completed with the study group. The number of non-respondents from the study group was 27. The reasons for non-response are given in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2: Reasons for non-response in study group

	No. of young people
Direct refusals (6)	
Parental refusal	1
Verbal refusals by young people	5
Indirect refusals (17)	
No parental consent	8
Absence on survey days in school/homework clubs	9
Moved out of the area (4)	
Advised young person does not live in the area	4
Total non-respondents	**27**

Table 3.2 shows that there were six direct refusals, one from a parent and the remaining five from young people themselves. An additional 17 cases were categorised as 'indirect' refusals where parental consent could not be obtained (8) and absences on the days allocated for survey administration (9) – this included one case where a young person initially agreed to do the survey and then did not show up at the homework club on the appointed day. Finally, four young people were deemed not to live in the area (parental consent was also outstanding for these cases). Given the various difficulties that arose during survey administration a highly satisfactory response rate was finally achieved.

Survey of parents

The aim of the parents' survey was to obtain their views on the OST activities that their children attended, in particular the homework clubs in the local community. The survey examined the current nature of OST activities in which their child participated and asked questions about the perceived benefits for their child, reasons for their child's attendance and views about the staff. In addition, parents were asked about their contact

and relationship with their child's school. Basic socio-demographic data was also compiled, e.g. gender, employment and educational attainment.

Similar to the student survey, the parent survey was a structured questionnaire which comprised of largely closed ended questions, although parents did have an opportunity to make additional comments.

The parents who comprised the survey population were the parents of the young people on the revised list of the study group (n=95). The names and addresses of this group of young people's parents were available for all but seven cases. Therefore, there was a total of 88 children/young people in the final population for the parent survey. An initial target of 40 completed surveys was agreed with the research commissioners, thus providing coverage of 45% of all parents whose children (aged 11-14) attended the two homework clubs. Parents were randomly selected, while ensuring that there was equal representation of parents from both the Fatima and Dolphin communities.

The survey was administered by a local community worker at parents' homes. On average, surveys took 15 minutes to complete, although this ranged from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. It took approximately two or three calls to each household to achieve a completed survey. There were six refusals: three parents said their child no longer attended one of the homework clubs; two children did not live in the area and only attended one of the clubs when visiting; and one family had moved out of the area.

More quantitative data was collected from schools on selected aspects of young people's education

Schools data

The purpose of compiling data from young people's schools was to show how young people were faring in terms of their school attendance, behaviour, learning supports received and educational attainment. The eight schools involved in the first round of the student survey administration were asked to provide information on certain aspects of young people's education. This consisted of the following:

- number of days missed at school in the last school year 2007/8 and the current school year to date

- number of suspensions or expulsions during the current school year

- detail on learning support received during the current school year, and

- results of literacy and numeracy standardised tests.

For some schools, a structured template was designed to facilitate data compilation.

Schools were requested to provide data on all the students who completed the survey. A total of 142 young people took part in the survey, 126 of whom attended the 8 schools.[11] Information was obtained for 122 young people and was missing for 4. Therefore, data from schools on aspects of young people's education has been compiled for 86% of all students who took part in the student survey.

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[11] The remaining 16 young people completed the survey through their homework club and did not attend one of the eight schools that participated in the study.

Observations of OST activities

The main aim of the observation of OST activities was to pilot test an instrument that could potentially provide useful information to staff about OST service delivery. It was agreed with the research commissioners that the data collected as part of this exercise would not be included in the final report. Rather, recommendations would be made regarding the suitability of the observation instrument for the RLC setting, and on the nature and utility of the data that could be collected. A note of the practical issues involved in administering the tool was also made by the research team. This information is at Appendix 1.

The observation instrument was based on a tool developed by the Policy Studies Associates, a U.S. organisation involved in education evaluation and research.[12] The observation instrument has four main sections:

1. Cover sheet

This comprises a checklist and collects basic information on the OST activity, e.g. type of activity, type of space, number of participants and staff.

2. Ratings of relationships and participation

This section involves rating a set of pre-determined indicators on 5 areas:

- youth relationship building (with other youth and staff)

- youth participation

- relationship building among staff and youth

- staff participation (e.g. strategies used while working with young people etc.), and

- activity content and structure

3. Environmental context

This looks at the learning context for the activity, including the level of adult supervision, the nature of the work space and the availability of materials for the activity.

4. Policies and practices

This section was developed by the Children's Research Centre team to look at standard policies and practices, e.g. whether there is a written policy on health and safety, availability of staff training and regularity of staff meetings.

This was the final aspect of primary data collection carried out by the research team (March 2009). Observations of two OST activities were conducted – a homework club activity was observed twice and an arts activity in a local youth project was observed once.[13] The activities were co-observed by two members of the research team. Two

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[12] Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A. & Birmingham, J. (2008) *Out of School Time (OST) Observation Instrument*, Policy Studies Associates, Washington DC. See http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/OST%20Observation%20Instrument.pdf

[13] It was intended to observe the arts activity twice but this was not feasible. The activity took place once a week and the following week's activity involved a trip away and this was followed by the Easter holiday period.

members of the research team met with the homework club staff prior to observations to discuss the purpose of the exercise, to answer any questions and agree the dates for observation.

In addition to quantitative research methods, data was collected through qualitative instruments including focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Focus groups with young people

The aim of the focus groups was to gain an insight into young people's views on the OST activities in which they participated. They were asked about certain aspects of taking part in OST activities, e.g. the perceived benefits of taking part and their relationship with OST staff and peers.

Three focus groups were carried out with young people. Two took place in one of the homework clubs, and the third was conducted in a local primary school which involved participants who attended one of the local homework clubs. In total, 15 young people participated, the majority of whom were still in primary school, although some were in first year in secondary school. Two members of the research team were present at each focus group, where one led the discussion and the second kept notes and ensured that the interview schedule was covered. An attempt was made to hold another focus group with older youth but this did not proceed because of a lack of participants.[14]

Focus group of parents

The aim of the parent focus group was to elicit their views on local OST activities in which their children participated, as well as exploring parents' views on their child's education in general.

One focus group was carried out with parents whose children attended one of the homework clubs. This involved six parents (all female) and two members of the research team. Some of the information complemented some of the data that emerged from the survey of parents, albeit in more detail. The focus group discussion lasted for approximately one hour and was carried out in the homework club after activities had finished for the day. An attempt was made to hold a second parent focus group but did not proceed because of an insufficient number of participants.

Interviews with teachers

The teacher interviews aimed to investigate teachers' knowledge and attitudes about out of school time activities in the area. Teacher perspectives on benefits of OST activities, the extent of linkages with community-based homework clubs, and relationships with parents were also explored. In a broader context, teachers were asked about what they considered to be key factors that impacted on poor educational outcomes for children in the area.

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[14] Two participants turned up and a minimum of five was required

At total of 11 interviews were carried out with teachers from the eight schools that participated in the research. A semi-structured interview schedule was used during the course of the interviews. The majority of interviews took place in the school setting and lasted for approximately one hour.

Interviews and focus groups with OST project leaders and staff

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to examine the views of OST project leaders and staff on the provision of OST activities. These aimed to compile some preliminary information on the nature and content of the projects, explore the project leaders' roles and their experiences of delivering OST activities in the local community. In addition, the benefits of young people's participation in OST activities were explored as well as relationships between staff and young people. Matters concerning young people's education and schooling were also discussed.

Three interviews were carried out with three OST project leaders. On average, interviews took approximately one hour. In addition to interviews with project leaders, three focus groups were carried out with OST project staff, which explored the same issues.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

The survey data (young people and parents) were analysed using the quantitative data analysis computer package SPSS. Data cleaning was carried out to ensure that any errors during data entry were identified. Analysis included descriptive frequencies, cross-tabulations and chi-square analysis of associations between variables of interest. School-level data were also analysed using SPSS. There were some challenges involved in this as there was an issue of compatibility of data, especially in relation to the results of standardised tests given that some schools used different tests. However, the analysis and presentation of results employed techniques to deal with this appropriately, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter five.

Qualitative data

All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded (with the consent of all participants) and transcribed in full. Analysis of the transcribed data involved the whole research team to ensure that the interpretative processes were insightful and collaborative. The transcripts were read through repeatedly and cross-compared to establish the emergent and recurrent themes in the data. Each member of the team produced accounts of their own determination of themes and sub-themes for discussion at team meetings. This process ensured that individual interpretations of the data were validated by other team members before being introduced into the coding framework. Following this process NVivo qualitative software was used to assist in the management and storage of the transcripts and the development of a thematic coding index.

In addition, some manual content analysis was carried out on open-ended questions in the parent survey.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

One of the key ethical principles that underpinned the conduct of the research was informed consent. The purpose of the research was discussed with each stakeholder group and outlined what their involvement would mean in practice. Before the student survey was administered, information leaflets and consent forms were distributed to young people's parents through schools. At the time of survey administration in schools information leaflets and consent forms were also distributed to young people who had parental consent and their individual written consent was obtained. Parental consent was also obtained for the release of school data on aspects of young people's education. In accordance with research protocols, the research team emphasised that participation was voluntary and withdrawal at any stage of the process was not problematic.

Chapter 4: Student findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the student survey as part of the research undertaken in the development phase of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC). Structured questionnaires were administered by the researchers and were completed by a total of 142 young people. Seventy-three students formed the study group and represented those targeted by the RLC, and 69 were in a comparison group. The comparison group students were drawn from schools also attended by the study group students. Results are presented below on the following topics:

- Demographics
- Attitudes to school
- Help with homework
- Relationship with teachers
- Future aspirations
- Participation in spare time activities
- Participation in after school clubs
- Relationship with after school club staff
- Reasons for non-participation in after school clubs
- Relationships
- Self-esteem

Demographics

Gender

Table 4.1: Survey participants by gender

	All participants n = 142 %	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
Male	42	38	45
Female	58	62	55
Total	100	100	100

Table 4.1 shows that there was a fairly even gender breakdown amongst survey participants, although there was a slightly higher number of girls than boys – 58% of all survey participants were girls and 42% were boys. When broken down into the study and comparison groups, this pattern was consistent.

Table 4.2: Age breakdown of survey participants

Years of age	All participants n = 142 %	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
10	14	11	17
11	25	29	22
12	23	23	22
13	20	22	19
14	13	12	13
15	5	3	7
Total	100	100	100

For the sample as a whole, survey participants ranged in age from 10 years to 15 years with a mean age of 12.1 (SD = 1.4). However, the majority of young people were aged from 11 to 14 years (81% of all participants). The age breakdown for the study and comparison groups follows this pattern (Table 4.2).

Considering the age profile of survey participants, it was not surprising to find a fairly even number of young people attending primary and secondary school.

Primary/secondary school

Table 4.3: Primary/secondary school breakdown of survey participants

	All participants n = 142 %	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
Primary school	52	55	49
Secondary school	48	45	51
Total	100	100	100

Table 4.3 shows that just over half of all young people, 52% attended primary school, while 48% went to secondary school. This pattern was repeated in the study group while there was almost a 50/50 breakdown in the comparison group.

Country of birth

Young people

The vast majority of survey participants were born in Ireland, 90% (128). However, when this is broken down by study and comparison groups, it was clear that most of the young people who were born outside Ireland were in the comparison group – 99% (72) of those in the study group were born in Ireland compared to 81% (52) of those in the comparison group.[15]

Parents

Similar to the results for young people, the majority of their parents were born in Ireland – 88% (125) of mothers and 85% (121) of fathers. Again, most of the parents born outside Ireland were in the comparison group. In relation to young people's mothers, 99% (72) of those in the study group were born in Ireland compared to 77% (53) in the comparison group.[16] For the study group children's fathers, 94% (69) were born in Ireland compared to 75% (52) of fathers in the comparison group.[17]

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[15] Based on the comparison group, other countries where young people were born were England (4), the Philippines (3), Somalia (2), Slovakia (1), Romania (1), Nigeria (1), Ivory Coast (1) and Hungary (1). The single young person in the study group born outside Ireland was born in England.

[16] Based on the comparison group, other countries where mothers were born were England (4), Philippines (3), Somalia (2), Hungary (1), Ivory Coast (1), New Zealand (1), Nigeria (1), Romania (1) and Slovakia (1). The one mother in the study group who was born outside Ireland was born in England.

[17] Based on the comparison group, other countries where fathers were born were England (3), Philippines (3), Somalia (2), Germany (1), Hong Kong (1), Hungary (1), Ivory Coast, (1), Nigeria (1), Poland (1),

Again, most of the parents born outside Ireland had children in the comparison group.

Living with family members

Table 4.4: Who young people live with*

Family member	All participants n = 142 %	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
Mother	93	96	90
Father	56	48	64
Stepmother	4	6	1
Stepfather	11	15	6
Sisters	53	58	49
Brothers	56	62	51
Grandmother	7	8	6
Grandfather	6	6	6

*As young people were likely to be living with more than one family member, the total percentage adds up to more than 100%

Table 4.4 shows that the majority of young people lived with their mother – 93% of all survey participants, 96% of those in the study group and 90% of those in the comparison group. While just over one half of all survey participants, 56% lived with their father, this was found to be more likely for those in the comparison group, 64%, than the study group, 48%. After further exploration of this data, it was found that 53% of all participants lived with both their mother and father. When this was broken down by study and comparison group, living with both their mother and father was more likely for the comparison group, 59%, compared to 47% of those in the study group.[18]

Some young people live with a stepmother or stepfather – 4% and 11% respectively. Survey participants in the study group were more likely to report this than those in the comparison group. Over one half of all participants live with sisters or brothers – 53% and 56% respectively. A few young people live with their grandparents – 7% with their grandmother and 6% with their grandfather overall.

Romania (1) and Wales (1). Of the fathers in the study group who were born outside Ireland, 2 were born in Scotland and one in Norway.

[18] It should be noted here that some young people may be living in two households if their parents were no longer living together. Therefore, the results in Table 4.4 do not reflect the number of young people who were living with both parents in the same household.

Parents' economic status

Out of all survey participants, 58% (82) of mothers and 67% (95) of fathers were currently employed. Almost one quarter of mothers, 23% (33) were engaged in family duties (compared to 3% of fathers). Table 4.5 shows the full breakdown for the study and comparison groups.

Table 4.5: Parents' economic status by study and comparison groups*

	Study group n = 73 %		Comparison group n = 69 %	
	Mother	**Father**	**Mother**	**Father**
Currently employed	59	63	57	71
Engaged in family duties	23	6	23	-
Looking for a job	1	4	3	9
Student	6	-	1	-
Unable to work due to illness	-	1	3	1
Retired	-	-	1	3

*The results do not add up to 100% because of missing data

Table 4.5 shows that a similar percentage of mothers were working in the study and comparison group, 59% and 57% respectively. Fathers in the comparison group were slightly more likely to be employed, 71%, than the study group, 63%. Where parents were not working, mothers were most likely to be engaged in family duties, 23% in both the study and comparison groups. Mothers in the study group were more likely to be studying, 6%, than those in the comparison group, just 1%. Where fathers did not work, they were most likely to be currently looking for a job, 9% in the comparison group and 4% in the study group.

Attitudes to school

The student survey asked a series of questions on young peoples' attitudes to school. Table 4.6 shows the results broken down by the study group and the comparison group.

Table 4.6: Attitudes to school*

	Study group (n=73) %		Comparison group (n=69) %	
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Are you happy at school?	86	12	96	3
Do you get on well at school?	95	4	99	1
Are you happy with your teachers?	86	12	96	4
Are you able to pay attention?	81	18	93	7
Do you enjoy going to school?	51	49	67	33
Do you get along well with your teachers?	86	14	91	9
Do you get into trouble in class?	53	47	36	62
Do you get on well with your classmates?	96	-	93	4
Do you feel safe when you are at school?	88	12	97	3

*Where the results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data

Table 4.6 shows that the responses to some of the attitudes to school differ between the study and the comparison groups. In particular:

- the study group was significantly more likely to report that they were not happy at school, 12%, compared to just 3% of the comparison group.[19] Nevertheless, the vast majority of young people in both the study and comparison groups reported that they were happy at school.

- the study group was more likely to say that they were not happy with their teachers at school, 12%, compared to just 4% of the comparison group.[20] However, it should be noted that the majority of young people in both groups said that they were happy with their teachers.

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[19] The chi-square statistic was X^2=4.414, df=1, p<.05. In total, 9 young people in the study group said they were not happy at school, 3 of whom were male and 6 were female. Also, 5 of them were aged 11-12 years old, while the remaining 4 were aged 13-15 years old.

[20] This result was of borderline statistic significance, with a chi-square statistic of X^2=3.007, df=1, p=.083. Of these 9 young people in the study group, 4 are male and 5 are female. Also, 3 of them are aged 10-12, while the remaining 6 are aged 13-15 years old. Further analysis showed that 5 out of 9 of these young people also responded negatively to the question on whether they were happy at school.

- the study group was twice more likely than those in the comparison group to say that they have problems paying attention at school – 18% and 7% respectively.[21] In addition, girls were significantly more likely than boys to report such difficulties.[22]

- almost one half of the study group, 49%, said they did not enjoy going to school compared to one third of those in the comparison group, 33%[23]

- a higher proportion of those in the study group said that they got into trouble in class, 53%, compared to 36% of those in the comparison group,[24] and finally,

- the study group was significantly more likely to say that they did not feel safe at school, 12%, compared to just 3% of the comparison group.[25] However, the majority of survey participants did feel safe at school.

An additional question on attitudes to learning in the school setting was asked. As Figure 4.1 shows, students in both groups had similar scores, 26.9 for the study group and 27 for the comparison group. The high scores in both groups (maximum score of 32) demonstrated highly positive attitudes towards learning.

Figure.4.1: Mean scores for attitudes to learning[26]

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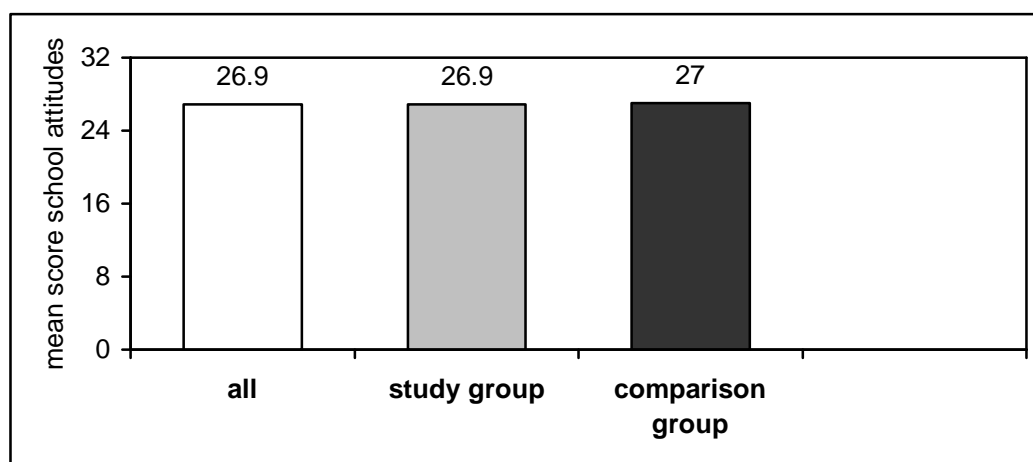
[21] This result was of borderline statistical significance with the chi-square result of X^2=3.697, df=1, p=.055.

[22] With respect to all participants, the chi-square statistic was X^2=8.345, df=1, p<.005. The result was also significant for the study group (X^2=4.087, df=1, p<.05) and the comparison group (X^2=4.398, df=1, p<.05).

[23] This result was of borderline statistical significance with the chi-square result of X^2=3.731, df=1, p=.053.

[24] This was statistically significant - X^2=3.942, df=1, p<.05.

[25] This was statistically significant - X^2=4.414, df=1, p<.05.

[26] There were 8 items in this scale: I don't see the point of going to school; Doing well in school is important to me; The things I am learning in school will be important later in life; I need to finish school to get a good job; The things I am learning in school will be useful in a job or career; I need to finish school so that I can go to college; I try to answer questions in class; and doing my homework helps me to learn. The minimum score possible is 8 and the maximum 32. The mode for both groups was 29.

Help with homework

The survey asked some questions about homework and the source of help, if any, received by young people.

Receive homework from teachers at school

Figure 4.2 shows that the majority of all survey participants received homework from their school teachers, 97% (138) (first two white bars added together). This was made up of 74% (105) who replied 'always' and 23% (33) who replied 'sometimes'. When broken down by study/comparison group, 96% (70) of those in the study group said they received homework - 75% saying 'always' and 21% replying 'sometimes'. Similarly 99% (68) of those in the comparison group said they received homework - 73% saying 'always' and 26% replying 'sometimes'. No survey participants reported that they 'never' got homework, although 3% (4) replied 'no, not that much' – made up of 3 young people in the study group and one in the comparison group.

Figure 4.2: Do you get homework from teachers at school?
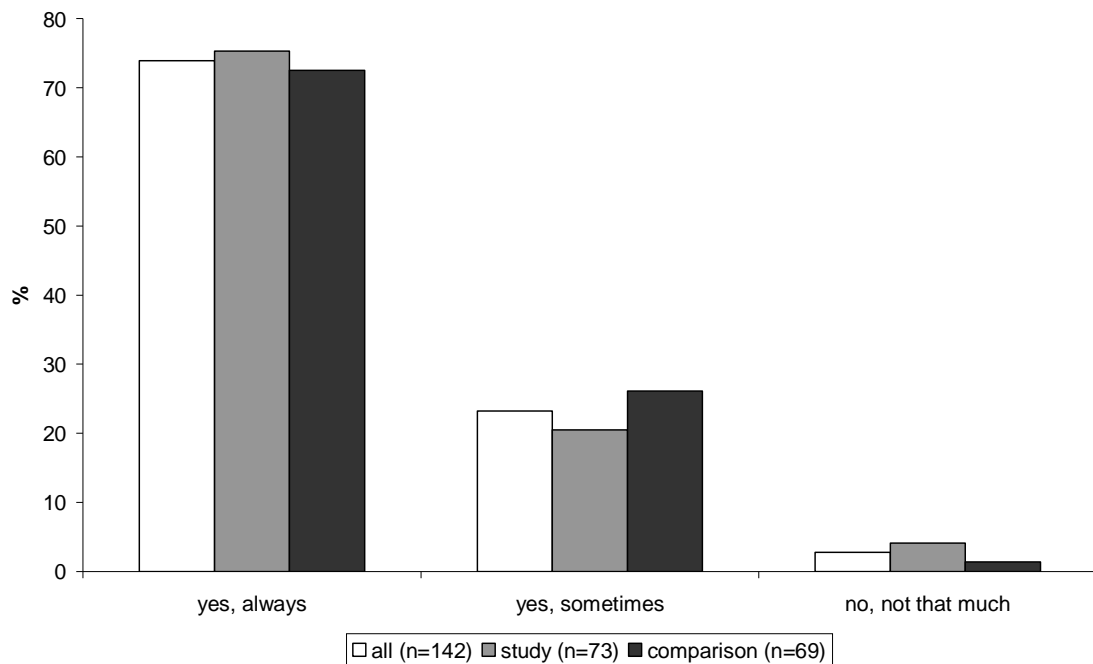
Getting homework done on time

Figure 4.3 shows that the vast majority of all survey participants, 86%, said that they got their homework done on time (first two white bars added together). This was slightly higher for the comparison group, 93% compared to 80% of those in the study group. Further analysis showed that young people in the study group were significantly less likely to say that they got their homework done on time – 80% (58) of the study group compared to 93% (64) of the comparison group.[27] Also, Figure 4.3 shows that 14% of those in the study group replied 'not that much' and a further 7% said 'no, never'.

Figure 4.3: Do you get your homework done on time?

_____
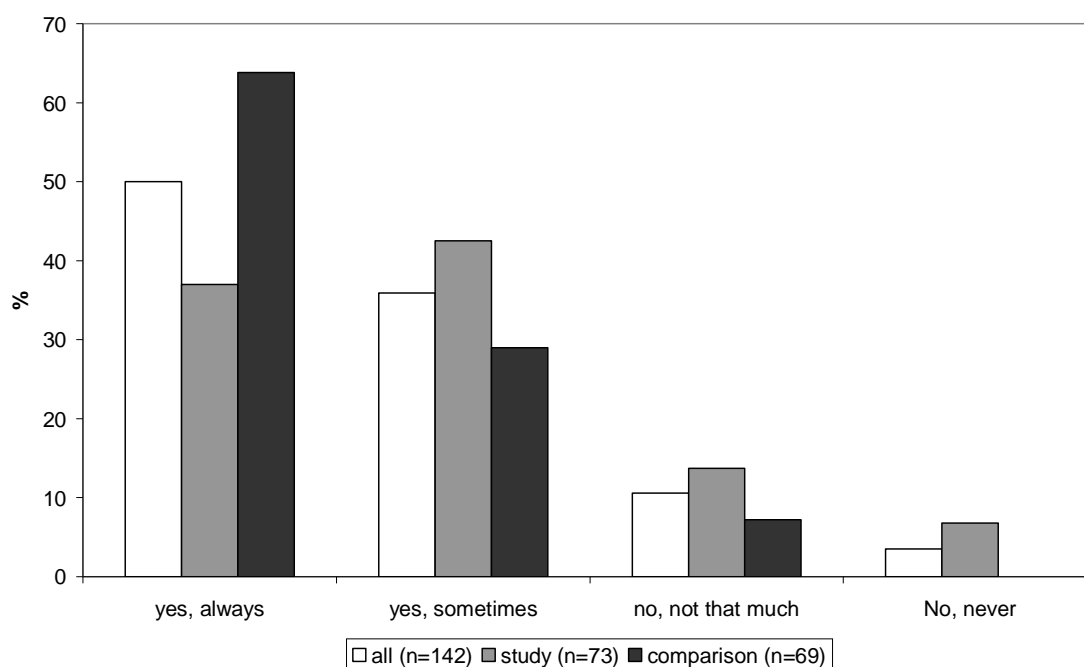
[27] The chi-square statistic was $X^2 = 5.187$, df=1, p<.025

Ask for help with homework

Figure 4.4 shows that just over one half of all survey participants, 58%, asked for help with their homework. The results were very similar for the study and comparison groups – 59% and 57% respectively. However, the study group were more likely to say that they 'always' asked for help with their homework, 18% compared to 4% in the comparison group. Young people in the study group were less likely to never ask for help with their homework, 12%, compared to 19% in the comparison group.

Figure 4.4: Do you ask for help with your homework?
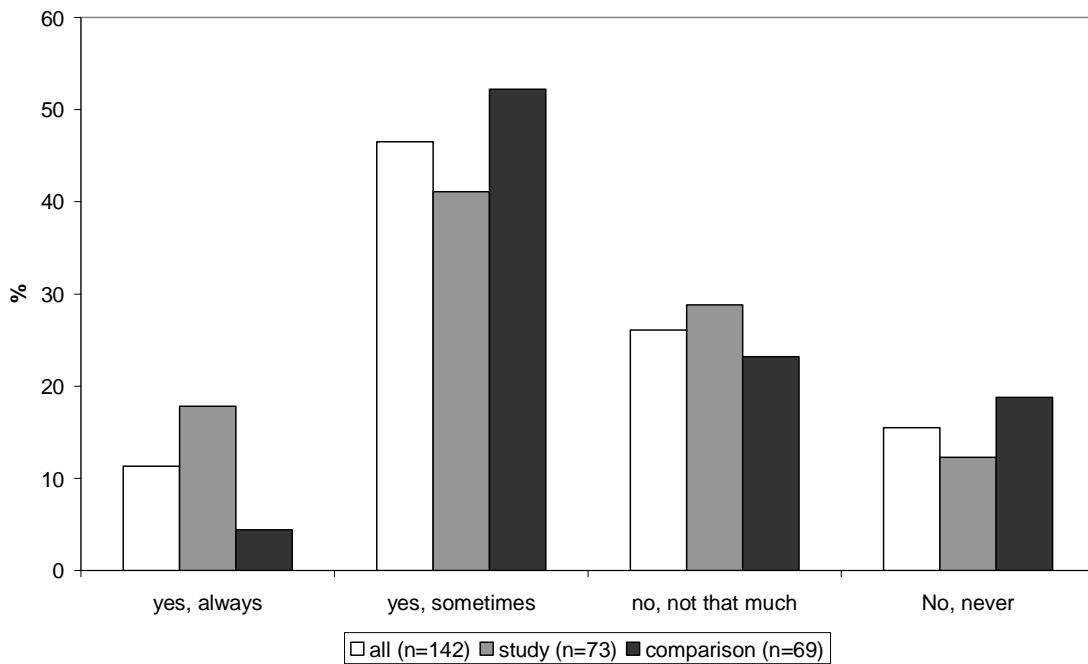
Source of help with homework

Young people were asked to indicate whether they got help with their homework from their parents, friends and/or a homework club (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Source of help with homework[28]

	Study group n = 73 %		Comparison group n = 69 %	
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Homework club	62	38	23	74
Parents	67	32	58	39
Friends	23	70	24	75

Table 4.7 shows that young people in the study group were significantly more likely to get help with their homework from a homework club, 62%, compared to 23% of those in the comparison group.[29] Over two thirds of the study group, 67%, received help with their homework from their parents, compared to 58% of those in the comparison group. A similar percentage in both groups received help from friends.

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[28] There was some missing data in this table which means that some of the results add up to less than 100%. The highest number of missing cases was for the question 'do your friends help you with your homework' where there were 5 missing cases in the study group and 1 missing case in the comparison group.
[29] The chi-square statistic was highly significant at X^2=20.263, df=1, p<.005

Relationships with teachers

Young people were asked some questions about their teachers. Table 4.8 shows the results.

Table 4.8: Attitudes to teachers*

	Study group n = 73 %		Comparison group n = 69 %	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
My teachers really care about me	75	23	88	12
They listen to me	80	21	87	13
They always try to be fair	77	21	81	19
They always listen to our ideas about making things better at school	74	26	86	15
I can talk to them about anything that is bothering me	67	33	73	28

*Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data. Also, some results add up to more than 100% as percentages have been rounded up

Table 4.8 shows that the majority of survey participants – both in the study and comparison groups - had positive attitudes towards their teachers at school. However, the comparison group tended to have more positive attitudes than the study group. For example, 88% of the comparison group agreed with the statement 'my teachers really care about me' compared to 75% of the study group. Similarly, 86% of the comparison group agreed with the statement 'they always listen to our ideas about making things better at school' compared to 74% of the study group. Overall, attitudes to teachers were largely positive, however, compared to the comparison group young people in the study group were found to be less likely to be as positive about their teachers.

Further analysis was carried out to determine if attitudes to teachers differed according to students' gender. Boys were found to be more positive about their teachers than girls, with significant results for three of the five attitudes listed in Table 4.8. For example, 90% (53) of boys and 77% (63) of girls agreed with the statement 'my teachers really care about me'.[30]

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[30] The chi-square result was X^2=3.976, df=1, p<.05

Educational aspirations

Junior Certificate examination

The vast majority of all survey participants, 89% (126), said that they expected to take the Junior Certificate examination with the rest of the respondents replying 'don't know'. When broken down by group, there was a similar expectation amongst the study and comparison groups – 88% (64) and 90% (62) respectively.

Leaving Certificate examination

Similar to the Junior Certificate, the majority of all survey participants, 82% (116), said they expected to take the Leaving Certificate examination. A further 13% (18) responded 'don't know' and 4% (6) said 'no'.[31] Table 4.9 shows the results broken down for the study and comparison groups.

Table 4.9: Expectation to take the Leaving Certificate examination*

	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
Yes	78	86
No	3	6
Don't know	18	7
Total	99	99

*Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data

Table 4.9 shows that the comparison group was slightly more likely to expect to take the Leaving Certificate examination compared to the study group – 86% and 78% respectively. Despite the relatively large percentage difference by study/comparison group, this result was not statistically significant and could be due to chance. A slightly higher proportion of young people in the comparison group said that they did not expect to take the exam, 6%, compared to 3% in the study group. The number of 'don't know' responses are more than twice as high in the study group, 18% (13), than the comparison group, 7% (5). After further exploration of this result for the study group, boys were twice more likely to reply 'don't know' than girls – 9 boys and 4 girls. Also, eight of these young people were currently attending primary school, while five were in secondary school.

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[31] This result adds up to just under 100% as data was missing for the remaining 2 young people.

Further analysis attempted to shed more light on the expectation to take the Leaving Certificate exam. Girls were more likely to say that they expected to take the exam than boys – 89% (72) and 75% (44) respectively. However, this result could have been due to chance. One result that was significant found that boys in the study group were significantly less likely than boys in the comparison group to expect to take the Leaving Certificate exam – 66% (19) and 83% (25) respectively.[32] The results for girls were similar for the study group, 88% (38), and comparison group, 90% (34). Therefore, boys in the study group were at greatest risk of leaving school without finishing the Leaving Certificate exam. They were most likely to respond 'don't know' to this question, which was shown above.

After finishing school

Young people were asked what they expected to be doing when they finished school. Table 4.10 shows the results.

Table 4.10: When young person finishes school*

	Study group n = 73 %	Comparison group n = 69 %
Further education	41	52
Apprenticeship or trade	14	13
Employment	34	17
Unemployment	-	-
Don't know	11	16
Total	100	100

*Data for one case in the comparison group was missing so the total adds up to less than 100%

Table 4.10 shows that the comparison group were more likely to expect to continue their education beyond secondary school than the study group – 52% and 41% respectively. However, this result was not statistically significant and could be due to chance. It is noteworthy that four out of 10 young people in the study group indicated that they aspired to participate in further/third level education. The next most popular category was employment. The study group were twice as likely to say they would get a job after leaving school as those in the comparison group – 34% and 17% respectively. For those in the study group who say they will get a job after finishing school (n = 25), there are slightly more girls (14) than boys (11), but there is an even divide between those currently attending primary school (12) and secondary school (13). The response for apprenticeship/trade was similar for both the study and comparison groups.

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[32] The chi-square statistic for this result for male survey participants was X^2=6.258, df=2, p<.05.

Participation in spare time activities

Nature of spare time activities

Young people were asked to state the kind of activities they did in their spare time (specifically, in the last week prior to completing the survey). Figure 4.5 shows the results broken down by study and comparison group.

Figure 4.5: Participation in spare time activities
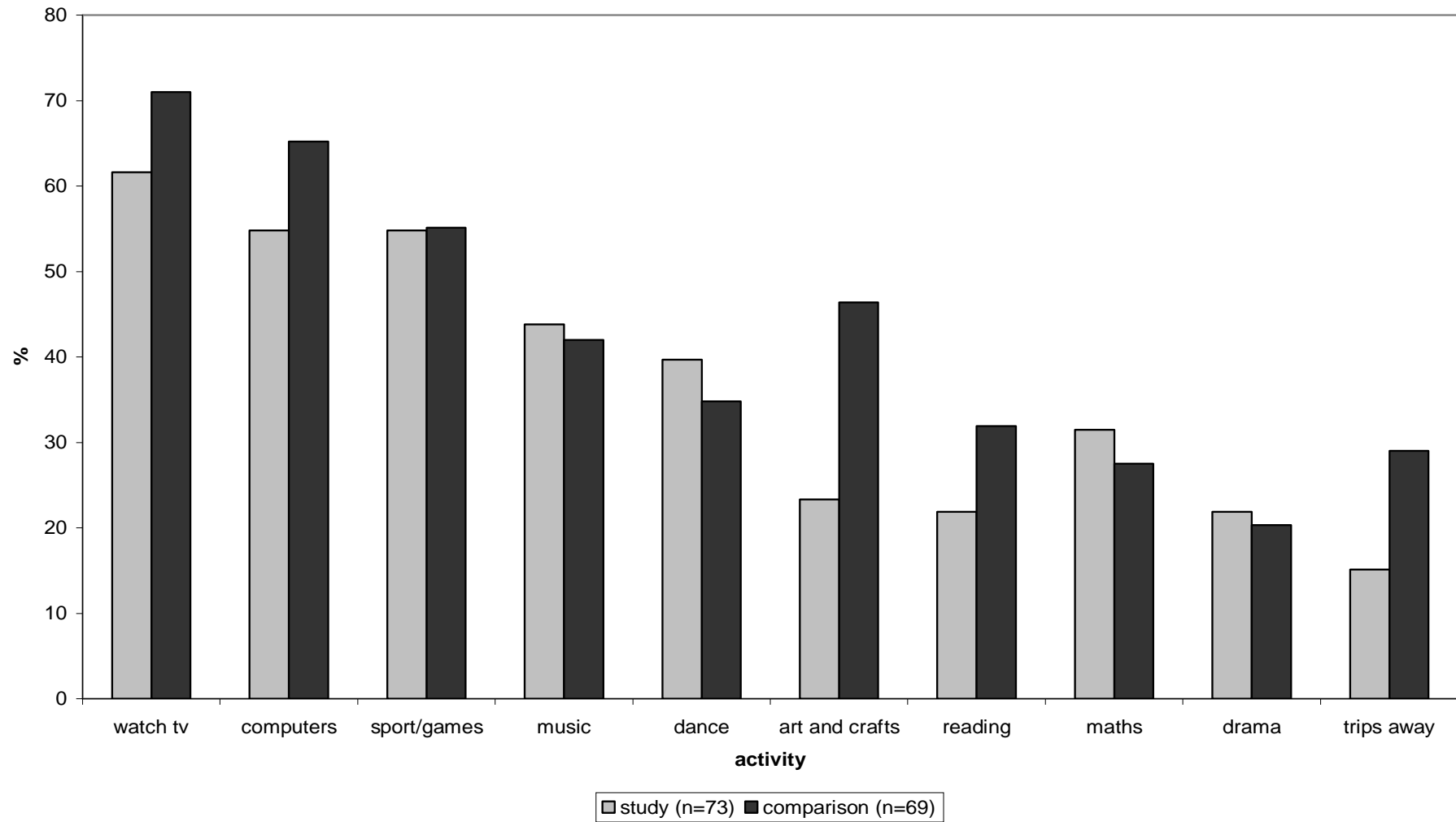
Figure 4.5 shows that the top three spare time activities were watching television, using computers and playing sports/games. These were followed by music and dance. Arts and crafts was the next most popular activity, which was selected by twice as many young people in the comparison group as the study group – 46% (32) and 23% (17) respectively. The two activities 'reading' (for pleasure) and 'trips away' were also more likely to be chosen by the comparison group than the study group – 32% (22) and 22% (16) for reading and 29% (20) and 15% (11) for trips away. Although the main emphasis in this question was on the activities that young people did in their spare time, it is clear that some responses referred to activities in school, most notably 'maths'. Also, it should be noted that the results reflect the spare time activities that are engaged in during a specific period of time, i.e. during the week prior to completing the survey.

Location of spare time activities

The place where young people took part in their spare time activities differed for the study and comparison groups. The study group were most likely to take part in spare time activities in their local area, 56% (41), followed by at home, 49% (36) and then finally at school (after class), 21% (16). Whereas young people in the comparison group were most likely to do spare time activities at home, 61% (42), followed by their local area, 46% (32) and finally at school (after class), 13% (9). These results show that the study group were slightly more likely to take part in spare time activities in their local area than the comparison group, although this could have been due to chance as the result was not statistically significant.

Participation in activity clubs

Young people were asked to state the number of times they had attended specific activity clubs in the last week. These included sports clubs, majorettes, dance clubs, music clubs and drama clubs. Table 4.11 shows the results.

Table 4.11: Participation in activity clubs in the previous week[33]

Activity club	Study group n = 73 %				Comparison group n = 69 %			
	Never	**1 or 2 times**	**3 or 4 times**	**5 times or more**	**Never**	**1 or 2 times**	**3 or 4 times**	**5 times or more**
Sports club	29	27	4	19	33	23	12	13
Majorettes	38	21	4	7	59	3	4	3
Dance club	30	16	3	7	45	12	6	3
Music club	30	12	7	8	44	6	1	10
Drama club	29	14	4	1	51	1	1	4

Table 4.11 shows that the study group have a higher rate of participation in activity clubs in the previous week compared to the comparison group, except for sports clubs. In particular, the study group were significantly more likely to have taken part in majorettes and drama than the comparison group. For example, 32% of the study group had taken part in majorettes compared to just 10% of the comparison group. This may reflect the location of some of these activities in the Fatima and Dolphin areas.[34]

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[33] It should be noted that the results for each activity club do not add up to 100% when broken down by the study and comparison group because of missing data.

[34] In relation to majorettes, the chi-square statistic was $X^2=13.598$, df=3, p<.005. With respect to drama club, the chi-square statistic was $X^2=12.586$, df=3, p<.01.

Participation in after school clubs

Over three quarters of all survey participants, 79% (112), had taken part in an after school club during the week prior to completing the survey. The study group were significantly more likely to have attended at least one after school club during the previous week, 93% (68), compared to the comparison group, 64% (44).[35]

Young people were asked to state the number of times they had attended an after school club (e.g. breakfast club, homework club) during this time. Table 4.12 shows the results.

Table 4.12: Participation in after school clubs in the previous week[36]

After school club	Study group n = 73 %				Comparison group n = 69 %			
	Never	1 or 2 times	3 or 4 times	5 times or more	Never	1 or 2 times	3 or 4 times	5 times or more
Breakfast club	47	4	4	15	62	7	4	7
School homework club	53	6	6	7	61	6	3	17
Community homework club	23	16	18	30	71	3	3	6
Youth club	18	45	7	25	48	25	4	9
Local youth project	26	21	6	18	61	15	-	6

Table 4.12 shows that the study group were more likely to take part in after school clubs compared to those in the comparison group. In particular, young people in the study group were significantly more likely to attend a community homework club – both in terms of the number who attended and also the frequency of attendance. For example, 64% (47) of the study group had gone to a community homework club in the previous week compared to just 12% (8) of the comparison group.[37] Furthermore, there was a high frequency of attendance at community homework clubs in the previous week, 16% (12) had gone 1 or 2 times in the previous week (compared to 3% (2) in the comparison group), 18% (13) had attended 3 or 4 times (compared to 3% (2) in the comparison group), and 30% (22) had attended 5 or more times (compared to just 6% (4) in the comparison group). Young people in the comparison group were more likely to attend a school homework club 5 times or more in the previous week, 17% (12), compared to

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[35] The chi-square statistic was X^2=13.378, df=1, p<.005.
[36] It should be noted that similar to Table 4.11, the results for each after school club do not add up to 100% when broken down by the study and comparison group because of missing data.
[37] This result was highly significant with a chi-square statistic of X^2=41.655, df=1, p<.005.

7% (5) in the study group. The study group were also significantly more likely to attend a youth club or local youth project in the past week than the comparison group.[38]

There were no significant differences between the participation of boys and girls in after school clubs. However, a higher percentage of boys took part in a local youth project compared to girls, 38% (23) and 28% (23) respectively, although this difference could be attributed to chance.

Location of after school club

Out of all the survey participants who had attended an after school club in the previous week (n = 112), they were most likely to attend a club that was based in their local area, 72% (81), followed by one in school, 22% (25). Young people in the study group were more likely to attend an after school club in their local area, 82% (54) compared to those in the comparison group, 59% (27).[39] However, this result could have been due to chance.[40]

Further analysis was carried out by gender. Girls were significantly more likely to take part in after school activities in their local community than boys, 81% (55) and 59% (26) respectively. Boys were significantly more likely than girls to take part in after school activities that were based in their school, 36% (16) and 13% (9) respectively.[41]

Duration of attendance at after school club

Out of all survey participants who attended an after school club (n =112), 42% had been attending for more than three years. When this was broken down, the study group had a longer attendance record than the comparison group: 55% (36) of the study group had been attending the same after school club for more than three years compared to 26% (11) of the comparison group.[42] There were no differences by gender.

The following sections report the results on young people's attitudes to after school clubs, the benefits they saw from taking part and their relationship with staff in the clubs. The results are based on those who had actually attended an after school club in the previous week. In total, 79% (112) of all survey participants had attended at least one after school club (as listed in Table 4.12) during the previous week. This group of 112 young people was made up of 68 in the study group and 44 in the comparison group. The results are based on the after school club that they attended most often during the week.

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[38] In relation to youth clubs, the chi-square statistic was X^2=22.147, df=1, p<.005, and with respect to a local youth project the chi-square statistic was X^2=8.980, df=1, p<.005.

[39] These results are based on 68 young people in the study group and 44 young people in the comparison group, who reported that they attended an after school club.

[40] This result was of borderline statistical significance – X^2=7.632, df=3, p=.054.

[41] The chi-square statistic was X^2=13.835, df=3, p<.005.

[42] The chi-square statistic was X^2=17.765, df=2, p<.005.

Attitudes to after school clubs

Attitudes to after school clubs were overwhelmingly positive amongst both the study and comparison groups. Table 4.13 shows the results.

Table 4.13: Attitudes to after school clubs*

Attitude	Study group n = 68 %		Comparison group n = 44 %	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I get a chance to do new things there	79	12	77	9
I get to go to places that I don't usually go to	69	19	61	21
I feel like I belong there	77	15	73	9
I get into trouble there	28	62	16	66
I feel like my ideas count there	79	10	71	11
I feel like I do well there	85	4	80	2
I feel safe there	84	6	75	5
It is a good place to hang out	79	9	73	9

*Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data

Table 4.13 shows that the majority of survey participants, both in the study and comparison groups, were overwhelmingly positive about the after school clubs in which they participated: 79% of the study group agreed with the statement 'I get a chance to do new things there', which was also endorsed by 77% of the comparison group. The only area where there was some difference was in relation to 'I get into trouble there', which was more likely for the study group, 28%, than the comparison group, 16%. However, this difference was not statistically significant and could have been due to chance. After carrying out further analysis by gender, no significant differences were found.

Benefits of after school clubs

The survey included a set of statements on the benefits of participating in an after school club. The results of young people's views on the benefits they had derived from taking part in after school clubs are presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Benefits of taking part in after school clubs*

	Study group n = 68 %		Comparison group n = 44 %	
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Read and understand more	49	34	48	32
Finish my homework	57	28	50	30
Feel more confident about my school work	56	27	59	27
Get help with schoolwork	53	32	41	41
Make new friends	65	21	80	5
Feel safer after school	53	28	80	5
Have fun	87	3	82	2
Try new things	78	10	80	5

*Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data

Table 4.14 shows that young people were more likely to report that the benefits of taking part in after school clubs were of a social nature (last 4 items) rather than educational (first 4 items). There were high responses to 'have fun' and 'try new things' in particular. For example, 87% of the study group felt that they had fun, similar to 82% of the comparison group. Some differences emerged between the study group and comparison group. The comparison group was significantly more likely to agree that being involved in an after school club had helped them to 'make new friends' and 'feel safer after school'.[43]

While the educational benefits received relatively lower positive responses than the social benefits, many young people agreed that they had derived such benefits. For example, 56% of the study group felt more confident about their schoolwork, as well as 59% of the comparison group. A higher percentage of the study group indicated that they finished their homework and got help with their school work than the comparison group, but neither result was statistically significant and therefore could have been due to chance.

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[43] In relation to make new friends the chi-square statistic was X^2=6.620, df=2, p<.025. With respect to feel safer after school the chi-square statistic was X^2=10.197, df=1, p<.005.

In relation to gender, boys were significantly more likely than girls to say that their participation in after school clubs helped them to finish their homework and also assisted them with their school work.[44]

Relationships with after school club staff

Young people were largely positive about their relationships with staff in the after school clubs. Table 4.15 shows the results.

Table 4.15: Relationships with after school club staff*

Statement	Study group n=68 %		Comparison group n=44 %	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
They really care about me	81	9	82	2
They listen to me	84	6	82	5
They always try to be fair	79	9	80	7
They always listen to our ideas about making the club better	78	10	80	5
I can talk to them about anything that is bothering me	57	31	75	9

*Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to missing data

Table 4.15 shows that the majority of all survey participants had positive attitudes to the staff in the after school clubs. For example, 81% of the study group and 82% of the comparison group agreed with the statement 'they really care about me'. However, young people in the comparison group were significantly more likely to agree with the final statement about being able to confide in the staff than the study group – 75% and 57% respectively.[45] Nonetheless, almost 6 out of 10 young people in the study group felt that they could confide in the staff. Furthermore, boys were significantly more likely to say that they could confide in the staff than girls, 95% (35) compared to 63% (42) respectively.[46] This was explored in more detail and girls in the study group were significantly less likely to say that they could confide in staff compared to girls in the comparison group – 46% (18) and 86% (24) respectively.[47] There were no other differences by gender.

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[44] In relation to 'finish my homework' the chi-square result was X^2=3.939, df=1, p<.05, and with regard to help with schoolwork the chi-square result was X^2=5.181, df=1, <.025.
[45] The chi-square statistic was X^2=5.500, df=1, p<.025.
[46] The chi-square statistic was X^2=16.626, df=1, p<.005.
[47] The chi-square statistic was X^2=10.905, df=1, p<.005.

Reasons for non-participation in after school clubs

Table 4.16 shows the reasons reported by young people for not attending an after school club.

Table 4.16: Reasons for not attending an after school club

	Study group No.	Comparison group No.
It doesn't interest me	8	15
My friends don't go there	5	6
I have to help out at home	2	8
I like being at home	1	6
It is too far from my home	-	6
I'm too old for it	1	4
I don't like the other children/young people there	-	5
I don't like the staff/adults there	2	2
I'm too young for it	-	3
I prefer to be on my own	1	2

Table 4.16 shows that the main reason that young people gave for not attending an after school club was that it did not interest them – 8 young people in the study group and 15 young people in the comparison group. The second most common reason was that their friends did not attend – five in the study group and six in the comparison group. Also, girls were more likely to cite this reason (n = 9) than boys (n = 2). Helping out at home was more of an issue for those in the comparison group (8) than the study group (2).

Relationships

Parents

Young people were asked to say how easy it was for them to talk to their parents about things that were bothering them. Figure 4.6 presents the results for young people's mothers. The comparison group were more likely to say that they can talk to their mother about things that may be bothering them, 56% (56), compared to 74% (54) in the study group. Also, the study group were twice as likely to report that talking to their mother was difficult, 10% (7), compared to 4% (3) in the comparison group. This result was not statistically significant and could have been due to chance.

Figure 4.6: How easy is it for you to talk to your mother about things that are bothering you?
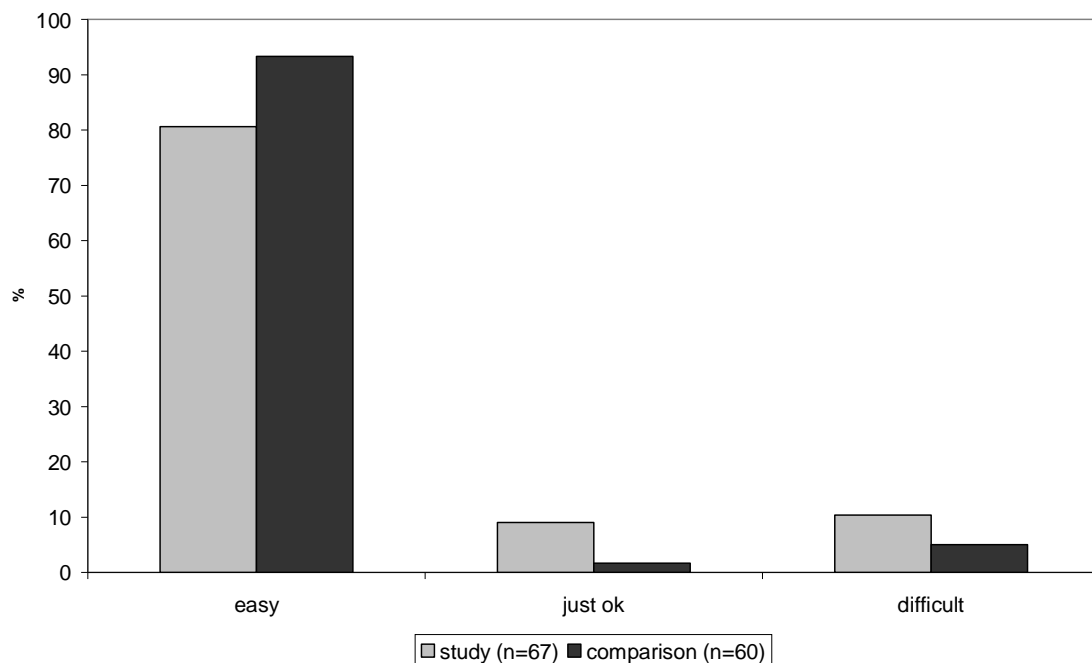
Figure 4.7 shows the results for young people's fathers. There was a similar difference between the groups as found for mothers. The comparison group was more likely to find it easy to talk to their father about things that may be bothering them, 70% (48), compared to 47% (34) in the study group. However, unlike in the case of mothers, this result was statistically significant. Young people in the study group were more than twice as likely to find it difficult to talk to their father, 14% (10) compared to 6% (4) in the comparison group.[48] One factor that may have contributed to this result was the finding that the comparison group was more likely to live with their fathers than the study group.[49]

Figure 4.7: How easy is it for you to talk to your father about things that are bothering you?
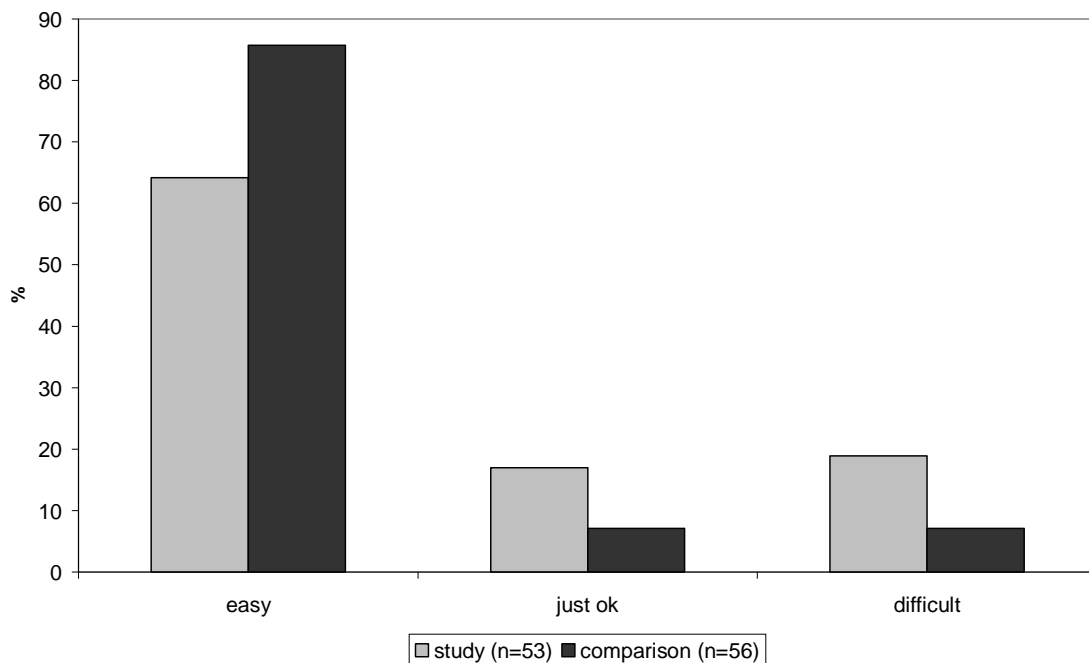
The above results show that overall young people find it easier to talk to their mothers rather than their fathers about things that are bothering them.

Friends

The majority of young people stated that they had five good friends or more – 89% (65) of the study group and 80% (55) of the comparison group. Similarly, most said that they had a best friend – 86% (63) of the study group and 93% (64) of the comparison group. Young people were most likely to say that they found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to talk to their best friends about things that were bothering them.

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[48] The chi-square statistic was X^2=6.807, df=2, p<.05.
[49] This result was of borderline statistical significance with a chi-square statistic of X^2=3.598, df=1, p=.058.

Self-esteem

Figure 4.8: Mean self-esteem scores
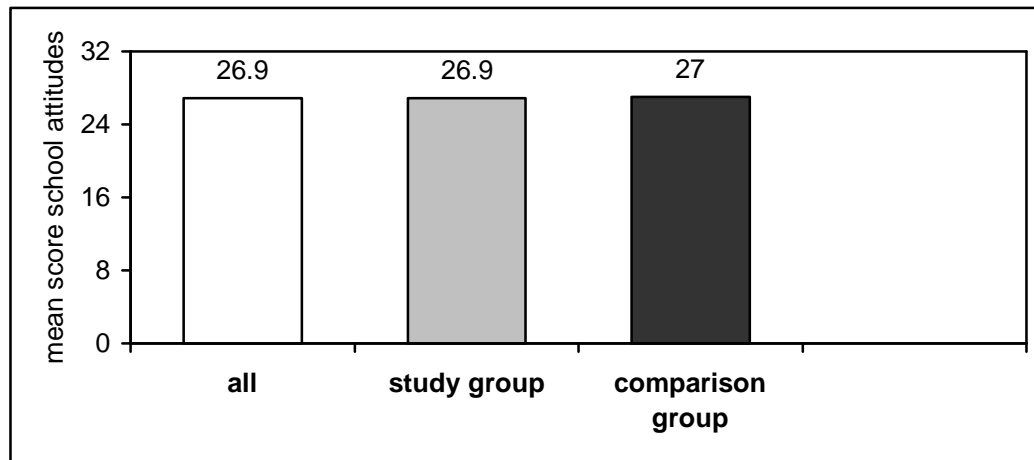
Figure 4.8 shows the summary results on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale[50]. The minimum score possible is 10 and the maximum is 40. The range for the study group was 20 (min of 20, maximum of 40; mode 25). The range for the comparison group was 18 (min 20, maximum of 38; mode 25). Both groups display similarly high levels of self-esteem.

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[50] There were ten items in this scale: I am satisfied with myself; Sometimes, I think I am no good at all; There are a lot of things that are good about me; I can do things as well as most other people; I feel I do not have much to be proud of; Sometimes, I feel useless; I feel I am as good as anyone else; I wish I could have more respect for myself; Sometimes, I feel a bit of a failure; and I feel good about myself.

Summary of student survey findings

Demographics of all survey participants

Gender	• Slightly more girls, (58%), than boys, (42%) but generally an even gender breakdown
Age	• 81% aged 11 to 14 years, with a mean age of 12.1 years
School level	• 52% attended primary school and 48% went to secondary school
Country of birth	• Young people: 90% born in Ireland
	• Parents: 88% of mothers and 85% of fathers born in Ireland
	• Where young people or their parents were born outside Ireland, this tended to be in the comparison group
Live with both parents	• 53% lived with both their mother and father
	• More likely for the comparison group (59%), than the study group (47%)
Parents' economic status	• 58% of mothers were working, while 23% were engaged in home duties.
	• 67% of fathers were working. This was higher for those in the comparison group, (71%) than the study group (63%).

Attitudes to school and learning

- Attitudes to school were generally positive, e.g. 86% of study group and 96% of comparison group said they were 'happy at school'.

- Where attitudes were not positive, this was most likely for the study group. In particular, they were more likely to say they got into trouble at school and did not feel safe there.

- Young people demonstrated positive attitudes to learning, with similar scores for the study and comparison groups.

Homework

- 97% of all survey participants said they got homework at school

- 86% of all young people said they got their homework done on time but this was significantly less likely for the study group than the comparison group

- 56% of all survey participants asked for help with their homework – the study group was significantly more likely to get help from a homework club than the comparison group.

Relationships with teachers

- The majority of young people held positive attitudes to their teachers at school, although the study group were less likely to be as positive as the comparison group.

- Boys were found to be significantly more positive about their teachers than girls.

Future education aspirations

- 89% of all survey participants expected to take the Junior Certificate.

- 82% of all young people expected to sit the Leaving Certificate exam. However, boys in the study group were at greatest risk of leaving school without taking the exam.

- 4 out of 10 young people in the study group said they expected to go onto further education.

Participation in spare time activities

- The top three activities were watching TV, using computers and playing sports/games. The study group was more likely to take part in these activities in their local area, while the comparison group was most likely to do these activities at home.

Participation in after school clubs

- 79% of all young people took part in an after school club during the previous week. The study group was significantly more likely to have done so, 93%, than the comparison group, 64%.

- The type of clubs attended also differed for both groups. The study group was significantly more likely to have gone to a community homework club, youth club or local youth project in the previous week, than the comparison group.

- Overall, girls were significantly more likely to engage in after school activities in their local area than boys.

- One feature of attendance was the fairly long duration that young people had been going to these clubs. The study group were significantly more likely to be attending for more than three years than the comparison group.

Attitudes to after school clubs

- The majority of young people was positive about the after school clubs they took part in, which was similar for the study and comparison groups.

Benefits of after school clubs

- Young people tended to report social benefits rather than educational benefits. The comparison group was more likely to say they had made new friends and felt safer after school than the comparison group.

- In relation to educational benefits, boys were significantly more likely than girls to say their participation helped them to finish their homework and also assisted them with schoolwork.

Relationships with after school club staff

- The majority of young people had positive attitudes to staff. The comparison group was significantly more likely to say they would confide in staff than the study group. However, 6 out of 10 of those in the study group agreed with this statement.

Reasons for non-participation in after school clubs

- Non-participation was most likely where young people were not interested in the activity. Having friends not attending was also an important factor, especially for girls.

Relationships – parents and friends

- Overall, young people found it easier to confide in their mothers than their fathers. In relation to fathers, the comparison group was significantly more likely to say they could talk to their fathers than the study group.

- There was evidence of good friendships, where the majority of young people had five good friends or more. Also, the majority of young people had a best friend.

Self-esteem

- Both the study and comparison group showed high levels of self-esteem.

Chapter 5: School attendance, educational competency results and learning support

Introduction

The eight schools in the Rialto area that participated in the study were asked to provide information about students who had completed the survey. The students comprised two groups of 11-14 year olds, one that attended the Fatima and Dolphin homework clubs and a comparison group of young people not attending these clubs but living in the wider Rialto area.

The information requested from schools was as follows[51]

- number of days missed in the last school year 2007/8 and the current school year to date

- suspensions and expulsions during the current school year

- whether young people received learning support during the current school year, and

- results of standardised tests on literacy and numeracy.

The purpose of compiling the above data was to show how young people were faring at school in terms of their attendance, behaviour, receipt of learning support and educational progress.

A total of 142 young people took part in the survey, 126 of whom attended the eight schools.[52] Information from schools was obtained for a total of 122 young people and was missing for four students. Therefore, school data on aspects of young people's education has been compiled for 86% of all students who took part in the research.

The results are presented for all 122 students, i.e. the study and comparison groups have been merged. In some sections, the results are divided by primary and secondary school, e.g. school attendance. Some results are broken down by study and comparison group. Gender will also be a factor in the analysis. A few issues related to the comparability of the data emerged during the course of the study and these will be addressed as they arise. Further analysis was carried out to determine whether there were any associations between the data provided by schools and the data gathered in the student survey. For example, does school attendance vary by young people's attitudes to school?

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[51] Parental consent was obtained prior to the release of data from schools
[52] The remaining 16 young people completed the survey through their homework club and did not attend one of the eight schools that participated in the study.

Characteristics of the student population

Before outlining the main results, some basic demographic characteristics of the population of young people for whom data from schools was collected will be presented. This focuses on gender, age, whether they attended primary or secondary school, school year attended and the breakdown by study/comparison group.

Gender

There were more females than males in the sample, 60% and 40% respectively. This corresponds with the gender breakdown of young people who completed the student survey – 58% were female and 42% were male.

Age

Figure 5.1 shows that the majority of young people were in the 11-14 year age group (80%). One quarter (25%) were aged 11 years old, which was followed by 13 year olds, who made up 21% of the sample. The mean age was 12 years.[53]

Figure 5.1: Age breakdown of young people (n = 122)

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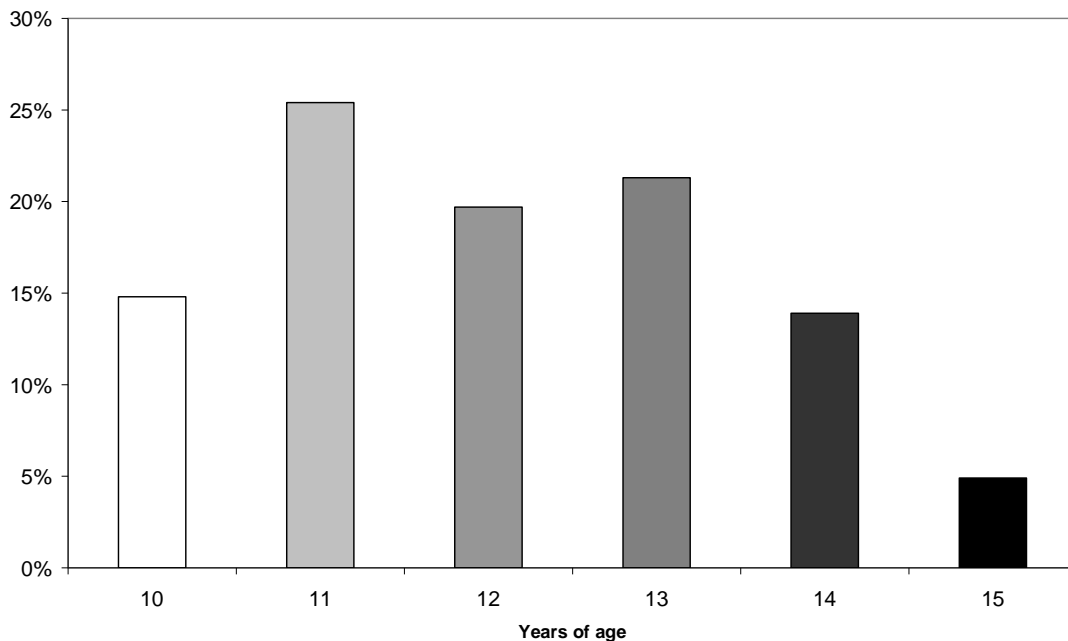
[53] The standard deviation was 1.4.

Attendance at primary or secondary school

The proportion of young people was evenly divided between those attending primary or secondary school, with 50% (61) in each category.

School year attended

Figure 5.2 shows the proportion of students by their school year. Young people in primary school were fairly evenly distributed across 5th class (27%) and 6th class (23%). In secondary school, young people were most likely to be in 1st year (25%) or 2nd year (16%).

Figure 5.2: School year attended (n = 122)
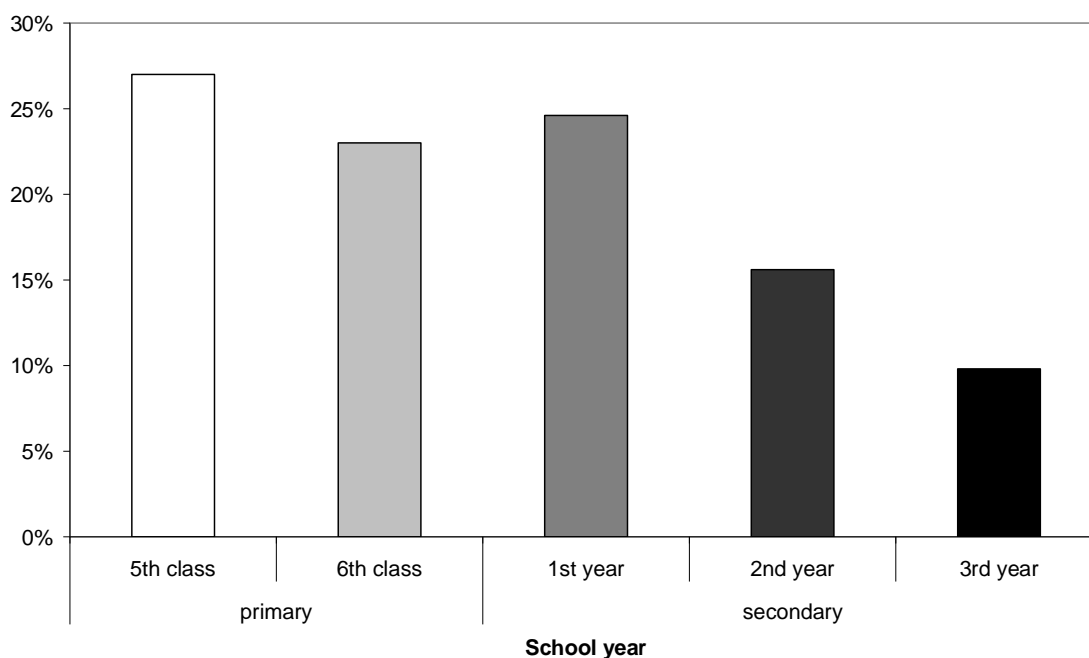
Study/comparison group

There were slightly more young people in the comparison group, (54%) compared to the study group (46%). However, there was a fairly even proportion of young people in both groups.

School attendance

The results for young people's school attendance are broken down by primary school and secondary school.

Primary school

One half of all young people, 50% (61), attended primary school. Data on school attendance was available for 58 young people.[54] Preliminary analysis showed that:

- the number of days missed for the year 2007/8 ranged from 0 (3 young people) to 73 (1 young person). As a percentage of all primary school days in 2007/8, the number of days missed ranged from 0% to 40%.[55]

- the total number of days missed for the year 2007/8 was 963 (all 58 young people)

- the average number of days missed during the year 2007/8 was 17, which represents 9% of all school days in the year.[56] This is higher than the national figure compiled for the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), which puts the rate of primary school absence at 6% for the year 2005/6 (most up to date available).[57] However, the higher than national rate of primary school absence is in line with other results in the NEWB report which shows the higher prevalence of absenteeism in schools with DEIS status.[58]

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[54] The remaining 3 young people did not attend the school in the previous school year and therefore data on the days missing in 2007/8 was not available for them.

[55] The number of days in the school year is set by the Department of Education. For primary schools, the minimum number of days in 2007/8 was 183.

[56] The average is measured by the mean score (SD = 14.0). Although the mean can be affected by very low or high scores, it was deemed to be the most appropriate measure of central tendency in this case.

[57] Mac Aogain, E. (2008) Analysis of School Attendance Data in Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2003/4 to 2005/6: Report to the National Educational Welfare Board, Dublin: Educational Research Center (unpublished) See: www.newb.ie/downloads/pdf/school_attendance_report.pdf

[58] The mean score for non-attendance in primary schools was 7.9 in DEIS Band 2 schools and 9.4 in DEIS Band 1 primary schools (MacAogain, E, 2008).

Figure 5.3: Number of days missed by young people in primary school during the year 2007/8 (n = 58)
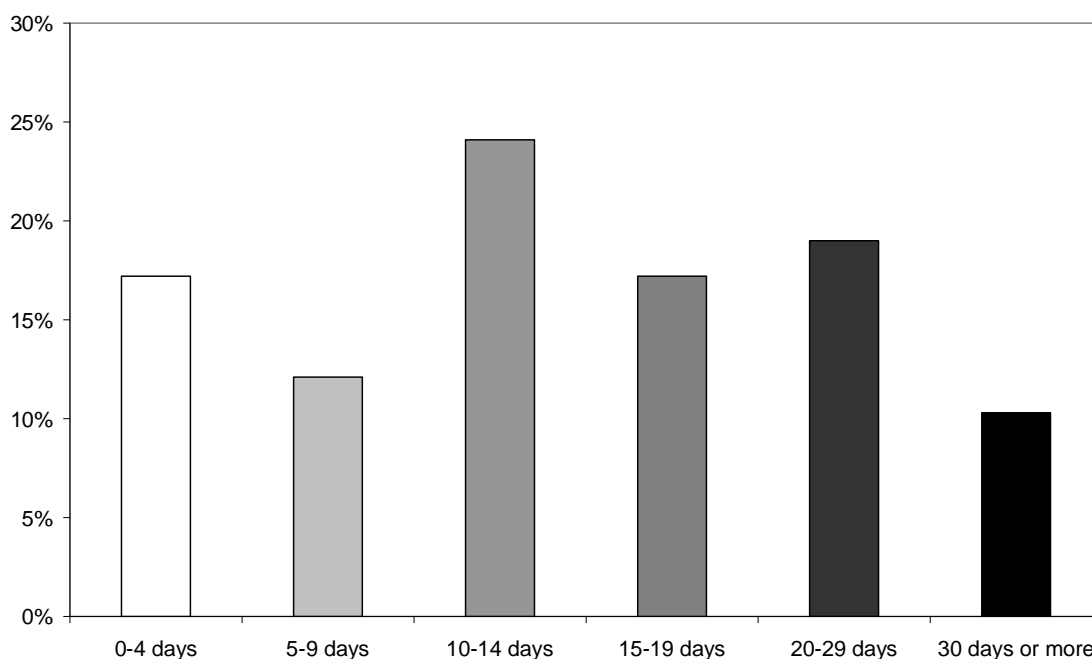
Figure 5.3 shows the distribution of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 with the number of days grouped into categories. Almost one quarter (24%) missed between 10-14 days – the modal category based on the grouping in the table. A further 19% missed between 20-29 days. Finally, 1 out of 10 young people missed 30 days or more.

Twenty-day absences and comparison with national student population

Figure 5.3 shows that 29% of young people missed 20 days or more of primary school during 2007/8 (last two bars combined). Based on national figures compiled for the NEWB, almost 12% of students missed 20 days or more of school during the year 2005/6. Although the results in Figure 5.3 are based on a small sample (compared to the national figures) and the academic years are different, the above data indicates a higher rate of serious absence (i.e. 20 days or more) amongst young people in the study than in the national population. The primary schools that took part in the research were all designated DEIS status and the rate of 20 day absences was in accordance with the NEWB data for DEIS Band 1 schools, which recorded far higher rates of 20 day absences compared to the national rate.[59]

Further analysis was carried out using some data from the student survey results. It was not surprising to find that young people who missed 20 days or more in primary school reported less positive attitudes to school. For example, 24% of those who said that they 'enjoyed going to school' missed 20 days or more at primary school in 2007/8, this

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[59] The mean score for 20 day absences was 18.2 in DEIS Band 2 schools and 24.4 in DEIS Band 1 schools (MacAogain, E, 2008),

increased to 44% for those who said that they did not enjoy going to school.[60] There was a similar result for the question 'are you happy at school?'

Additional analysis was carried out to explore if the results on the number of days missed at primary school varied by:

- gender, and

- whether young people were in the study/comparison group.

Gender

Table 5.1: number of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 by gender

	Boys	**Girls**
No. of young people	25	33
Mean	18	16
Median	12	13
Standard deviation	15	13
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	73	68
Sum	441	522

Table 5.1 shows that the average number of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 is slightly higher for boys than girls. For example, the mean number of days missed is 18 for boys and 16 for girls. Further analysis of this data was carried out and Figure 5.4 shows the number of days missed by gender.

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[60] This result was statistically significant based on the chi-square statistic, X^2=9.229, df=2, p<.01. Also, the Spearman rho correlation co-efficient was 0.347 (significant at the 0.01 level). The correlation co-efficient was slightly higher for the study group (0.369) than the comparison group (0.303) but neither of these results were statistically significant.

Figure 5.4: Number of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 by gender (n = 58)
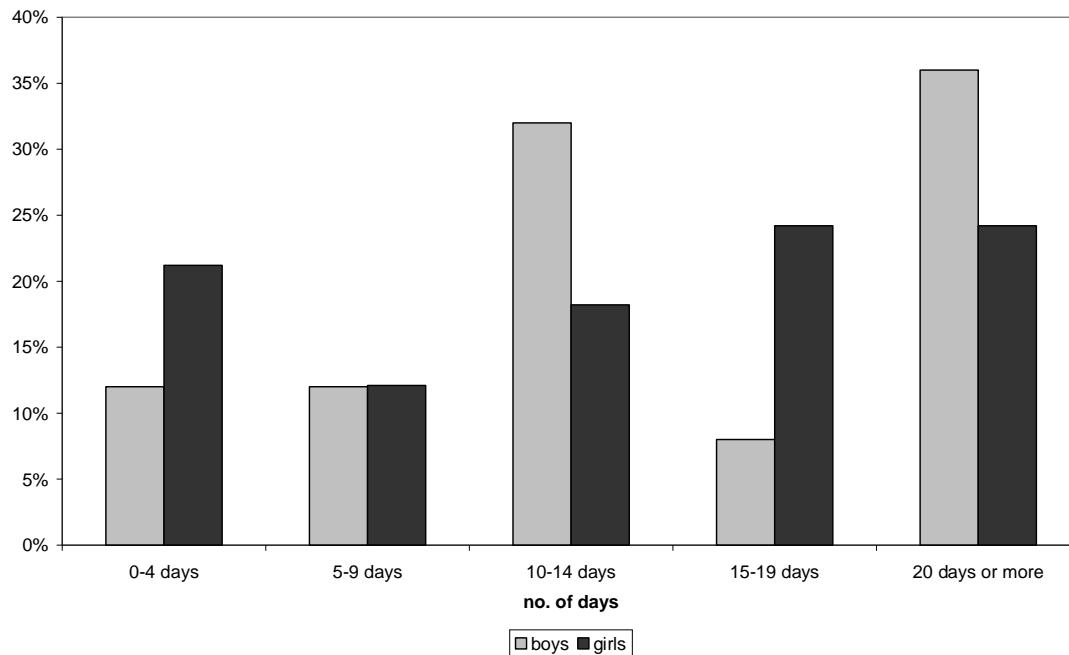
Figure 5.4 shows that there is no consistent pattern in relation to the number of days missed at primary school during 2007/8 by gender. Girls were more likely to miss 0-4 school days compared to boys, 21% and 12% respectively, as well as 15-19 days, 24% and 8% respectively. Boys were more likely to miss 10-14 days than girls, 32% and 18% respectively, as well as 20 days or more, 36% and 24% respectively. While there is no clear pattern across all the categories by gender, looking at the two extreme categories it can be seen that girls are more likely to be represented in the lowest category (0-4 days) while boys are more likely to be in the highest category (20 days or more), which may account for the slightly higher mean score for boys. However, the results on absenteeism by gender were not statistically significant, and therefore the above findings could be due to chance.

In summary, for this group of young people, gender does not appear to be associated with the number of days missed at primary school during 2007/8. Although there was some evidence that boys were more likely than girls to miss 20 days or more of primary school during the year, this result could have arisen by chance.

Study and comparison groups

Similar analysis was carried out to see if there was any relationship between the number of days missed in primary school and whether or not a young person was in the study group or the comparison group. Table 5.2 presents the main descriptive statistics.

Table 5.2: number of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 by study/comparison group

	Study group	Comparison group
No. of young people	27	31
Mean	20	14
Median	18	12
Standard deviation	18	8
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	73	34
Sum	542	421

Table 5.2 shows that on average the study group missed a higher number of days in primary school compared to those in the comparison group – measured by both the mean and median scores. The mean number of days missed by young people in the study group was 20 compared to 14 for the comparison group. There is also a far greater range of scores for the study group, going from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 73, compared to 0 to 34 for the comparison group. These findings indicate a trend whereby young people in the study group have a higher rate of absence from primary school compared to the comparison group. Figure 5.5 presents the number of days missed for primary school students in the study and comparison groups.

Figure 5.5: Number of days missed in primary school during 2007/8 by study/comparison group (n = 58)
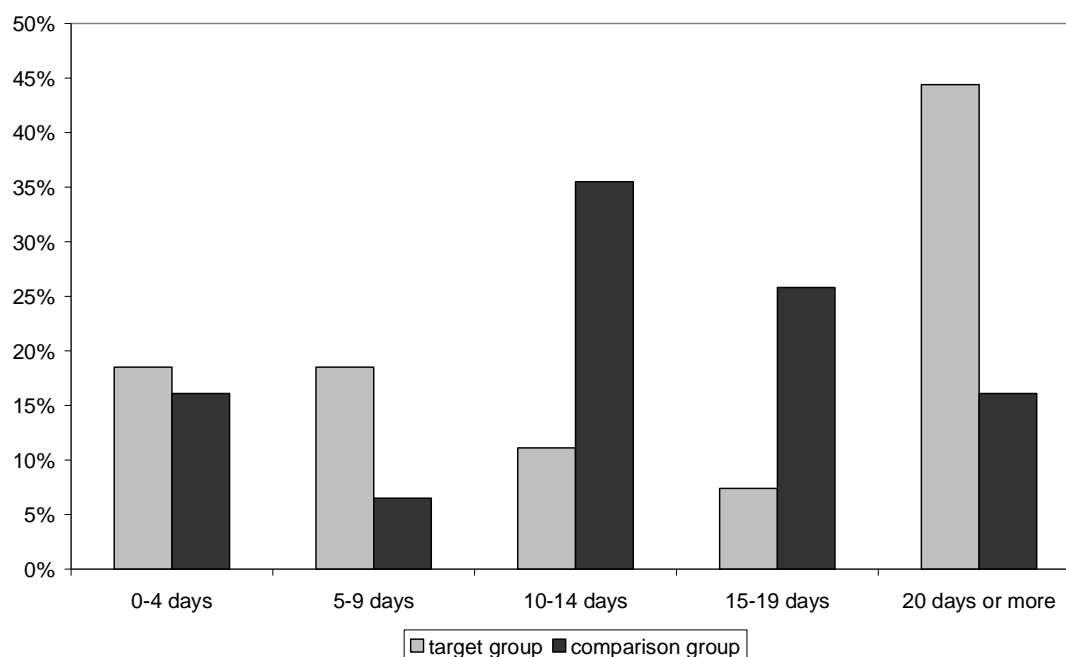
Figure 5.5 shows that young people in both the study and comparison groups are equally as likely to have missed 0-4 primary school days in 2007/8 – 19% and 16% respectively. However, key differences emerge for the remaining categories of days missed. In particular, young people in the study group are far more likely to have missed 20 days or more, 44%, compared to 16% in the comparison group. Those in the comparison group are much more likely to have missed between 10 to 14 days and 15 to 19 days compared to those in the study group – 36% compared to 11% and 26% compared to 7% respectively. Young people in the comparison group are more likely to miss 10 to 19 days of primary school and those who can be deemed to have a very high rate of absence, i.e. 20 days or more, are more likely to be in the study group. This result was statistically significant.[61]

In summary, absence in primary schools appears to be associated with whether young people were in the study or comparison group. While young people in the comparison group were more likely to have a reasonably high rate of absence, between 10 to 19 days during 2007/8, absence of more than 20 days or more, deemed to be more serious, was most likely to be reported for those in the study group

Now we turn to a consideration of the school attendance results for young people at secondary school.

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[61] This was based on the chi-square test of significance which was calculated as X^2=12.121, df=4, p<.05. This means that the relationship between the number of school days missed at primary school in 2007/8 and the study/comparison group in Figure 6 is only 5% likely to be attributed to chance factors.

Secondary school

One half of young people for whom data from schools was collected (n = 61) attended secondary school. The results presented here will differ slightly to those in primary school because many students did not attend the secondary school in 2007/8 because they were in their last year of primary school. Data on the number of days missed at secondary school during 2007/8 was only available for 16 students. Therefore, the results will be based on the number of days missed to date in the current school year 2008/9.

The timing of data collection is an important factor here. In total four secondary schools participated in the research, two of whom released data at the end of the first term (n = 35) and the other two, at the end of the second term (n = 26). Therefore, the number of days missed in 2008/9 was not based on the full school year of 167 days. It was estimated that the number of secondary school days was 78 in the Winter term and 55 in the Spring term.[62] In order to make the results comparable, a *percentage* of days missed was calculated for each student.[63]

Analysis based on descriptive statistics showed that:

- the rate of absence in 2008/9 so far ranged from 1% (1 young person) to 45% (1 young person)

- on average, young people missed almost 13% of all secondary school days during the current year 2008/9 so far.[64] This is higher than the national rate of absence from secondary school, which was reported as 8% in 2005/6 based on data compiled for the National Educational Welfare Board. However, similar to the findings for primary schools, the results for secondary schools presented here correspond to higher rates of absence found in disadvantaged secondary schools based on the NEWB data.

Figure 5.6 presents the percentage of days missed by young people in the study who were attending secondary school for the current school year 2008/9.

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[62] This was based on the school calendar for one of the secondary schools that participated. While there may be some differences between schools, e.g. discretionary days, in-service days etc., these should be minimal.

[63] Where data referred to one school term, the number of days missed to date was expressed as a percentage of 78 days. For those young people for whom data was available for two school terms, the absence rate was calculated out of a total of 133 days (i.e. 78 plus 55 days).

[64] This was based on the mean score (SD = 10.1).

Figure 5.6: Percentage of secondary days missed during 2008/9 (n=61)
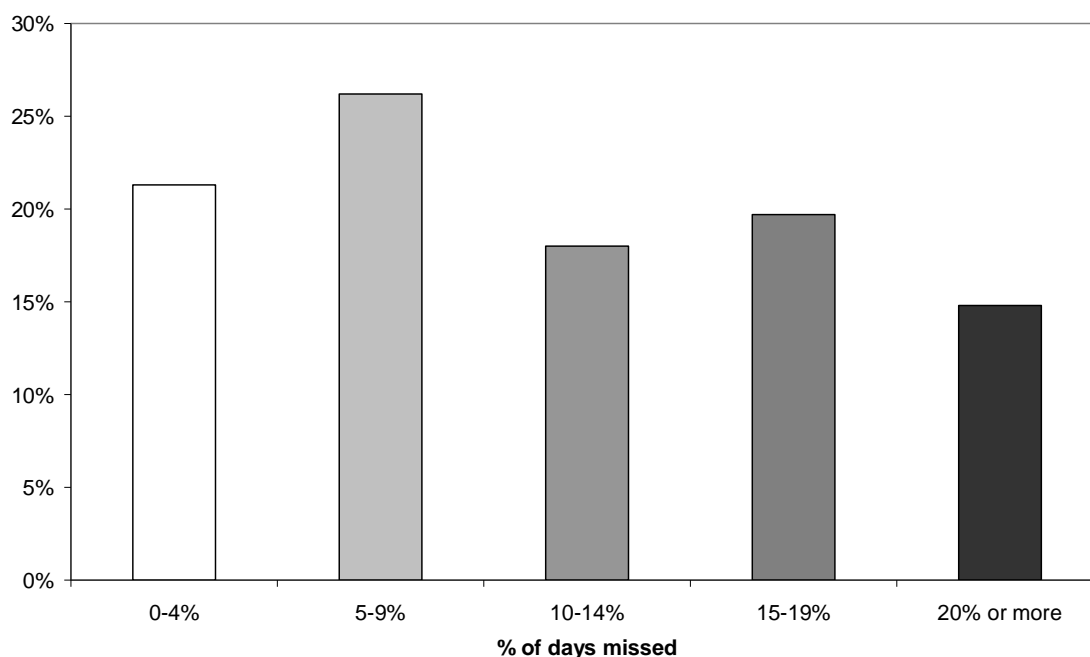
Figure 5.6 shows that just over one quarter of young people in secondary school (26%) missed between 5-9% of school days so far during 2008/9. Almost two out of 10 missed between 15-19% of school days. A further 15% were reported to have missed 20% or more of secondary school days so far during the current school year.

Twenty-day absences and comparison with national student population

Based on the actual number of days missed by young people at secondary school to date in 2008/9, one fifth (21%) had missed 20 days or more. This is likely to increase as the data available only measures absence for part of the school year (either one term or two terms depending on the school). National figures compiled for the NEWB showed that 16% of students were absent for 20 days or more from secondary school during the year 2005/6. This national rate has already been exceeded by the young people in this study despite only having collected data for absence over one or two terms. However, this is in accordance with NEWB data which shows far higher absences in secondary schools which are deemed to be the most disadvantaged.

Similar to the primary school results the data on secondary school attendance were analysed to see if there were any differences by gender and study/comparison group.

Table 5.3: Percentage of days missed by young people at secondary school 2008/9 by gender

	Boys	Girls
No. of young people	22	39
Mean	13	13
Median	11	10
Standard deviation	9	11
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	40	45

Table 5.3 shows that the average percentage of days missed by young people at secondary school did not vary to any great extent by gender. For example, the mean was 13% for both boys and girls.

Study group/comparison group

Table 5.4: Percentage of days missed by young people at secondary school 2008/9 by study/comparison group

	Study group	Comparison group
No. of young people	27	34
Mean	13	13
Median	10	13
Standard deviation	11	10
Minimum	1.5	0
Maximum	45	40

Table 5.4 shows that the mean percentage of days missed are the same for young people in the study group and comparison group (13%). However, the median is higher for the comparison group (13%) than the study group (10%). Figure 5.7 explores this further.

Figure 5.7: Percentage of secondary school days missed during 2008/9 by study/comparison group (n = 61)
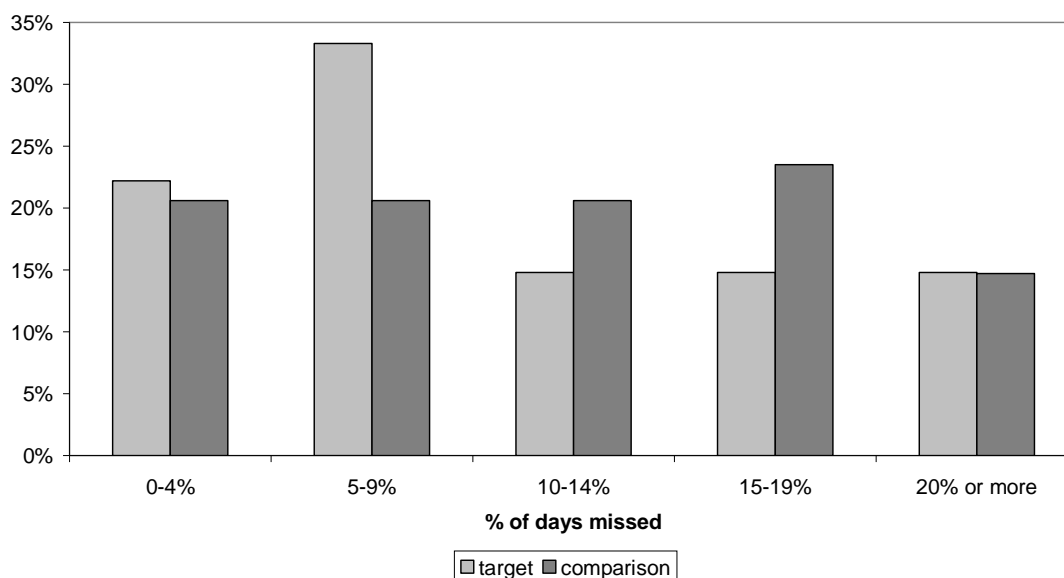
Figure 5.7 shows the proportion of young people who missed a certain percentage of school days at secondary school broken down by study and comparison group. Those in the study group were more likely to miss 5-9% of days than those in the comparison group 33% compared to 21% respectively. However, young people in the comparison group were more likely to miss 10-19% of days than those in the study group, which accounts for the higher median for the comparison group in Table 5.4. At either extreme, 0-4% and 20% or more days, there was little variation in the proportion of young people in the study and comparison group in these categories.

School behaviour

Schools were asked to indicate whether young people had been suspended or expelled from school during the current school year. Schools had different disciplinary procedures that could result in suspensions. For example, in one secondary school, when a student received a certain number of 'tickets' for poor behaviour, they were suspended. There were no expulsions during the school year but 8 young people (7%) had been suspended. Further analysis of this showed that these 8 young people were:

- more likely to be boys (7) than girls (1)
- slightly more likely to be in the study group (5) than the comparison group (3), and
- were just as likely to be in primary school (4) as in secondary school (4).

Data compiled for the NEWB showed that the national rate of suspensions in 2005/6 was 0.3% in primary schools and 5% in secondary schools. Based on the data gathered in this study, the rate of suspensions for all young people in primary and secondary school was the same at 7% (4 were suspended out of a total of 61 attending both

primary school and secondary school). Therefore, the rate of suspension for the young people in this study at primary school was far higher than the national rate, while it was just slightly higher for those at secondary school.[65] However, the number of young people in this study attending primary and secondary school is fairly small. Therefore, the national figures are presented here to provide some context for the results on suspensions in this study rather than to make any strict comparisons with the data. The number of young people in this study who had been suspended from school in the current year was found to be reasonably low (8 out of 122).

Learning support

Schools were asked to state if young people were receiving learning support during the current school year. Overall, 43% (52) had received some form of learning support at the time of data collection. The basis on which young people were deemed to require learning support varied across schools. However, in general, the decision tended to be based on young people's scores in standardised tests. Two of the four primary schools who took part in the study confirmed that they provided learning support where young people scored below the 10th percentile in literacy and numeracy tests. This comprises the *general allocation model* for the provision of learning support by the Department of Education and Science. One Principal argued that it was extremely difficult to get additional support for young people beyond this general allocation model. The same Principal noted that the school used to have a special class a few years ago but this ceased when the general cut off points for the general allocation model were raised upwards, resulting in fewer children qualifying to be in a special class. In relation to secondary schools, the results of standardised tests were also used to identify young people in need of learning support, typically the school entrance exam. In one secondary school, results of psychological assessments were also used to inform this decision.

Further analysis was carried out to consider whether gender, study/comparison group and school type was associated with receiving learning support.

Table 5.5: Likelihood of receiving learning support in current school year by gender*

	Boys % (n)	Girls % (n)	Total % (n)
Yes	53	36	43
No	46	64	57
Total	99	100	100
	(49)	(73)	(122)

*Some columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding of percentages

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[65] The data compiled for the NEWB showed that the rate of suspensions was higher in urban schools and those designated as experiencing particular educational disadvantage under the DEIS initiative. All 8 schools in the study were both urban and DEIS schools.

Table 5.5 shows that boys were more likely than girls to be reported to have received some form of learning support during the current school year, 53% and 36% respectively. This result was found to be of *borderline* statistical significance. [66]

Table 5.6: Likelihood of receiving learning support in current school year by study/comparison group

Received learning support?	Study % (n)	Comparison % (n)	Total % (n)
Yes	48	38	43
No	52	62	57
Total	100	100	100
	(56)	(66)	(122)

Table 5.6 shows that young people in the study group were slightly more likely to have received learning support in the current school year compared to those in the comparison group – 48% and 38% respectively. While this variation was not deemed to be large enough to be statistically significant, it does indicate that those in the study group were more likely to receive additional support with their school work compared to those in the comparison group.

Primary/secondary school

There was very little difference in the percentage of young people who received learning support by school type, 41% in primary and 44% in secondary. Additional information was collected for those at secondary school, which focused on whether they were taking the Junior Certificate Schools Programme.

Junior Certificate Schools Programme

Of the 61 young people at secondary school, almost one third, (30%) were taking the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) rather than the mainstream Junior Certificate examination at the end of the junior cycle. After further analysis of this group of 18 young people, it was found that:

- there were slightly more boys (11) than girls (7)

- there were slightly more in the comparison group (11) than the study group (7) , and

- there was no association with school attendance, for example, young people who had missed just 0-4% of days in the current school year were equally as likely to be taking the JCSP (3 young people) compared to those who had missed 20% or more days (also 3 young people).

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[66] Based on the chi-square test of statistical significance, this relationship was of borderline significance (X^2=3.648, df=1, p=.056). The result for the Phi correlation (used for nominal data) was 0.173.

Educational attainment

Data was collected from schools on young people's educational attainment in terms of literacy and numeracy based on their performance in standardised tests carried out by the school. Schools used different tests to establish a young person's literacy and/or numeracy levels. In order for the data to be comparable, the results are broken down for those attending primary school and secondary school.

Primary school results

An indicator of young people's literacy and numeracy was provided by the four primary schools who took part in the research.

Literacy

The Micra-T standardised test was used by three of the four primary schools to provide information on the reading abilities of young people.[67] The remaining primary school measured literacy using the Drumcondra reading test (representing 11 out of a total of 61 young people).[68] Despite the different nature of the two literacy tests, both tests produce similar statistics consisting of raw scores, standard scores, Sten scores and a percentile rank.[69] The results for young people's reading abilities have been combined here and are presented in Table 5.7.[70]

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[67] The results are based on Level 3 or 4 of the Micra-T test and were done either at the end of 4th class or the start of 5th class.

[68] These results are based on young people's reading abilities when they were in 4th class.

[69] A raw score indicates the number of correct answers. This is then used to compute a standard score, which typically ranges from 55 to 145 (Micra-T) – a score of 100 is deemed average for both the Micra-T and Drumcondra reading test. A Sten score is based on the standard score and ranges from 1 to 10. Finally, a percentile score ranks the young person's standing in relation to the rest of the class or the same age group, e.g. 10th percentile means that a young person's score is the same or better than 10% of other students in their class or age group.

[70] Three primary schools provided the Micra-T Sten score. The fourth primary school which used the Drumcondra Reading Test gave the percentile rank scores. These percentile rank results were converted into Sten scores using an Administration Manual for the Drumcondra Reading Test. See Educational Research Centre (2007) *Drumcondra Reading Test Revised – Levels 3 to 6: Administration and Technical Manual* (conversions based on Table C6 on p.93). The ERC were consulted about combining the scores and they stated that combining scores from both tests has been done by the Department of Education and Science when analysing literacy results.

Table 5.7: Literacy levels for young people attending primary school

Category of STEN score[71]	%	No.
Well above average (Sten score 8-10)	4	2
Above average (Sten score 7)	9	5
Average (Sten score 5-6)	32	18
Below average (Sten score 4)	29	16
Well below average	27	15
Total	101	56*

*Data were missing for 5 cases as they did not sit the test.

Table 5.7 shows that almost one third (32%) are rated as being 'average' for their reading ability. Just over one quarter (29%), are deemed as 'below average' and a further 27% are rated as 'well below average'. Relatively few young people scored 'above average', (9%) or 'well above average' (4%). How do these results on literacy compare with what would be expected in the overall student population?

The percentage of students in the national population who are expected to fall into each category is given in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Sten score range, category and coverage in the national population*

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

*Reproduced from an information leaflet for parents 'Your Child and Standardised Testing' by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. See http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/STen.pdf

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[71] This classification of Sten scores for the Micra-T and Drumcondra Reading Test into categories can be found in documentation by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Micra-T) and the Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College (Drumcondra Reading Test).

The data in Tables 5.7 and 5.8 have been plotted on a chart to produce Figure 5.8 below. Some comments can be made about the reading abilities of young people attending primary school in this study compared to what would be expected in the national student population.[72]

Figure 5.8: Young people's Micra-T Sten scores compared to expected scores in the national population (n = 56)
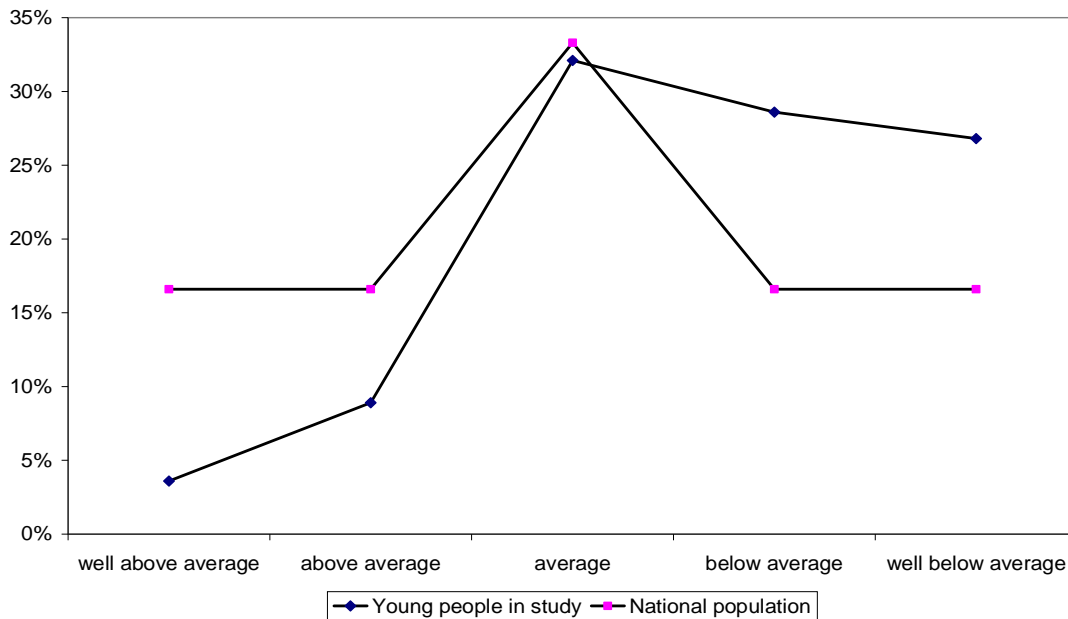
- the proportion who have scored 'average' for literacy is fairly approximate to the percentage that would be expected in the national population – the points representing an average score in Figure 5.8 almost overlap for the young people in the study and the national population.

- those in the study are far more likely to be deemed 'below average' or 'well below average' in literacy scores compared to what would be expected in the national population.

- those in the study are far less likely to have scored 'above average' or 'well above average' in literacy scores compared to the overall population.

Further analysis was carried out to see if young people's Micra-T Sten scores varied by gender, study/comparison group or number of days missed at school.

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[72] Table 5.8 is based on the normal distribution, where the distribution of scores is symmetrical, with the greatest number of cases occurring in the middle of the distribution (around the average) and a relatively smaller number of cases are found as you move toward either extreme end of the distribution.

Gender

Girls were slightly more likely to score below average[73] on their reading ability compared to boys, 61% and 48% respectively. This was not statistically significant[74] but shows that there was some difference in the lower scores by gender. Both girls and boys were equally as likely to score above average while fewer girls than boys had an average score.

Study/comparison group

There was a variation in literacy scores by study/comparison group where young people in the study group were more likely to have below average scores than the comparison group, 67% and 45% respectively. Those in the study group were also less likely to score average or above average compared to the comparison group. However, the differences in the results were not large enough to be statistically significant and could have been due to chance.[75]

Number of days missed

There was no consistent pattern in the results for literacy scores by the number of days missed at school.

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[73] This combines the two categories 'well below average' and 'below average'.
[74] The chi-square statistic was X^2=1.318, df=2, p=.517. The correlation co-efficient was -0.108 (Spearman's rho).
[75] The chi-square statistic was X^2=2.913, df=2, p=.233. The correlation co-efficient was 0.228 (Spearman's rho).

Numeracy

Information on young people's numeracy attainment was also compiled for those attending primary schools. All four primary schools who took part in the study used the Sigma-T standardised test to measure numeracy. Table 5.9 shows the results for young people's numeracy scores, which have been coded into categories.

Table 5.9: Sten scores on the Sigma-T test for young people attending primary school

Category of STEN score	%	No.
Well above average (Sten score 8-10)	13	7
Above average (Sten score 7)	5	3
Average (Sten score 5-6)	23	13
Below average (Sten score 4)	20	11
Well below average (Sten score 1-3)	39	22
Total	100	56*

*Data were missing for 5 young people

Table 5.9 shows that almost one fifth of young people, 23%, had an 'average' score for numeracy. Over one third, 39%, were found to score 'well below average' with a further 20% scoring 'below average'. One out of ten young people scored 'well above average', 13%.

Figure 5.9: Young people's Sigma-T sten scores compared to expected scores in the national population (n = 56)
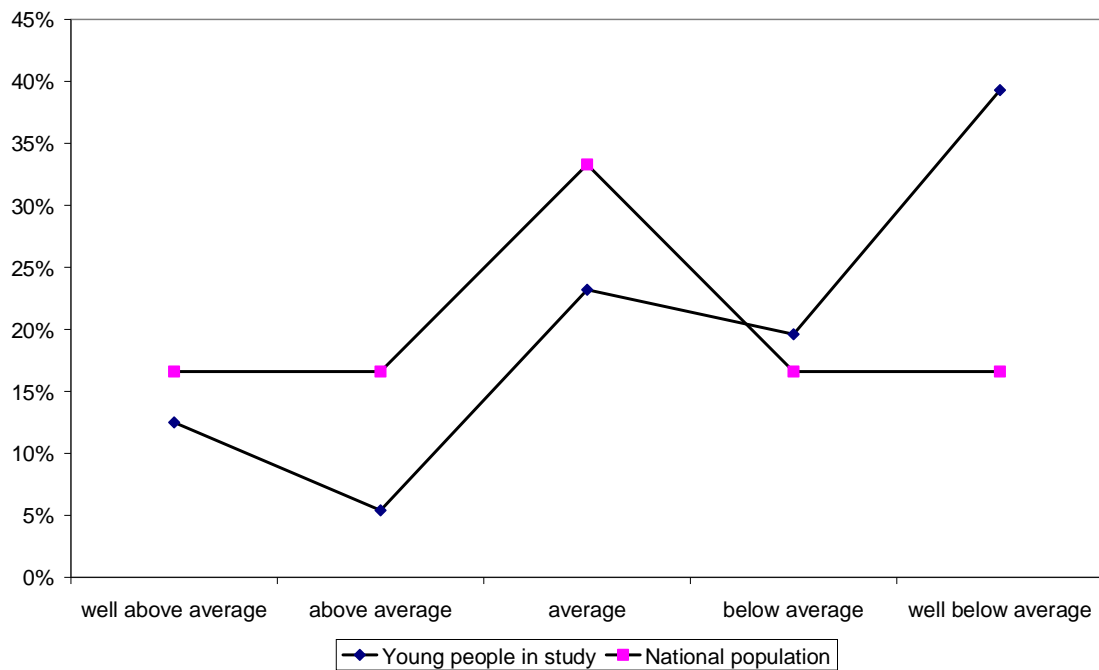
Figure 5.9 plots the data from Table 5.9 and the expected distribution of Sten scores (see Table 5.8). The following points emerge:

- the proportion of young people in the study scoring 'average' is lower than would be expected nationally – the point on the line for young people in the study for 'average' is below that for the line for the national population

- young people in the study are much more likely to score 'well below average' than those in the national population, however the points for 'below average' almost overlap

- young people in the study were far less likely to have scored 'above average' than that expected nationally, however the proportion who scored 'well above average' is not far below what would be expected nationally.

Further analysis was carried out to see if there was any variation in young people's Sigma-T Sten scores by gender, study/comparison group or number of days missed at school.

Gender

Girls were more likely than boys to score below average on numeracy, 63% compared to 54% respectively. However, at the same time, girls were found to be more likely to score above average than boys, 22% and 13% respectively. Boys were twice as likely to

have an average score as girls, 33% compared to 16% respectively. This result was not statistically significant.[76]

Study group/comparison group

Young people in the study group were *significantly* more likely to score below average on their numeracy scores compared to the comparison group, 78% and 41% respectively. Those in the comparison group were three times more likely to have an average score and twice as likely to score above average compared to those in the study group. This result was statistically significant.[77]

There was no consistent pattern in young people's numeracy scores by the number of days missed at school in the last school year 2007/8.[78]

Secondary school results

Information was collected from secondary schools on young people's literacy levels. Three of the four secondary schools in the study provided data on young people's reading age at the time of sitting the school entrance examination (n = 41). The fourth school was not able to provide data on young people's reading age but gave the standard scores for a standardised test measuring verbal reasoning taken by young people (n = 15). Data on the remaining 5 young people were missing. Results on young people's reading age will be presented first:

- the reading age assessed for young people (n = 41) ranged from 6.1 years to 14.1 years, with an average of 9.5 years (based on the mean).

- the actual age of young people at the time of the school entrance exam ranged from 11.1 years to 12.9 years, with an average of 11.8 years (based on the mean).

A comparison of the assessed reading age and the actual chronological age of young people was carried out to identify the discrepancy between the two measures. The majority was older than their assessed reading age (n = 41) at the time of sitting the school entrance exam. The discrepancy between actual age and assessed reading age ranged between -5.50 years and +2.20 years. On average, young people's assessed reading age was 2.3 years below their actual chronological age.[79] Figure 5.10 presents the discrepancy between assessed reading age and chronological age for all students.

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[76] The chi-square statistic was X^2=2.689, df=2, p=.261. The correlation co-efficient was -0.029 (Spearman's rho).
[77] The chi-square statistic was X^2=7.762, df=2, p=.021. The correlation co-efficient was 0.346 (Spearman's rho).
[78] The correlation co-efficient was 0.047 (Spearman's rho).
[79] This figure is based on the mean. The standard deviation was 1.79 and the standard error was 0.3.

Figure 5.10: Discrepancy between assessed reading age and chronological age (n=41)
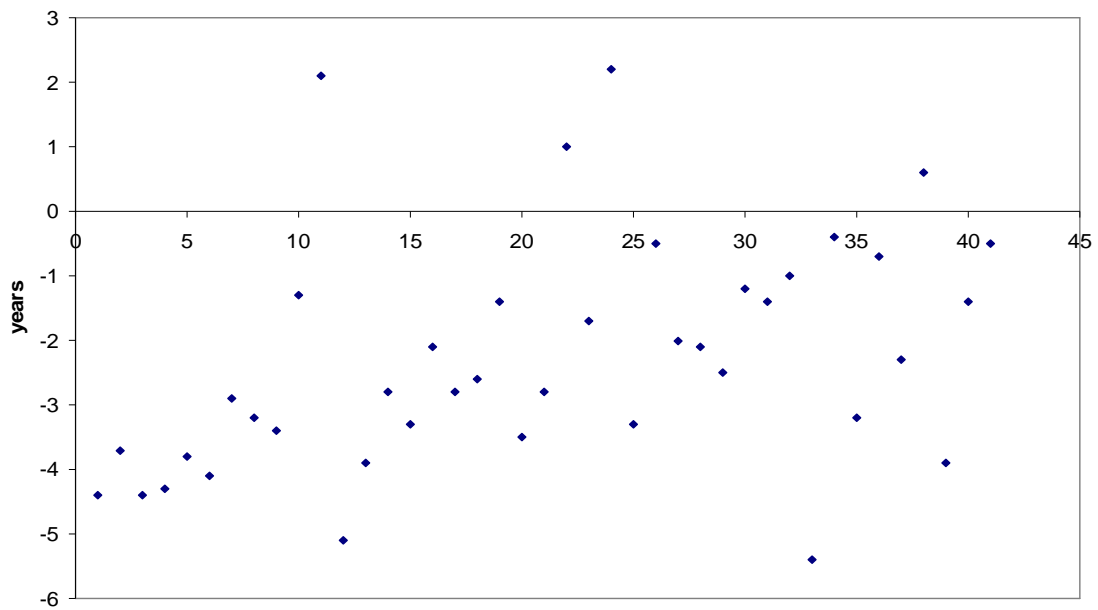
Figure 5.10 shows that the vast majority in secondary school, whose reading age was available, scored below their actual chronological age. Out of 41 young people, 16 had a reading age of below 3 years or more than their actual age (total number of dots below the -3 horizontal line). Further analysis showed that the mean discrepancy for boys was higher than for girls, -2.7 and -1.8 respectively. However, there was little difference in the mean discrepancy scores for those in the study/comparison group, -2.1 and -2.3 respectively.

In order to include the literacy levels of the remaining 15 young people who attended secondary school, a new variable was created which ranked each young person as being 'below average', 'average' or 'above average' based on the their results on standardised tests.[80] Table 5.10 shows these results:

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[80] Where young people had a reading age score (n=41), the discrepancy between the assessed reading age and their chronological age was used to put them into these categories. The limits for the 'average' category were determined by the mean (-2.3) and standard deviation (1.8) – any scores between 0 and -0.5 were deemed as average. For the remaining 15 young people, they were put into categories based on the pre-defined classification of such categories used for the standardised test they had taken.

Table 5.10: Young people's ranking based on scores for reading age and performance in English tests at secondary school

Ranking	%	No.
Above average	7	4
Average	9	5
Below average	84	47
Total	100	56*

*Data for 5 young people were missing

Table 5.10 shows that the majority of young people, 84%, were classified as 'below average' in relation to their English or literacy level when they sat the secondary school entrance exam. Further analysis showed that there was no variation in this result by gender or study/comparison group – that is, boys and girls were equally as likely to be classified in each category as were those in the study/comparison groups. Additional analysis was carried out incorporating some of the data from the student survey, which explored the relationship between literacy levels and participation in homework clubs.

Young people in primary school who had literacy difficulties (i.e. they scored 'below average' on standardised tests), were far more likely to be receiving help with their homework from a homework club (school or local community) compared to those who did not have such difficulties. For those going to primary school with literacy difficulties, 7 out of 10 were getting help with their homework from a homework club. This was statistically significant.[81] In particular, young people in the study group with literacy difficulties attending primary school were more likely to receive help with their homework from a homework club, 78%, than those in the comparison group, 62%, which was statistically significant for the study group findings.[82]

Compared to young people with literacy difficulties in primary school, those attending secondary school were far less likely to be getting help with their homework from a homework club. Just under one quarter of those with literacy difficulties at secondary school were getting such help, 24% (11), compared to 76% (34) of those with literacy difficulties who did not go to a homework club. Despite the large percentage difference in this finding, this result was not statistically significant and therefore could have occurred by chance. However, further analysis found that most of the secondary school students with literacy difficulties who were getting such help (11) were in the study group (9). Therefore, just under half of young people in the study group with literacy difficulties in secondary school (21 in total) were getting help with their homework from a homework club. In addition, young people in the study group with literacy difficulties were twice as likely to be currently attending a youth club or local youth

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[81] The chi-square statistic was X^2=11.771, df=2, p<.005. The correlation co-efficient was .388 (Spearman's rho), which was significant at the 0.01 level.

[82] This was based on the chi-square statistic X^2=6.337, df=2, p<.05

project compared to those in the comparison group. However, this result was not statistically significant. These results show two things:

- young people with literacy difficulties in primary school were far more likely to be attending a homework club in their school or local community compared to those in secondary school, and

- where young people with literacy difficulties in secondary school did go to a homework club, they were more likely to be in the study group rather than the comparison group.

Therefore, young people with literacy difficulties who were attending primary school were more likely to be receiving additional help with their homework through a homework club than those in secondary school, except for a number of young people in the study group.

Educational progress and educational aspirations

There were some interesting results when exploring the data on young people's educational progress (from the information from schools) with students' educational aspirations (from the student survey):

- young people with literacy difficulties in primary school were just as likely to say that they expected to sit the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate exams at school compared to those without such difficulties. With regard to the Leaving Certificate, young people in the study group with literacy difficulties were less likely to expect to sit the exam compared to those in the comparison group, 72% and 93% respectively. However, this result was not statistically significant and could have been due to chance.

- young people with literacy difficulties in secondary school had similar expectations to take the Junior Certificate exam but were less likely to say they would sit the Leaving Certificate exam, compared to those without such difficulties. For example, 83% of young people who were categorised as 'below average' in their reading age expected to do the Leaving Certificate, whereas all of those who were 'average' and 'above average' expected to do so. However, this difference was not large enough to be statistically significant. There was no variation in these results by study group or comparison group.

- with regard to what young people expected to do when they finished school, 6 out of 10 young people with literacy difficulties in primary school said they expected to go on to further education – the same result was 4 out of 10 of those who scored 'average' and almost 9 out of 10 of those who scored 'above average'. This expectation was slightly lower for those in the study group, 56%, compared to those in the comparison group, 69%. However, this result was not statistically significant and the variations could have been due to chance. For young people at secondary school with literacy difficulties, they were equally as

likely to expect to go on to further education or to start a job after finishing school (35%). Young people in the study group were slightly less likely to expect to go onto further education after secondary school than those in the comparison group, 56% and 69% respectively. However, this was not statistically significant.

Educational progress and self-esteem

There was no clear relationship between educational progress and self-esteem. Scores for self-esteem were coded into categories: low (score of 10-14); average (score of 15-21); and high (score of 22 or more). Almost 8 out of 10 young people in primary school with literacy difficulties had an 'average' score for self-esteem, while almost a further 2 out of 10 had a 'high' score. Young people with literacy difficulties in the study group were more likely to have an average score for self-esteem than those in the comparison group. Although neither result was statistically significant.[83]

For young people in secondary school with literacy difficulties, almost 6 out of 10 had an average score for self-esteem. Just over one quarter of young people with literacy difficulties had a low self-esteem score, 27% (9), but a further 15% (5) had a high self-esteem score. These 5 young people were all from the comparison group rather than the study group. However, this result could have been due to chance as it was not statistically significant.

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[83] The correlation co-efficient for young people in primary school overall was -0.279 (based on Micra-T scores and self-esteem scores) (Spearman's rho), which indicates that as one score increased the other decreased. Therefore, as the self-esteem score increased, the Micra T score decreased or vice versa.

Summary

School attendance

The main findings in relation to young people's attendance at primary school during 2007/8 were:

Primary

- the average number of days missed by young people was 17, which represented 9% of all days in the school year. This was higher than the rate of 6% reported for the national population but in accordance with the higher absence rates found in disadvantaged primary schools which had DEIS status.

- young people were found to have a higher rate of serious absence (20 days or more), 29%, compared to 12% for the national population, but again this was in line with higher serious absence in disadvantaged schools

- absence from school was similar for boys and girls, although boys were more likely to miss 20 days or more but this could have been due to chance

- the average number of days missed by young people in the study group was higher than those in the comparison group, but further analysis found that those in the comparison group were more likely to miss between 10-19 days while those in the study group were more likely to miss 20 days or more – this result was not statistically significant.

The main findings in relation to young people's attendance at secondary school during 2008/9 were:

Secondary

- on average, young people missed a higher percentage of school days than the national population, 13% compared to 8% nationally

- young people were more likely to have a higher rate of serious absence (20 days or more), 21% compared to 16% nationally. However, the rate of serious absence was in line with its higher prevalence in disadvantaged secondary schools.

- there was no difference in the percentage of days missed by gender

- there was no difference in the mean percentage of days missed for the study and comparison groups, although the comparison group were more likely to miss 10-19% of days than the study group and the study group were more likely to miss 20% or more secondary school days. However, this result was not statistically significant.

School behaviour

- the total number of young people who had been suspended from school during 2008/9 was 8 out of 122 (7%) – those suspended were most likely to be male (7).

- young people in the study were found to have a higher rate of suspensions than those in the national population

Learning support

- 43% (52) had received some form of learning support during the current school year 2008/9

- boys (53%) were more likely than girls (36%) to receive learning support (borderline statistical significance)

- young people in the study group (48%) were more likely than those in the comparison group (38%) to receive learning support but this was not statistically significant

- almost one third of secondary school pupils, 30% (18), were taking the Junior Certificate Schools Programme.

Educational attainment

The results of *literacy tests* for young people in primary school showed that:

- the proportion of young people who scored 'average' was similar to what would be expected in the national population

- young people in the study were overrepresented in the 'below average' categories and underrepresented in the 'above average' categories than would be expected in the national population

- girls were more likely to score 'below average' than boys but this was not statistically significant

- young people in the study group were more likely to score 'below average' than those in the comparison group but this was not statistically significant

The results of *numeracy tests* for young people in primary school showed that:

- the proportion who scored 'average' is lower than the figure expected nationally

- they were overrepresented in the 'below average' categories and underrepresented in the 'above average' categories, although the proportion who scored 'well above average' was not far below what would be expected in the national population

- there was no relationship by gender

- young people in the study group were significantly more likely to score 'below average' compared to the comparison group – 78% and 41% respectively

The results of standardised tests for young people in *secondary school* showed that:

- the majority had a reading age below their chronological age at the time of sitting the school entrance exam (n = 37). On average, young people's assessed reading age was 2.3 years *below* their actual age

- overall, the majority was deemed to be 'below average' in terms of their literacy/English based on their reading age or scores in standardised tests (n=56)

- there was no difference by gender or study/comparison group

Literacy and participation in homework clubs

- young people with literacy difficulties who were attending primary school were more likely to be receiving additional help with their homework through a homework club than those in secondary school, except for a number of young people in the study group.

Educational progress and educational aspirations

- young people with literacy difficulties in secondary school were less likely to expect to sit the Leaving Certificate exam than those without such difficulties, although this result could be due to chance.

- young people in the study group with literacy difficulties in secondary school were less likely to expect to go onto further education than the comparison group, although this was not statistically significant.

Educational progress and self-esteem

- there was no clear relationship between educational progress and self-esteem.

Chapter 6: Children's perspectives on their homework clubs

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group discussions that were conducted with children who attended the Fatima and Dolphin homework clubs.

Three focus group discussions were carried out with young people who attended the Dolphin and Fatima homework clubs. The aim of the focus group discussions was to gain an insight into young people's views on the OST activities that they participated in, including the reasons why they attended them. Two focus groups took place in one of the homework clubs. The third was conducted in a local primary school which involved participants who attended one of the local homework clubs. In total, 15 young people took part, the majority of whom were still in primary school although some were in first year in secondary school.

The age and gender composition of each focus group was as follows:

Group 1 (n = 7)	• 6 young people aged 11 years • 1 young person aged 12 years	• 6 females • 1 male
Group 2 (n = 3)	• 1 young person aged 8 • 1 young person aged 9 • 1 young person aged 10 years	• 2 females • 1 male
Group 3 (n = 5)	• 1 young person aged 10 • 3 young people aged 11 • 1 young person aged 12 years	• all female (girls' primary school)

The findings are presented below under broad themes that largely reflect the questioning route followed, although some themes emerged separately in the discussions:

- OST activities in which young people participate
- Structure of community homework clubs
- Reasons for attending community homework clubs
- Significance attached to homework
- Location of doing homework
- Comparison of school and community homework clubs
- Relationships with staff in community homework clubs
- Relationships with peers in community homework clubs
- Suggestions for improvement

Types of OST activities in which young people participate

From the discussions in the focus groups, it was clear that most young people took part in many different OST activities, both within their local community and through the schools that they attended. These activities included doing homework, music, art, majorettes, hip hop dancing and sports. Many young people said that they went to a local youth club in the community, e.g. St. Catherine's, St. Andrew's or the Ferrini youth club. In addition, most young people had taken part in once off productions in the local community, e.g. Halloween festival, Hansel and Gretel and Cinderella.

The predominant picture that emerged was that young people were extremely busy taking part in a range of activities after their school day had ended. For example, Karen (12) replied,

> Once a week I go to the homework club in [local community area] and then sometimes on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, I go to the school homework club. On a Tuesday, I go to the [local youth club] as well, and then on a Thursday I have like a variety group, it's like hip hop. On Friday I have my youth club as well. (FG3)

Rebecca (aged 11) commented:

> I'm busier than my ma! (FG1)

Participation in the community homework club

All 15 young people attended a community homework club. When asked how long they had been attending, most answered in terms of years, ranging from one year to nine years. Two young people stated that they had been attending the homework club since they commenced primary school. In general, most had been attending for two to three years. The number of days attended each week varied with some young people reporting four days a week while others reported going once or twice a week.

One young person reported that she stopped attending the homework club for a while after having attended for many years, although she had recently started to go again. When asked why she stopped attending, she said:

> I just felt like it was boring or something. And then I thought that it was good, so I came back to it. (Sarah, aged 9, FG2)

Therefore, there was no particular reason for her non-attendance. It appeared that she just wanted a break from it for a while before starting to attend again.

Structure of homework club

Young people were able to talk about the community homework club that they attended and what it consisted of each day. They spoke about how it was structured and that different age groups attended at different times of the day. Homework was the first activity to be done. This lasted for approximately one hour. After homework and usually when it had been completed, young people said that they could take part in other activities, such as music, games etc. One young person made the point that the first thing she did when she got into the homework club was to say hello ('hey') to the people there.

Young people were asked about what happened during the time they were doing their homework in the club. A leader was assigned to a group of young people and if young people needed help with their homework, they could ask their respective leader. Some examples of this included when they could not work out a maths problem or when they were having difficulty with a spelling. In relation to maths, one young person made a point of saying that she was encouraged to work out a maths problem by herself rather than using a calculator. Another gave an example where she had difficulty with a sum and how the staff member encouraged her to think through the problem and approach it in a different way to come up with the answer, which she eventually did herself. She stated:

> If I'm doing my homework and I have a problem, I just keep thinking about it in my head. I think in my head for about 10/15 minutes and then if I don't get it, then I ask the leader. (Maria, aged 8, FG2)

These findings suggest that there was some evidence of independent thinking amongst young people when doing their homework, which was encouraged by the homework club staff.

Reasons for going to community homework clubs

Young people gave various reasons for attending the homework club. However, the primary reason stated was to do their homework. This emerged as a major benefit of attending the homework club and it helped to ensure that homework was completed, as Michael (aged 11) states below:

> Michael: If I hadn't got homework club, I wouldn't do my homework.
>
> Interviewer: Wouldn't you? Why not?
>
> Michael: 'Cos I wouldn't sit there and do homework. (FG1)

Other reasons for going to the homework club then emerged. These included being able to do art, going away on trips, playing games, taking part in music activities, having fun and spending time with friends. Similar reasons emerged across all three focus groups.

Although getting their homework done was the primary reason for attending the homework club, it was clear that the availability of other activities at the club was very important to them and that they enjoyed them. For example, young people spoke about making Christmas logs and going ice skating, which was organised by the homework club.

These other activities also gave young people a chance to try new things. Two young people spoke about having guitar lessons, one of whom, Shauna (aged 11), talked enthusiastically about being part of the Jammers group in the Rialto Youth Project:

> Shauna: Yeah, the Jammers
>
> Interviewer: And what does that involve?
>
> Shauna: Well, they teach you loads of new songs and all and you just go there to relax and all. Like you can take turns in singing and all with a guitar or else someone else can play the guitar to you. (FG3)

The young people gave a positive picture of the homework club and their reasons for attending. It was a place where they could get their homework completed, enjoy doing other activities and spend time with some of their friends.

Significance attached to homework

Young people were in agreement over the importance of doing their homework and having it completed for the next school day. One young person said that if she did not do her homework, her mother would give out to her and she would end up having to do more homework the following night to make up for it. However, the majority said that they did their homework to ensure that they did not get into trouble at school the next day, as Christine (aged 11) states below:

> Interviewer: So, you come in and do your homework. Why is that important to you?
>
> Christine: 'Cos you need to do it for school 'cos if you don't have it for school you get a note. (FG1)

The young people gave other examples of disciplinary action by the school for non-completion of homework. These included 'writing your name in a book' and some reported that when this happened three times, a note was sent home. More serious disciplinary action could be taken by the school, with two young people reporting that it could lead to suspension and another saying that a note could go into a young person's secondary year book (even if they were still at primary school). From the language used by some of the young people, there seemed to be a real sense of fear around some of the consequences of not doing homework. For example:

> Sarah: Yeah, if you get three dockets……
>
> Maria: Something happens…….

Sarah: Yeah, something really bad happens… Some people end up going home crying. (FG1)

Some young people also spoke about the benefits of doing homework and how it could contribute to positive outcomes in the future. A few linked doing homework with helping to get a good education and also a good job. Doing homework in the homework club was seen as beneficial in terms of learning new things, as Maria (aged 8) states below:

I love doing it [homework] here. It helps me in school because they [homework club staff] teach you stuff here as well that you might not learn at school. I learned lots of sums that I didn't know. (FG2)

Where do young people do their homework?

Most young people said that they did their homework at the homework club, although a few stated that they also did some of it at home. Where they did their homework depended on how much they received. One young person said that if she received a lot of homework, she would start it at home before going to the homework club, but if she only received a little, then she would wait until going to the homework club to complete it. However, some young people were clear that they could not do their homework at home because there were too many distractions, usually from siblings. For example, Sarah (aged 9), says:

I hate it when you're at home and my sister wrecks my head, and I can't concentrate on my homework. 'Cos I can't concentrate with her in there, like in my bedroom or anything, 'cos she does be messing and all. The homework clubs really helps me here. (FG2)

These findings suggest that attending the homework club in the community gives many young people the chance to complete their homework, particularly where they may have difficulty in doing so at home.

Young people's perspectives on school and community homework clubs

Most of the young people in the focus groups reported that their school had a homework club. Only two said they were currently attending the school homework club, while a few more said they had gone at some stage in the past. When asked why young people seemed to prefer going to the homework club in the community rather than the one in the school the location was an issue. For example Joanne (aged 11) answered:

Because it's after school and you don't want to spend your time in school all day (FG1).

Where young people had some experience of attending a school homework club, there was a general consensus that they felt they received less help with their homework in the school homework club compared to the one in their local community. For this reason, Sarah (aged 9), no longer attended the school homework club:

> I don't go because like the teachers, they don't help you, you have to be sure that you know the answer. (FG2)

Some young people stated that the degree of help they received often depended on the teacher and how they were getting on with other work. One young person expressed the view that even when approached to help with a particular question, a teacher at school would tell her to 'try and do it yourself'. Furthermore, Karen (aged 12) reported that she was accused of not concentrating in class when asking a question about her homework:

> Like some teachers, they always say, 'did you's not go through that in class?' Like they make a big thing over it. 'You mustn't have been paying attention or anything', they do be saying. One day, I told my ma and my ma came in and gave out because they're meant to be helping us. (FG3)

This does not mean that school homework clubs did not assist young people with their homework, rather the nature of support tended to differ between the school and community homework clubs. The accounts of the young people clearly show that they tended to receive more one–to-one help with their homework in the community homework club. Another stated that he was unable to attend the school homework club because he was not in the teacher's class who ran the club. When his mother asked the school if he could attend, she was told that he would have to wait until a place became available. So, access to a school homework club was an issue for this young person.

A difference of opinion emerged over who was deemed most suitable to help young people with their homework. One young person argued that the school homework club was better because teachers were in a better position to help with homework given their qualifications. However, another responded that many of the staff in the homework club also went to college. This difference of opinion reflects the typically more formal structure of school homework clubs compared to those in the local community. For one young person (aged 11), the school homework club provided an environment that was more conducive to getting her homework done because it was 'peaceful' and was 'more organised'.

The young people perceived the environment of the school and community homework as very different to each other. Attending the school homework club involved having a longer school day but it could be a good place to get homework done for those who preferred to have a quieter and more disciplined place to do their homework. Yet, the majority view was that young people preferred the community homework club which was less formalised, where there were rules but these were not as strict as at school. There was a greater sense of freedom attached to going to the community homework club where young people spoke about being able to wear their own clothes, where they could walk around the room (within reason) and also link up with their friends. Compared to the school homework club, the location of the community homework club

was deemed to be more convenient for going home afterwards which helped to contribute to a feeling of safety amongst some young people, including Rebecca (aged 11).

> You're more safe here, you feel safe, because you're near where you live and in school you have to walk all the way home. (FG1)

Young people's perspectives on relationships with homework club staff

It was clear that most young people got on very well with staff in the community homework club. Descriptions of staff included 'nice' and 'friendly'. One young person reported that she was 'best mates' with one of the staff. Most young people felt they could have fun with the staff and enjoyed their company. For example, Shauna (aged 11) said:

> I love [name of leader]….. She lives near me. We're always messing together and all. Like she's real nice and all. (Shauna, 11, FG3)

Many young people reported that they would confide in a homework club staff member if something was bothering them apart from their homework. Therefore, it appeared that young people could relax with the staff and found them very easy to get on with, which helped them to build trusting relationships.

Rebecca (aged 11) said the following about her relationship with staff in the homework club that she attended:

> Like you can talk to them. You feel more comfortable talking to the leaders here. (FG1)

Rebecca went on to say that she felt more comfortable talking to the staff in the homework club than her school teachers, something which some other young people agreed with. Although a few did say that they could talk just as easily to a teacher at school. Some young people said that there was a 'trust box' at school where if something was bothering them, they could write it down and put it in the box, which was only accessed by the teacher. The teacher would then write a note to a child's parents to let them know.

It was common for young people to know some of the homework club staff outside of the club environment. For example, one young person had an aunt working there while another young person's mother was amongst the staff members. This familiarity seemed to contribute to young people's sense of ease when talking to homework club staff, as well as a feeling of being welcome in the homework club.

There was one exception to the above where a young person reported that she had a poor relationship with one staff member in the homework club. This situation appeared to have been resolved by the leader in the homework club and the young person continued to attend. However, this was very much an exception to the largely positive comments that young people made about the staff in the homework clubs.

Relationships with peers in the homework club

In general, young people reported that they got on well with their peers in the homework club. Most reported that they had friends who also attended the club. Whether or not they attended the same school did not seem to be an issue as a few young people who were in primary school pointed out that 'they hung around' with friends who were attending secondary school. The common factor was that they all attended the homework club as well as living in the same area. One young person said that quite a bit of 'slagging' went on between young people in the local area but this changed when they were in the homework club together. Rebecca (aged 11) says:

> When you come here, you're best friends. You get to know each other. Say me and [young person's name] are slagging each other and then we come here and we talk….. and then we're friends. (FG1)

Therefore, attending the homework club could be seen as giving young people the opportunity not only to meet up with friends but also to make friends with other young people living in the neighbourhood, across age groups and with those who attended other schools.

There was a difference of opinion to the overall positive comments in one of the focus groups, where one young person said that other young people disrupted the homework club by 'messing' and this was something that had negative consequences.

> Shauna: There's a lot of messers there and they're way too noisy and all.
>
> Interviewer: So, what would happen if people are messing around?
>
> Shauna: Well, we're in a quiet room and all, sometimes people open doors and just start like roaring, like all the boys and all. And they have to throw them out of the homework club because they're bold and that.
>
> Interviewer: How does that affect you when you're trying to do your homework?
>
> Shauna: It just takes a bit longer because the leaders have to stop teaching us for a minute because they have to throw them out and all, so it takes a bit longer. But like sometimes I was doing something really important like maths, I'm getting ready for a maths test and all, I sometimes forget where I was at and it takes me a while to get back to the sum. (FG3)

The other young people in this particular focus group attended a different homework club to Shauna and her comments were not corroborated. However, it is clear that poor behaviour by other young people who attended the club had a serious impact on this young person's ability to complete her homework and was a concern for her.

Young people's suggestions for the homework clubs

Young people were asked if they would like to see any changes made to the homework clubs. A few suggestions were made in relation to how the clubs are organised and structured. One young person (aged 12) felt that she was unable to finish her homework sometimes because she had to wait to get help from a staff member as they were helping other young people:

> Karen: There's not enough leaders that work there. There's only 2 or 3 a day…… Well, I don't really get it [homework] all done. I go past time and then I do be still struggling and trying to do it.
>
> Interviewer: So, when do you do the rest of it?
>
> Karen: I have to do it at home then. I start it before I go 'cos I know I won't get it all done. Say if I had Maths, Irish and English, I'd do my Maths first and then when I go to the homework club, I'll do my English and Irish. Then if I didn't do it all I'd just go home and do it."
>
> Interviewer: So, the time that you're in the homework club is not enough to get your homework done?
>
> Karen: No [in agreement] (FG3)

Some young people made comments about the physical environment of one of the homework clubs. One said that there had been mice found in the homework club. Space also arose as an issue. For example, one young person said that young people played games in the same room as she was trying to finish her homework in, which she found distracting. Lack of space also had an impact on the nature of activities that could take place. As Katie (aged 11) pointed out:

> Like, there's not enough room in there [homework club] to skip and all that, to run around and play games. (FG1)

When asked to compare the homework club with other clubs that young people were attending, some said that the facilities in other clubs were better. For example, one young person mentioned that there was both a girls' and boys' toilet in another club that she went to, rather than one shared toilet. In addition, there were activities mentioned that were available in other clubs but not at the homework clubs, including pool and table tennis. It should be acknowledged here that one of the homework clubs moved into new premises just after the focus group discussions were carried out. This information is included here as it shows that the quality of the physical environment is important to young people.

A variety of activities were on offer in community homework clubs. Based on the activities that young people said they got involved in, it appeared that the homework club gave them more of an opportunity to take part in arts and creative activities, e.g. the Halloween event, Hansel and Gretel and making Christmas logs. These activities

involved young people in making masks, costumes and in dance, amongst other things. This was something that they all talked about enthusiastically and seemed to enjoy. Going on trips was also something that young people were keen to talk about, e.g. ice skating.

Young people were asked if there were any activities that they would like to be able to do that were not available to them at the present time – both in homework clubs and the wider community. Swimming was the most popular activity that emerged, as one of the local pools had just closed a few months previously. For example, Lisa (aged 11) said:

> We used to go swimming in the homework club every Monday and I want to do that again. (Lisa, 11, FG3)

Other activities mentioned included art, cookery and football (for girls). One young person said that Sunday was the most boring day of the week as she felt there was nothing to do in the area.

Summary

All of the young people in the focus groups took part in local OST activities. The main feature of their participation was its extensive nature, with many attending a variety of OST activities over a fairly long period of time. In the case of the homework clubs they attended, most young people had been attending for the last two or three years. The main reason cited for attending a homework club was to get their homework completed. Some said they could not do their homework at home because of distractions, e.g. interruptions from siblings. The main aim of homework completion was to avoid getting into trouble at school the next day. This was the overriding concern for most young people, although a small number recognised the potential longer term benefits of doing homework for their educational progress and attainment.

The young people indicated a clear preference to attend a homework club in their local community rather than in their school. Community homework clubs were seen by them as less strict than school homework clubs and provided greater freedom for them to mix with their friends. Furthermore, the homework club gave them an opportunity to take part in other activities after homework had been completed, e.g. art, music. The nature of homework support was also an issue with the majority of young people saying that they received more one-to-one help in the community homework club compared to the homework club at school.

The focus group discussions revealed very positive relationships between the OST staff and young people. Young people tended to talk affectionately about the staff and said that they got on well with them, with just one exception. Many felt that they could confide in a staff member if they needed to. Relationships with peers were also generally positive. The homework clubs gave them an opportunity to spend time with their friends and gave them a chance to make new friends with young people who lived in their area but who were attending different schools. However, some complained that others could be disruptive in the homework club and this could make it difficult for them to do their homework.

Finally, some ideas were given for changes in the homework clubs. More staff would help to ensure that adequate support was provided to achieve homework completion. It was also clear how important the physical environment was to young people. Having a clean, safe place with enough space and proper facilities were given a high priority. The opportunity to take part in other activities, especially the creative arts, was welcomed by them and many considered that they would like more opportunities for swimming.

Chapter 7: Parents' perspectives on the Fatima and Dolphin Homework clubs

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the parent survey and one focus group held with parents of children who attended one of the homework clubs.

A random survey of 40 parents whose children were reported to attend two homework clubs in the Rialto area, Fatima and Dolphin House, was carried out to examine their attitudes to and satisfaction with various aspects of their child's homework club. The survey asked parents about the reasons why their child attends; their views about their child's experiences of the OST activities; what they liked about the homework clubs and what they would like changed. Parents' relationship with the OST staff and their level of involvement in the OST services were also examined. In addition, the survey attempted to find out about parents' relationship with their child's school.

The aim was to survey an equal number of parents in both the Fatima and Dolphin communities. Parents were selected at random and a local community worker administered the survey. Forty parents participated with equal numbers from the Dolphin and Fatima communities.

One focus group discussion was held with parents whose children attended one of the homework clubs. The group comprised six parents (all female) and was facilitated by two members of the research team. The focus group discussion lasted for approximately one hour and was carried out in the homework club after activities had finished for the day. Results from the survey and focus group are presented below under the following headings:

- Demographic characteristics of survey participants
- Parents' views on OST activities
- Parents' contact with and attitudes to child's school

Demographic profile of survey respondents

Gender and relationship to child

Table 7.1 shows that survey respondents were all female and almost all were mothers of the children registered with the homework club. Just one respondent declined to respond to this question, and one respondent was a child's guardian. Almost two thirds reported that they did not have a spouse or partner living in the home (62%).

Table 7.1: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender	%
Female	98
Male	0
Missing	2
Total	100
Relationship to child	
Mother	96
Guardian	2
Missing	2
Total	100
Spouse/partner living in the home	
No	62
Yes	33
Missing	5
Total	100

Employment

Table 7.2 shows that almost equal proportions of parents reported that they were employed (48%) or unemployed (50%). Of those who were employed most were in full-time employment (40%).

Table 7.2: percentage of parents and spouse/partner in employment

	Participant (n = 40)	Spouse/Partner (n = 13)
Full-time	40	69
Part-time	8	8
No employment	50	23
Missing	2	-
Totals	100	100

Level of education

Many of the respondents gave more than one answer to the question about their highest level of education. This may suggest that their education took part in two stages. Three respondents indicated that they did not finish primary school but have subsequently gained a FETAC qualification (2) or a third level certificate or diploma (1). Almost a third of respondents finished primary level education but did not complete either the Junior or Leaving Certificate and have subsequently gained a technical or vocational qualification (12) (Table 7.3)

Table 7.3: Parents' highest level of education (%)	Participant	Spouse/Partner
Not finished primary	5	0
Primary	15	13
Junior Certificate	18	8
Leaving Certificate	5	0
Technical or FETAC	48	8
Third level Diploma or Certificate	8	2
Third level degree	2	2

Views on after school activities

The majority of the parents reported that their child attended one of the two homework clubs in the area. Of those who reported that their child attended the Fatima homework club, the majority said that they attended often (33%) and an additional 7% attend sometimes, but 10% of parents with children registered with the Fatima club reported that they did not attend ever.

Parents of children who attended the Dolphin homework club reported that (23%) of children attend 'often' and a further 20% attended 'sometimes'. Just under one tenth (8%) of the children registered with the Dolphin homework club are reported by their parents as not attending ever.

When asked about their children's leisure time activities the most popular activity according to parents, is to 'hang out with friends' and large proportions do so either often or sometimes (80%). Almost two thirds of the parents reported that their child attended another youth club either often or sometimes (63%), and almost half reported that their child attended the Rialto Youth Project either often or sometimes (45%). A similar proportion of parents reported that their child participated in a school sports team either often or sometimes (45%). Just one fifth of parents reported that their child attended the school homework club either often or sometimes (20%) (Table 7.4)

Table 7.4: Frequency of participation in after school activities (%)

	Often	Sometimes	Never	Missing/not applicable	Total*
Fatima homework club	33	8	10	50	101
Dolphin homework club	23	20	8	50	101
School Homework club	10	10	78	2	100
Rialto Youth Project	10	35	40	15	100
Played on school sports team	25	20	53	2	100
Hung out with friends	75	5	15	5	100
Another youth club	10	53	33	5	101

*Some total %s add up to more than 100% due to rounding up of figures

Parents who reported that their child did not attend the Dolphin or Fatima Homework clubs were asked to indicate reasons for non-attendance. Nine parents responded to this question. Four parents reported that their child did their homework at home by preference; three reported that their child was too young or old for the homework club, and two others stated that their child preferred to go to the school homework club. Two parents gave a number of reasons for non-attendance.

Parents' satisfaction with the homework clubs

Parents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the homework club in terms of its facilities, level of comfort, opening hours, safety, equipment and materials.

While only small proportions of parents were dissatisfied with the facilities in the homework clubs, the majority felt that the comfort and opening hours were good. Parents reported that they were very satisfied with their children's safety in the homework clubs with 88% stating that it was either good or excellent. The majority of parents reported that the opening hours were good or excellent (87%). The majority (73%) felt similarly about the comfort of the rooms, while almost two thirds (63%) felt that the equipment and materials were good or excellent.

Parents' views on homework clubs

A main objective of the homework clubs is to support children with their homework. The majority of parents agreed that the clubs were achieving this objective (88%). Most parents also agreed that the homework clubs helped the children get on in school (85%). Most parents were satisfied with the types of activities offered (85%). Although 59% agreed that the homework clubs helps them connect with their child's school, more than one third (36%) disagreed with this proposition (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Parents' attitudes to homework clubs

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
I am satisfied with the kind of activities offered at the homework club	85	12	3	100
Club helped my child get on in school	85	15	0	100
Club helped get homework done on time	88	9	3	100
Club helps me connect with child's school	59	36	6	101

Two open-ended questions asked parents to identify what they liked best about the homework club, and what should change. The responses tended to mirror the earlier questions that asked about satisfaction with the homework club, with 18 parents indicating benefits related to children's completion of homework. Parents also identified the time-saving and stress-relieving benefits of having their child complete homework in the homework club, and in a few cases parents indicated that they were not in a position to help with homework. An additional two parents highlighted the fact that their children received help with a specific educational problem. Four parents identified the staff as the best thing about the homework clubs, in particular that they are friendly, supportive and helpful.

A clear pattern also emerged in parents' responses to the changes that they would like to see in the homework clubs. The main changes identified by parents were in terms of increased space (7), increased hours of operation (5) and the appointment of more staff (5). Two parents said that staff should have a higher level of education in order to be able to provide quality help with homework.

What parents would like to see more of in the homework clubs

Just six parents responded to the question about *additional activities* in their children's homework club. Many used the space to confirm that the homework clubs seemed to them to offer enough activities. Suggestions included: additional drama and art, somewhere for the children to play after homework to keep the children off the streets; keyboard lessons, table-tennis, football and other sports.

Eighteen parents responded to a question about *additional facilities* that they might like to see in their area and of those who did, five parents highlighted the need for activities for the children during the weekends and evenings. The suggestion made by most parents was for additional sports facilities: some specified swimming, soccer, football and hurling while others simply called for general sporting facilities. The need for safe, clean, properly maintained playgrounds and play areas was identified by ten parents. The remaining parents suggested music, drama and dancing, computers, foreign language support, trips to get them out of the environment and a hygiene programme.

Parents views on children's attitudes to homework clubs

Parents reported that their children were positive about the homework clubs. Almost all parents indicated that their child gets on well with other children in the homework club and gets on well with staff (97%). This finding is supported by results from the focus group with parents. One parent spoke of her child confiding in a staff member about an issue that was worrying him at school, which she was unaware of:

> There was an incident with my young fella just before Christmas that was happening in school and I didn't know. My young fella actually opened up to a member of staff here. That was very good I thought….. Like you can trust them and all. He couldn't tell me yet he was able to tell a member of staff here and I would never have known only for that. (Parent 4)

The vast majority reported that their child is happy to attend the homework club (93%). This was also echoed in the parent focus group:

> He loves it…. and they have the patience and the time and all, well that's what I think, and they put it into the kids. (Parent 2)

> I think that they feel at home. They've always felt at home in the homework club. (Parent 1)

Almost three-quarters reported that the child got a chance to learn new skills (72%). Perhaps because of their limited involvement with the club, some parents said that they did not know if the child learned new skills (16%) (Table 7.6

Table 7.6: Parents' reports on child's attitude to homework club (%)

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
My child likes going to the homework club	93	7	0	100
Child gets on well with staff	97	3	0	100
Child gets a chance to learn new skills	72	12	16	100
My child gets along well with other children at homework club	97	3	0	100

Reasons for child's attendance at the homework club

The majority of parents reported that the reason their child attended the homework club was because their child liked the activities offered (75%). Having the opportunity to take part in other activities, in addition to getting homework completed, was something that some parents in the focus also group felt was an important for their child's attendance:

> There's other things going on, it's not just coming over to a homework club. My young one is 14 and she'll be doing cooking. Just before Christmas they made jam to raise money for Our Lady's Hospital. It's all different things. I know with [child's name] that computers is also a big interest. (Parent 3)

Other reasons that parents gave for their child attending the homework club were that they needed help with homework (55%) or to be with friends (50%). Just under one tenth (8%) reported that it was somewhere for them to be minded after school (8%).

As well as having benefits for their education, parents were keen to stress the positive impact on their children's self-esteem and confidence:

> Well for my daughter, it's her self-esteem I think. It's not just her homework 'cos I'd be very pro-active with her homework. I like to check her homework with her but that's because I can and I have that luxury. But the other part of it is that you

can see her confidence coming on, you know from just linking in with other kids her age, mixing with different people and stuff. (Parent 6)

There's no point in a child having everything, like Honours in their Leaving, and not having the confidence to go out and do anything with it. (Parent 4)

Parents in the focus group spoke about the educational benefits for their children from participation in the homework clubs, but acknowledged that educational improvements had occurred over time amongst young people in the local community, and were at least partly attributable to attendance at the homework club. For example, one parent who was also involved in helping out at the homework club stated:

Going back, say we'd had a group of young fellas that we barely got them to their Junior Certificate, 'cos we work with them and encourage to go on. Over the last three years, I'd say the amount of kids that's staying on to do their Junior, and not forcing them to stay on, they're doing it out of choice…….. Years ago, you got them to their Junior then. You were lucky to get them to their Junior and it was a big thing. But now they're staying of their own choice, and they're all going on to do their Leaving now. Some of them are actually talking about staying on to go to college. (Parent 3)

Similarly, another parent noted that educational standards had been raised overall, and felt that the homework clubs had contributed to raising standards and expectations amongst the children who attended.

One parent felt that going to the homework club helped to get her children into the routine of doing their homework, even when they had stopped attending the club. Therefore, some of the benefits from attending the homework club set them up for developing good habits that would benefit their education in the future:

It sort of sets them up. It got them into the habit of coming home from school, up the stairs and get the homework done. It set them up with that habit. They wouldn't be hanging around watching the telly or whatever, just get in, get up to the homework club and it's like it comes naturally to them now. (Parent 1)

Some parents commented that young people's school work deteriorated when the homework club had been closed a few years previously, before being reopened by the Fatima Regeneration Board. One parent perceived that there had been a general drop in marks for school work amongst some of the children who would have attended the homework club in the area.

Parents in the focus group also gave a clear indication that their child's attendance at the homework club not only helped the child but also themselves. In particular, there was widespread agreement amongst parents that sometimes they were unable to help their child with their homework themselves. Some parents said that they were early school leavers, while others said that they had difficulty trying to help their children with particular subjects, such as Maths, Irish, and French:

With my young fella, I don't know how to do Irish or anything, and that's why he comes here [homework club], because I wouldn't have a clue what to do. He's into Science and all of that and I wouldn't have a clue. (Parent 2)

Another parent summed their situation up by saying:

We can't help our children at home doing homework that we don't understand ourselves. (Parent 4)

Furthermore, some parents spoke of how they were able to access the homework club and its resources in order to help them with continuing their own education. For example, one parent said that she was able to get some help with learning how to use a computer, another said a staff member proof read an assignment for her and one parent said she was able to use the printer in the homework club as she did not have access to one at home. These were all ways in which the homework club was able to reach out beyond children to provide help and support to parents. These positive experiences built parents' trust with homework club staff when it came to working with their own children:

If you can approach them [homework club staff] like that, you know then your kids can as well. (Parent 5)

Parents' attitudes to homework club staff

In general, the results of the parent survey showed that parents considered that they have good relationships with the homework club staff. Almost all parents reported that they were comfortable talking with the homework club staff (97%); none of the parents reported that they were not comfortable with the staff. A large majority reported that staff members welcome suggestions from parents (88%). Many reported that they were comfortable with the way that staff members dealt with behaviour problems (78%) and staff communication regarding their child's progress (75%). Almost one fifth reported that they didn't know if they were comfortable with the way staff handled behaviour problems, which may be because they have limited or no experience of the club. Almost two thirds reported that they were satisfied with the child-staff ratio (63%) and almost a fifth reported that they didn't know if they were satisfied with the staff ratio. Just over half reported that they were able to get involved in the homework club activities (56%). (Table 7.7)

Table 7.7: Parent attitudes to homework club staff

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
I am comfortable talking with the staff	97	0	3	100
Staff welcome suggestions from parents	88	3	9	100
Parent able to get involved	56	28	16	100
Staff tell how child gets on	75	19	6	100
Parent comfortable with staff handling of behaviour	78	3	19	100
Parent satisfied with staff ratio	63	19	19	101

Parents' contact with and attitudes to child's school

The parent survey examined the level of contact that parents had with their child's school and their attitudes to the school. All of the parents reported that they had visited their child's school at some stage in the past year. The majority attended the parent-teacher meeting (85%) and a large proportion also attended the start of school year meeting (75%). Many of the parents reported that they attended a social event involving their children (70%). Some had also attended another meeting with their child's teacher (40%) with smaller proportions helping out at school events (23%) or attending educational activities provided by the school for parents (13%) (Table 7.8).

Table 7.8 Parents' contact with child's school	%	n
Parent teacher meeting	85	34
Start of school year meeting for parents	75	30
Other meeting with child's teacher	40	16
Social event involving my child	70	28
Helped out at school event	23	9
Classes or talks for parents	5	2
Educational activities involving parents	13	5
Parent has not been to child's school	0	0

Parents reported highly positive attitudes towards their child's teachers and school. All parents reported that they felt comfortable talking to their child's teacher (100%) and almost all felt that they could go up to the school if they needed to (98%). A large majority also considered that the school offers a good learning environment (95%) and were comfortable with the way teachers handled behavioural problems (80%). A large proportion also considered that the school welcomed suggestions from parents (78%) and that the school provided opportunities to get involved (73%). Just over half (59%) were either not satisfied or did not know about the kind of after school activities offered by their child's school (Table 7.9).

Table 7.9: Parents' attitudes to child's school (%)

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
I am satisfied with the kind of after school activities offered at my child's school	40	41	18	98
I know I can go up to the school if I need to	98	3	0	101
Parent comfortable talking to teacher	100	0	0	100
School offers good learning environment	95	3	3	101
School welcomes suggestions from parents	78	8	15	101
School provides opportunities to get involved	73	23	5	101
Parent comfortable with teachers handling of difficult behaviour	80	15	5	100

Parents in the focus group compared their child's experiences in the homework club and at school. Some parents reported that the homework club took a holistic view of the child and took the time to treat the child as an individual in their own right. For example:

> I think the homework club looks after the child as the whole child rather than just the academic child, like the school does. (Parent 6)

Another parent noted:

> I think the homework club is just more real. It meets the child where the child's at I think. Whereas school, like, they don't have the time to do that, even if they'd like to do it, whereas here the time is prioritised. As everyone is saying [other parents in the focus group], it's not just looking at doing their homework, it's all the other bits that fits in a child's life, do you know that way? So, it's built around that. (Parent 6)

Even where schools also ran a homework club, the majority of parents in the focus group considered that children preferred to go to the homework club in their local community. One parent stated that her child had attended the school homework club for a time, but he had refused to continue because he disliked being with the same teachers all day and it prolonged the school day.

Nevertheless, there were some examples from parents of how homework club staff liaised with teachers in their child's school. This was deemed to be a fairly recent and positive development which had taken a lot of time and effort on the part of staff in the homework clubs. Parents provided examples of how both the homework club and the school worked together to meet the child's educational needs:

> People from the homework club come over to the school, so they do link in. Like that, if you need help on a certain subject, they go up to the school and link in with the school and say, 'well, how can we help?'(Parent 5)

Similarly, another parent commented:

> A member of staff here came up to a meeting with me and the school. Now, they're linking in with each other. So, the teacher writes in [child's] journal exactly what help she needs and the staff here would look at the journal. (Parent 3)

Some parents gave examples of how in the past teachers had appeared to have negative views of the children living in the two communities. Although parents agreed that this attitude had changed in recent times, some gave recent examples of instances where they felt teachers had lower expectations of their children. One parent felt that the school attended by her daughter did not 'push' her hard enough to ensure that her school work was done. Another parent felt that a teacher was dismissive of her hopes for her child to go to college when he left school, largely because he was doing the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. Despite these examples, it was clear that such attitudes were attributed to an individual teacher or a particular school, as another parent whose child was also doing the Junior Certificate Schools Programme felt that her child's school was extremely helpful and supportive in meeting the child's educational needs. The survey provided the opportunity for parents to offer additional comments on the homework clubs and almost all parents did so. The majority of parents used the opportunity to express their satisfaction with the work being done by the homework club:

Great place for the kids to go after school, good environment. Gets them out of the house, especially for big families they have all different hours to go into the homework, not only homework but drama music and swimming.

Very happy with help in maths I can't do, staff knock in to us if they see difficulties and check, I feel free to ask them. It will be better when they go into the centre.

I find it brilliant for the kids and my child – they have different education from us – it really helps. I would be lost and he would be lost without the homework club.

Guitar has been amazing – it's been great to get her into, I wouldn't be able to afford it

Some parents highlighted issues that they felt needed changing or raised an issue that they had had in the past. The most frequently occurring issue related to the opening and duration of the homework clubs:

> Set times for children yet staff bringing in their children all the time
>
> Longer hours for 5th and 6th classes
>
> Left standing outside waiting after school, should be open all the time for all kids, shouldn't be restricting times.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the results from a survey of 40 parents of children registered with the Dolphin and Fatima homework clubs. It also draws on key findings from a focus group of parents of children who attended one of the homework clubs. The survey and focus group attempted to gain an understanding of parents' perspectives on the homework clubs attended by their child and an understanding of parents' relationships with the staff in school and in the homework clubs.

Parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the homework clubs across a range of domains. A high proportion of parents reported satisfaction with the activities offered, the club facilities, hours of operation, safety, comfort, equipment and materials, and staff relations. The vast majority felt that the clubs helped their children get their homework done on time and helped them in their school life. However, just over half of parents reported that the clubs helped them connect with their child's school.

Parents reported a similarly positive picture of their child's attitude to the clubs. They agreed that their children were happy to attend and got on well with staff and other children.

Parents considered that the main reason their child attended the homework clubs was to avail of the activities offered. Parents reported that children's involvement in the homework club activities boosted their self-esteem and confidence. In addition, children's attendance at the homework clubs brought benefits to parents particularly those who were not able to support their children in subjects such as Mathematics and Irish. Parents in the focus group acknowledged that some parents had a poor second-level educational experience. To some extent these findings are supported by the survey findings that showed a considerable proportion of the parents surveyed had not completed second-level education but had later pursued courses in further education colleges.

While parents indicated that they hold very positive attitudes to the homework club staff, almost one third felt that they were unable to get involved in the club.

A positive picture was found of parents' attitudes to the school environment and of their reported level of contact with the school. In particular all parents indicated that they were comfortable talking to their child's teachers and almost all felt that they could go to their child's school if they needed to do so. In contrast just 40% of parents reported that they were satisfied with the kinds of after school activities offered at the school.

While the survey findings have revealed that parents were comfortable and connected with their child's school, parents in the focus group spoke of a history of poor relationships between the schools and the local community. While the focus group parents felt that there had been positive changes in recent years between school and community they had a preference for the holistic approach taken by the homework clubs.

While parents have shown that they are positive about the homework clubs the main suggestions for change were for increases of space, hours of operation and staff.

Chapter 8: Staff perspectives on OST provision

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted with leaders and staff of the Fatima and Dolphin homework clubs and the leader and staff of the Rialto Youth Project. The interviews aimed to explore staff perspectives on their roles, the activities provided by the clubs, and on the benefits of children's participation in the clubs. The interviews also examined the relationship between young people and staff and that of the parents and staff. The findings are presented below under broad themes that largely reflect the questioning route followed.

- Organisation of homework clubs
- Benefits of participation
  - homework support
  - other non-homework activities
  - social skills and confidence
- Barriers and facilitators to service delivery
- Barriers and facilitators to educational attainment
- Relationships
  - schools
  - young people
  - parents

Organisation of homework clubs

OST staff members were asked about the organisation of the homework clubs, in terms of the numbers of young people registered and the structure of the day. While the number of children attending varies from day to day, at the time of this study there were approximately 100 children registered in the Dolphin homework club and an average of 60 to 70 attending most days. In Fatima the number 'on the books' was slightly larger at 120 but again the regular attendance is lower.

> I suppose on a day to day basis it depends on the programme, some days you could have 60, other days you could have 90 or 100, some days…Fridays could be a little bit quieter… (OST leader 3)

At both clubs groups are structured by age with approximately an hour allocated per age group. Older children may sometimes need additional time and support and provision is made for this.

So secondary then from four o clock until seven every day and that would be they can come in and if they need any one to one so we would have maths grinds, [name of OST staff] and [name of OST staff] are our Irish speakers, we would have Irish one to ones with them but within the programme there is one to one as well. So some of the kids that are identified as maybe educationally needing and there would be more support so every worker would do one to one work. (OST leader 3)

Although both clubs commence at 2pm, Dolphin house operates until 6.15pm and the Fatima club finishes at 7pm. In addition, at Dolphin homework club older girls in fifth and sixth class and secondary school girls attend between 5pm and 5.50, although this session is not exclusively for girls.

Groups are also organised in terms of support needs as well as age so that the staff members are able to give attention to those who need most support:

So, we would devise…. one child that needs a lot of support and two kids that work well on their own, you just need to check it. There is those kids….. they don't all need an hour one to one. So, that's how it's divided and that trickles on grand. (OST leader 1)

Benefits of participation in homework club activities

The homework club staff were asked what they considered to be the main benefits for children and young people who attended the club. Staff spoke about benefits in terms of the completion of homework itself, benefits to future educational outcomes as a result of the routine of doing homework and extra educational supports that were made available for young people, particularly second-level students at exam times.

Homework support

Staff considered that the main function of the homework clubs is to help and support children and young people with their homework. Staff perceived that children's attendance at the homework club reduced the children's anxieties about homework completion:

Well, the day to day aim is that you want every child leaving here with their homework completed, everything in their bags… That's immediate, removing the anxiety that actually all children, regardless of where they're from, you never want to be called up that morning in class by the teacher. (OST leader 1)

I would say though the majority are pleased to get their homework done, they go home with a sense of relief. (OST leader 3)

The establishment of a homework routine was recognised by staff as part of the role of the homework clubs and one which contributes to future educational progress. However, for some children attendance at the clubs can be sporadic and determined by their academic needs:

…there's no point when a kid goes into 4th class and 5th class suddenly having to sit down an hour every day to do homework, if they've never ever done it before in their lives. So, what you're doing there is that it's part of the structure of your day when you go to school. (OST leader 1)

… well we have got children that wouldn't come that often for homework that we wouldn't see for weeks upon weeks but then if they get a project from school they feel comfortable enough that they can come over and ask you for help with the project, they would be in for a week and then you wouldn't see them for four weeks until they need you again. (OST staff 12)

The staff members in both clubs regarded this as a significant function in helping the children academically, whether they attend regularly or sporadically. One of the clubs also offered an additional educational service through the provision of a literacy programme:

…..education is fundamentally a big part of the homework club…so first and foremost it is to work with them…by supporting them within their education whether it is the completion of their homework and having that quiet safe space to do their homework… (OST leader 3)

But ideally, I mean we can't pick up the pieces of kids who have missed 40 days last year, but what we can do is by completing their homework, is maintaining where they're at and not letting them fall back any further. (OST leader 1)

For older children the provision of additional support, both academic and personal, particularly at exam time was seen as an important contribution to their academic success. Both homework clubs referred to their provision of tuition support for second-level students:

… the relationship is there so when it is coming to examination time maybe that is where it be becoming more labour- intensive for them they know that they can come in and get that support from us. (OST leader 3)

And the Junior Certs as well. I forgot about the Junior Certs, they come in as well and they could have a special teacher. We bring in a special teacher for them, if they need help, extra help with Irish or whatever. They go in to the room there with the teacher and they can sit studying in there. (OST staff 5)

Participation in other activities in the homework clubs

In addition to the usual homework activities (and the literacy programme being run in the Fatima club), the clubs offered a variety of other activities. There is a strong focus on the creative arts in all clubs. This has resulted in the development of a relationship between the Dolphin homework club and the arts based organisation, Common Ground. This has led to the introduction of music lessons to children and larger group work activities often resulting in performances, both locally and in the city:

> So, we have guitar lessons, keyboard lessons and singing lessons going on the same time as the homework. Now that it's established it's quite, 'you finish your homework and you go down for your lesson'. (OST leader 1)

> We ended up making a film then with a group of young men and young women as well as part of the Rialto Youth Project. So, I suppose a lot of the work is driven by young people and a lot of the work has a creative focus to it as well. (OST staff 14)

On Wednesdays and Thursdays the Fatima club offers guitar lessons. Baking is also offered and swimming lessons are organised for a number of children on Tuesdays. Maths and Irish tuition support is offered to some secondary students. Some young people use the clubs to access computers or use the library to "chill out if it is not being used". Friday is an open day for the clubs. The majority of children who attend the clubs are in primary school and do not have homework to complete on Fridays. The clubs use this time to offer activities in arts, crafts, or music.

Staff reflected that the introduction of arts-based activities was part of the overall strategy of the clubs for the development of skills to enhance the children's education:

> We will target particularly the creative stuff, we will target the kids that are at risk. I find that the likes of the guitar, particularly because there's a song writing element in that, we found very successful with kids that have trouble with reading. We would try to match up or subsidise, I suppose, their learning in other ways... (OST leader 1)

> We have a music programme as well. It's in Dolphin House homework club. But it's manifested mostly through a group called the Jammers, the Rialto Jammers. They make music, they write songs, they learn how to play instruments and they meet every Friday night. They've done concerts, gigs, all sorts of workshops. It's a group of young people who are using music as a means of expression for themselves. (OST leader 2)

The decision on which activities to offer is based, to a large extent, on the preferences, needs and responses of the young people:

We offer a programme and see who buys into it and if they don't buy into it then we mightn't do that again. (OST leader 3)

We judge it very much, the work is based on where the young people are at. We try to take it from where they're at, rather than where we want them to be, or where somebody else wants them to be. So, we spend a lot of time with trying to assess that, gauge exactly where the work should go. (OST leader 2)

…like we did swimming during the summer, we did lessons and we identified the children who were really afraid of water and now we have got that every Tuesday, those kids have continued that programme and are learning to swim. (OST staff 12)

The club leaders considered that while the creative arts activities were 'fun and enjoyable' for young people they also have the potential to enhance literacy and academic competencies:

So, we've come back to drama a bit and we've brought the visual arts in, and music has come back in right. But we've had a tradition for a long time because we noticed that a long time ago that young people from marginalised communities respond to that kind of work very easily and it encourages that. We think that they use it very well. (OST leader 2)

We brought in an artist before, he made books with the kids…and the children made books, their own books…just to get them into the whole idea of literacy and what it is about, without them even realising it because they are just making their own book. (OST leader 3)

A variety of other activities offered by the clubs are aimed at improving attendance in the homework club and helping young people to cope with the transition from primary to secondary school or deal with personal difficulties and problems:

We would have ran a transition programme, a week long programme based around the visual arts and drama, and a lot of role plays and possible situations that might happen, whether it's just with your peers, with your family, with your teachers, and all different ways you can respond to that. So, it's sort of problem solving drama. And that's pretty good actually. Of those 10 kids who participated, they are still coming every day. (OST leader 1)

A broad range of those around difficulties at home, school, pregnancy, all of those things. So, there's quite a bit of that happening as well. We also do sexual health programmes as we see a group developing, they're ready for that sort of material…That's the range of the programme. (OST staff 9)

What we find is that young people don't buy in so much to sport…They go to the GAA, the football clubs and there's quite a selection of them within a distance. The sport we tend to do, we use football maybe a little bit as a means of outreach for some particular young people, particularly young men in their late teens, we use football to outreach them. (OST leader 2)

While the homework clubs endeavoured to offer a variety of enrichment activities to young people in the Fatima and Dolphin communities it was also acknowledged that the children and young people lived in an area where there was much extracurricular provision and many young people were fully involved in many of these activities:

Believe it or not, there's actually a lot available…now, the quality of which I would question, but there is a lot available. It's ridiculous when you're trying to organise something because there is majorettes on a Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. There's hip hop on Wednesday, Saturday and then there are competitions on Sunday. There is training every Tuesday and Thursday, literally for 9 months of the year. There is Ferrini Youth Club on Friday. There is the church drop in on Tuesday. And that's not mentioning anything that the homework club or the youth project do. (OST leader 1)

For me, it's rich in possibilities for young people around here. Funnily enough, local people probably wouldn't say that. But in fact, there's actually a whole range of sporting, social and recreational activities that young people can do, from the Majorettes to football clubs to soccer clubs to dance clubs to karate clubs to kick boxing clubs, all within a very short distance. Some of them are obviously better than others, but that full range of opportunity exists. There's a strong Variety Group in the Rialto area – an adult and a children's one, and they do at least two shows a year. So, they're very active. There's a number of private dance groups…that cater for kids from tiny tots all the way up. So, all of those exist within this community, or within a very short distance of it. In my view, there's a whole menu of activity if people want to do it. (OST leader 2)

Development of young people's skills and confidence

A strong theme within the interviews with staff about the benefits of OST activities was the contribution of OST activities to the development of young people's social skills, confidence and self-esteem. OST staff and leaders made several references to the role that the staff and participation in activities play in the development of confidence:

I think it is all down to confidence and self-esteem and having a sense of self and if we can spend time with children and young people to really have a sense of self and dream and have ambition and we equip them to follow that… (OST leader 3)

It is a social skill, like you know some kids when they first start here they are quite shy, they are new and they are quite shy but they interact with the other children and develop their social skills and it is a huge deal. (OST staff 13)

Ours is about their social development, it is about their coping skills, their social skills, it is about supporting them through some of those difficult times. That's what our job is

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essentially. So, it is building up their confidence. And they're very confident with us. (OST leader 2)

The RYP offers a wide range of creative and leisure based activities, with a view to developing and expanding the young person's social skills, confidence and experience of achievement. Staff considered that confidence is central to young people's ability to learn and to take risks. Staff noted that they had an important role as individuals and as a club in offering a 'safe' space in which confidence could be developed:

> …Because we're constantly always saying, 'sure you're brilliant, you're well able' constantly. You'd be surprised the amount of kids who come in and say, 'I'm stupid, I can't do that'. So, you say 'of course you're not stupid'. (OST staff 4)

> We've put a lot of effort into that notion, that it would be a safe and respectful place, and in turn what that's done is it's given young people the opportunity to risk a little bit, and to risk making mistakes which is something that is a very big thing as well for young people, because they feel so self conscious and so put down in other areas that they're afraid everything has to be perfect, so to create a space where everything doesn't have to be perfect, where you can take risks…. (OST staff 14)

> We'd one child there last year and he was doing his Junior, and he just had no confidence in himself whatsoever. He wouldn't do and…. he wouldn't go to school. He started coming here. He started studying. We got the teachers in, the voluntary workers in to help him. He got 7 honours and 2 passes. (OST staff 5)

Nevertheless, one of the OST leaders cautioned that the confidence developed in the clubs might not extend far beyond the 'safe space' of the club. The leader spoke of an incident that highlighted the difficulties experienced by the young people in maintaining their confidence in new and different environments:

> So, it's a localised confidence that develops among themselves and among their peers. And we're always trying to challenge that. We set up the [name of club] around the music and we took them up to [place name], it wasn't quite a competition but it was sort of a competition. Anyway, they couldn't cope socially around other young people. On stage, they couldn't hold it together. (OST leader 2)

Staff from one of the projects spoke about the children in the Dolphin Art Group who were involved in a project which resulted in the group creating a mural in the United States, a process which a staff member feels greatly enhanced their personal development and sense of achievement:

> … but really what they're hanging onto is the fact that it's their image that they came up with, that they remember the torture of week in week out of trying to get that image that summed it up, and now that that image is on a wall in America is significant. There does need to be the end piece that they can say, 'well, we did it' but it's only useful if

they can identify with the torture sometimes of getting there y'know and the risks and all that, and that's where the pride and growth comes. (OST staff 17)

For me, looking at young people over the years engaged in the visual arts process, it's rarely about…it's rarely the form that gets them going first. Sometimes it is but it's the fact that it's about them, it's about what they have to say, it's engaging with themselves as intelligent, creative people, and they get to explore what it is they want to say, learn skills, put it out there, see a finished piece of work somewhere. It's that long kind of process where they go through it and they explore and learn. For me that's what holds them and that's what keeps it exciting…. (OST staff 17)

For those who show a greater level of interest and ability, the option can be offered to concentrate on the development of skills in a more focussed way leading perhaps to a future career:

Then I think the interest based groups alongside that is crucial because there's always a few who are like, 'that is what I'm interested in', 'I want to learn how to paint' or 'I want to be a singer' or…… but I think for a lot of them, I think it is fair to say that it's the process of being part of getting to say something and putting it out there in a way that's good and strong and interesting. (OST staff 17)

The additional benefits identified by the homework club and youth project staff are varied and include the provision of a "secure environment" or a safe supportive space for the children, somewhere that they can receive food or snacks and see friendly faces:

It gives them somewhere to come, even sometimes if they don't have homework, they come in just to chat. (OST staff 4)

Barriers and facilitators to the delivery of OST services

Staff were asked about what they considered to be facilitators and barriers to the operation of the homework clubs. Responses focused more on the range of barriers that they experienced but staff did mention possible solutions to some of the barriers identified. Barriers centred on time, facilities and training. A lack of time was the most frequently mentioned barrier and for the leaders the lack of time for planning new programmes or innovative ways of responding to the children's needs was a particular problem. The provision of additional staff was the most frequently mentioned solution to this problem:

I would say the very serious kids, that we haven't got the resources to, you're talking that are 4 to 5 years behind their reading age. None of us would say that we can get that child back up with the resources that we have now, can get that child at her reading age in 12 months. (OST leader 1)

> …certainly more bodies in the sense of carrying on the core homework support…but actually you need time, you need space away from the kids to actually think. Time to figure out how to respond to the kids' needs is really the bottom line for me. (OST leader 1)

> More workers…we are always getting caught up in doing and maybe sometimes we need more time set aside for analysing and reflecting, really analysing where the young people are and the needs of the young people, so that the centre becomes much more child focussed. (OST leader 3)

> There are a lot of kids that demand just your attention. You can't because you might have 5 others sitting at the table with you and them kids could just do with your attention, but….. (OST staff 4)

Staff in the one of the projects also spoke of the need for time to reflect on their own practice.

> Space, time, a bit of clarity you know, you need to step back. Speaking for myself, I haven't had that time in a long time to step back and actually look at who I'm working with. (OST staff 16)

> I think we've had quite an intense year. Reflection is really important because it's not just about how many young people we have in the doors or doing a load of projects. We're trying to do the work in a particular kind of way and I think what works well is that we hold the relationship sacred. (OST staff 14)

Many of the staff felt that a lack of space and facilities was a barrier to their work. There was an expressed need for larger and better facilities that were appropriate to the different age groups. Staff at one of the projects acknowledged that these needs will be addressed through the Fatima regeneration which will provide sporting facilities and larger premises in the Fatima area. Some of the ideas expressed included having a larger space available, green space outside and sporting facilities. Referring to plans to move to a new premises, one of the leaders commented:

> We will double the size of next door, so we will be able to have a larger space, 'cos they [11-14 year olds] need a totally different space. They just do. They need an actual space. They need a table each. Now we have, y'know they just fill out that room, and the little ones are grand. But that would certainly help in keeping them on. (OST leader 1)

Regular staff training was considered by OST leaders as a facilitator to effective service delivery. However, homework club staff considered that their training needs have been identified and met. They did not see lack of or access to training as a barrier to service delivery:

I think there is a constant need for training, constant need for self skilling up, more resources and more time into that...That is very important and for us to be the best that we can be for children and young people and workers to be highly skilled. (OST leader 3)

The training identified is done at a group level, as in what we all need this year, which is 'do we all need to do a week long first aid again?' and that kind of stuff, and then I would meet with the workers on an individual basis to see what's best for the club really, and for what they could deliver. (OST leader 1)

…most of us are well trained anyway. We have done plenty of different courses. (OST staff 4)

Interviewer; So, would you have access to more training if you needed it?

Anytime, yeah…yeah. (OST staff 4)

Barriers and facilitators to educational attainment

We asked the OST staff for their views on what they considered to be the main barriers to educational attainment for the young people in the local area. This question was also explored in interviews with teachers.

Staff mainly considered that the school system was the biggest barrier to young people's educational performance. In particular homework club staff focused on the practice of streaming within schools and its practical and psychological impact on a young person's progress in school and beyond.

While ordinary or foundation level subjects provide young people with a more practical approach to examination subjects, such choices have a long term impact on later subject choice and on the possibilities for progression to third level education:

They've been streamed into all ordinary or foundation subjects, by the time they even get to secondary school. So, the decisions about their future have already been made for them. So, you're dealing then with young people who are saying that they would like to go onto further education and that the road is very long for that because they don't have in school what they need to have to do that. (OST staff 14)

There are huge issues with kids being streamed in to Foundation level examinations where they are really capable of doing honours and pass and they are not getting the opportunity, I suppose apathetic I would say, kids fitting into the system that just doesn't suit them and it is like sticking a square peg into a round hole. (OST staff 12)

Another staff member gave an example of the long-term impact of such choices:

> We just got a guy that we've been working with for a couple of years, he's after getting a sports scholarship to UCD. He's doing his Leaving in June and he needs obviously a pass, I think it's 285 points, which isn't high at all, but because he's doing all foundation in his Leaving Cert, it's nothing. And his school will not support him. So, we're going to have to look now in January about doing some serious creative thinking about getting that young person who hasn't done an ordinary subject in two years up to scratch. An opportunity like that is just amazing but it's totally taken from him. (OST staff 16)

Streaming and the provision of additional support within schools were also considered by staff to have the potential to diminish a young person's self-belief. The fact that children are taken from the class to receive extra support is regarded by some staff members as sending them a negative message:

> …in the primary as well when they need special help they take them out into different classes and so their whole class sort of knows that they have needs where they are behind because they are getting taken out and being brought into another classroom…….. as young as eight and he gets taken out. (OST staff 8)
>
> Interviewer; so you are already marked?
>
> Yeah, he can't read properly so he gets taken out or she gets taken out. (OST staff 8)

Staff considered that streaming in secondary school impacted on children's self-belief. In particular this occurred during the transition from primary to secondary and had a bearing on children's overall attitude to education from the time that they commenced secondary school:

> It's very heavily streamed in local schools. And there is 'dumb class' and kids worry themselves. And the anxiety that the 6th class kids had, y'know the first day…before they start 1st year…. 'will I go into 1 (2), if I go into 1 (2) that's the dumb class' and they just play with ………… down the back. Literally, this is the kid's fear, and unfortunately it actually comes into fruition. (OST leader 1)
>
> I have a girl doing her Leaving Cert, her Leaving Cert Applied, which the kids call 'Lets Count Apples' because they would recognise that as 'I'm so dumb, I can't do anything else.' It's totally the kids' language, not mine. She's in 5th year but she'll be doing the LCA for 2 years. (OST leader 1)

Discussion of the impact of streaming and special assistance highlighted a lack of consensus on these issues among homework club staff. Some staff members expressed the view that taking the child out of class sent a negative message to the child which diminishes their self-belief while others felt that the school system is too rigid to adapt to the needs of individuals. Another staff member reflected that schools 'drop the standard' to suit the needs of those who fall behind:

> I think schools are more rigid, that is it, they have their curriculum to go by, they have to have their results at the end of the year and if any child is left behind then they are left behind, it is hard luck you are staying back, we couldn't help, you couldn't keep up with the rest of the class, and so on. Like they have their own system to go by every year whereas if they are falling behind we will pick up on it. I think they tend to lose focus then on the children that are falling behind. (OST staff 13)

Another staff member agreed that schools are unwilling to adapt to the needs of the individual child:

> X is right in what she's saying y'see, because a young person can experience all sorts of things here and in the community or with family, but they can go into an institution like school and immediately be cut down, immediately, the space is not there for them to…… It's like you're saying to be challenging or to be outside of the rigidity of that system. (OST staff 14)

Yet this is not the view of other staff who felt that schools respond to the needs of those who fall behind by lowering the overall standards:

> …it wasn't all that good, the school…they lower the standards of the education to suit the needs of the people who are falling behind not trying to bring them up or encourage them or try a different way of doing things, they drop the standard. They say you can't do that subject, you can't do this and you can't do that. (OST staff 13)

Some staff members expressed the view that many of the decisions about streaming, and expectations about future educational progress, made by teachers are based on prejudice and a belief that because of where the children are from they are less likely to achieve:

> I think that they may be a bit judgemental because of the area that we are from and I would say everybody was…I would say they are very judgemental about the area, I would say they are very judgemental about the families around here. (OST staff 13)

> Interviewer: Do you mean that they would pre-judge the child…?

> Yea and parents as well…pre-judge that the parents don't care about the child… and they have always done that…I reckon they have always done that. (OST staff 13)

> Interviewer; Would you agree with that [name], what [name] is saying?

They let people drop out and they keep their own classes going. It is like the highest they can expect from them is to go to Crumlin College and do a beautician's course or a secretary course and that would be the highest expectations. (OST staff 8)

Homework club staff spoke about other ways in which the school system impacted negatively on young people's educational attainment. These included not providing children with homework and by not teaching Irish to individual students:

We're not teachers, we can't give them a lot of homework. We can certainly give them space to do a few essays and stuff but it's very difficult when kids don't have homework in how to engage with them 'cos that is the first port of call when they come in here. (OST leader 1)

Interviewer: And obviously, it can affect their expectations about their abilities as well?

Absolutely. It's not like in an ideal world where children don't need homework and everything is covered in school, it's not that reason why they're not getting homework. I presume the teachers are just very happy to have them in school at all…but it is extremely disheartening when you have somebody in another school, the same age who you hang around with, in with an hour and a half of homework every day without fail. And that is disparity. That is just wrong. (OST leader 1)

The decision not to teach Irish to large numbers of young people from the area was also highlighted by one of the club leaders as having a long term impact on the young people's future educational prospects:

…that is unbelievably common. I've had 3 last year (Junior Certs), I've had 7 the year before, that's 10. I'd 5 the year before, that's 15 and 3 the year before. That's 18, and 3 of those young people did Irish for their Junior Cert, which is off the wall…It's just appalling. That undercurrent message is just disgraceful because really what the teacher is doing there is excluding them from a lump of third level institutions immediately. (OST leader 1)

Relationships

We asked the OST staff to reflect on the nature of their relationships with school, parents and young people.

Relationships with schools

As the previous section has shown most homework club staff perceived that some practices within the school system itself function as barriers to young people's education. It is perhaps not surprising to find that homework club staff have described mixed experiences in their relationships with teachers and schools. Some staff reported that they received regular contact from teachers, other staff reflected that they only dealt with schools when called on by parents or young people in times of crisis:

> Interviewer: Do you get any feedback from teachers?
>
> Not really. You might get one or two teachers that might write you a note where 'do you mind doing this?' I work with a little one and she actually can't read or write, so she's actually only at the stage of 'in' and 'is'. She can't count past ten. Her teacher would write little notes to say 'do you mind doing this for her?' and 'thanks' for this and that. (OST staff 4)
>
> Some of the teachers would write us notes within the child's journal but I suppose it is not policy, it is down to the individual teacher or the individual principal, if it was more formalised then we would have much more structured check ins. (OST leader 3)
>
> Well there is a strong connection with some of the schools whether it is through an RLC staff member and some of the home school liaisons are very good at ringing up and touching base, they are excellent, they are very good so there is a connection there. (OST leader 3)

The club leaders considered that more needed to be done to develop better links between OST staff and schools:

> Yeah, some schools are better than others in the sense that the relationships, and y'know, we're always trying to make them better. (OST leader 1)
>
> But it would certainly be an area that we would definitely want to be addressing, we are building steps but it's a long way off to what it should be. (OST leader 2)

The leader of one of the clubs described how their club had made efforts to develop links between the homework clubs and the schools by inviting teachers to an event in which children were taking part:

They just are not usually interested really in what happens outside of their four walls. We would often certainly invite people down to see their kids in their own community and stuff and some schools are great in participating, that they even do teacher training here during June and July, but only 5 teachers took them up. (OST leader 1)

Staff indicated that frequently the approach to the school is initiated by the homework club in response to a request from parents for help dealing with problem or a crisis:

So if a parent needed to go to the school, we would always try and facilitate the parent to go to the school first and foremost and if they felt they weren't getting the response we would go with them then so…I suppose it is not for us to go into a school without a parents permission or parents knowledge, or really without the parents but on a whole though the contact would be on a needs basis, it wouldn't be…ideally what you would love is to have a check in every month or so with the schools, that would be great. (OST leader 3)

For us like, a lot of our contact with the schools is at moments of crisis really. So, you're going in at a particular point with a young people, maybe to support a young person, to support a family around a situation in a school…it's a very mixed response that you get, mostly quite difficult. (OST staff 14)

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of a situation?

I think what happens is, often at times at a crisis point where a parent has received either no letter or twenty letters saying 'your child did this, your child did that' or whatever, so when you're going into the school, I suppose they're probably a little taken aback or maybe a bit wondering who you are and what your role is. Then there are certain procedures that schools need to follow around stuff like suspension or if young people are out of school, y'know, that quite often aren't followed. So, you're going in with that particular focus, that you're maybe looking for the formalities to be followed. (OST staff 14)

Staff members in one of the projects described similar experiences of being called in to help in moments of crisis. From the perspective of some staff it would appear that the response of the schools have not been positive. According to staff there seems to be differing perspectives among OST staff and schools about young people's needs and the best approach to supporting them:

Every September. You find young people are getting turfed out...it's been a very negative experience. We've never succeeded ever in advocating successfully for a young person in school. (OST leader 2)

And I would say that, I'm going to hold my hands up and say that I struggle with schools right myself, but I would say that they're coming from a different space to us as well ideologically or in their thinking around young people. So, you're often met with that barrier as well. And that the child has to fit the system rather than the system supporting a child, so that's a difficult one as well. (OST staff 14)

I just think schools don't do that. They don't acknowledge that they can't cope, they don't acknowledge that there's difficulty here, and as a result they don't want to find a solution to the problem. They've found easy ways to deal with those young people. They farm them off to Youthreach or find other ways of dealing with those young people. (OST leader 2)

When asked about how schools have responded to problem situations, the staff in one of the projects indicated that responses differed across schools:

Varied, really varied. Some schools are very responsive and other schools, it just doesn't matter, you can't touch them. (OST staff 16)

It's often supporting the parents first. (OST staff 15)

Interviewer; So, you're actually accompanying a parent?

Ideally, ideally you would be but it doesn't always mean you might be. (OST staff 14)

Interviewer; What about the reception that you get in the school then?

It's a mixed reception. (OST staff 16)

Some staff acknowledged that schools are in some cases very supportive of young people, but their own impression of schools is largely derived from their role as youth workers who help young people most 'at risk':

So, there is some very successful stuff in school and some of the kids are very happy in school, but the irony is if you're a youth project that works with children at risk primarily, the children that you're working with probably have challenging experiences in school on a regular basis. (OST staff 16)

Interviewer: Do you have any links with the homework clubs in schools?

Well, I'd know who's in them and that's as good as the link goes. The ones who are in them are the ones who can sit in a room and do their homework by themselves, so it totally suits us that those kids are there. If you're able to do that, because it's not like, you don't get really supported, there's two teachers supervising in a large room. The reality is that the kids who come to us can't do that otherwise they'd just sit at home or they'd do it in school. So, I mean it's certainly useful for us in the sense of numbers and stuff that the kids can be catered and you just need the different spaces. Some kids are perfectly happy to manage that. (OST staff 16)

Relationships with young people

Homework club staff were asked about their relationships with the children and young people who attended the clubs. Overall a very positive picture was reported of close and friendly relationships between the children. Staff spoke of how many of the children seemed to have preferences about the staff members that they liked to work with:

> We all have a little section here, our own groups. The minute they open the door, they know who they come to, who they're comfortable with and they stay with that person. They always look for that person if they're not in….. So, they know who they're comfortable with. They know who they can talk to. (OST staff 6)

The interviews showed that the staff and leaders were conscious of supporting the children in whatever way possible to create a safe and supportive space. One staff member described how a child will occasionally call to the homework club for a plaster, having fallen in the yard at school, rather than go home:

> It's not unusual for us to be one of the first ports of call…You can't say anything wrong, you might be able to say it a better way, but you actually can't say anything wrong. (OST leader 1)

Staff members agreed that the children can often confide things in staff members that they wouldn't discuss at home, such as getting into trouble in school or issues at home and the local environment:

> …they can talk to you more. They're not afraid to say some things…I think it varies depending on the child, and on how much they've participated, but I would be extremely attached to a certain amount of the kids, very much so, because of the level of contact. There is no doubt that if you are comforting and supporting a young person, which has happened a couple of times over the last couple of weeks, around bereavement or violence or something that's happened, you can't help but get attached. (OST staff 6)

> And there's some things that they tell you about school that they probably wouldn't tell their parents, do you know that way. 'I was in trouble today', whereas they mightn't go home and say they were in trouble today, you know, things like that. (OST staff 4)

> Interviewer: But they might say that to you?

> Yeah. …and we'd talk to them like what happened and why? Do you not think you should…….. You sit around the room and talk as well like, not like in school. (OST staff 4)

Although one staff member reported on the improvement in young people's behaviour when they attended the homework club, staff agreed that some of the young people they worked with were challenging:

> You can see the difference. You could see one child out there…They could be running amok out there with another child. He'd come in here, he'd sit with you, he'd talk to you, he'd tell you things. You'd be sitting here going 'that's not the same child that I saw out there a few minutes ago'…The difference when they come in here. The minute they come by that door in here, they're a totally different child altogether. (OST staff 5)

> You could have your good days and bad days with them y'know…It depends on their humour when they come in. (OST staff 5)

The homework club staff considered that the positive relationships built up over time between themselves and the young people contributed to young people's sustained participation in the clubs:

> But I do think the relationship is quite key and I think that's what keeps certain young people engaged for 4, 5, 6, 7 years…So, I think they wouldn't be coming back if there wasn't a person that they identified to come back to. (OST staff 16)

> So, I suppose one of the most important parts of the homework club would be the relationship with the kids in the sense that kids aren't going to come voluntary, 5 days a week just to sit in a corner and do their homework on their own. (OST leader 1)

> For me, it's about developing a respectful relationship. The needs of the young person are paramount as far as I'm concerned. I'm not saying that we always meet the needs all the time. But there is something about acknowledging that failure so that we can move on. (OST leader 2)

Relationships with parents

Staff reported that their relationships with parents varied from parent to parent and largely depended on the relationship between staff and child. Many of the staff members reflected on the fact that they had grown up and lived in the area and therefore were familiar with all the parents:

> Some would be very strong and others you would have to work on… there is different issues going on for different parents, em…you are always going to get the parent who really buys in and gives us a dig out and then you are always going to get the parents that don't, that is not to say that parents don't care. (OST leader 2)

> And then through relationships with the kids, you're evidently always going to have relationship with the parents, some better than others… by knowing the kids, you get to know the parents... (OST leader 1)

> …you'd know most of the parents of the children who come, don't we? (OST staff 4)

Yeah, I mean we live in the area so we'd know the kids and we'd know the parents as well obviously. But the parent might come over here as well and have a chat with us or (name), if the child needs anything extra. (OST staff 5)

In general, while the staff and leaders reported that they knew the parents, they indicated that they did not have much occasion to interact with them because of lack of time or because the parents did not visit the homework club very often or because parents had educational limitations themselves:

Getting the parents in is very difficult because, well for all sorts of reasons. Mothers are very busy but also there is the anxiety they have around their own literacy and numeracy. (OST leader 1)

Interviewer; Do parents get involved in other ways at all?

No (OST staff 5)

Well, at Halloween…. (OST staff 6)

Not really, well…at Halloween they did. (OST staff 5)

Something like summer projects, then maybe…… (OST staff 6)

But not day to day. (OST staff 4)

Not very often. Don't get me wrong, we do ask them! (OST staff 5)

Nevertheless, the project leaders indicated that they got to know the parents by calling from home to home in order to fulfil funding obligations or to collect children to bring them to the club:

Like for example, when we had to do the child subvention scheme forms, there a couple of weeks ago, there's 100 of them to get in. I had to go door to door. (OST leader 1)

…parents are free to come and go whenever they want, some parents drop them off and collect them and check in with us every day, some of the kids we go and collect, it could be just across the road, but we will go and walk over and get them. (OST leader 3)

Club leaders pointed out that they have the support and trust of the parents. One club leader reflected that this trust has been earned through the efforts made by homework club staff, and as a result parents will give homework club staff information about their child's progress, and in some cases educational assessments done by the children's school:

> And I think parents trust us, I think parents place the care of their child within the service, there is trust there. (OST leader 3)

> Yeah and that assessment, it is down to the relationship that the project has with that parent as well to trust us to show us that…so I think there is a great emphasis put on building up a rapport with parents as well for that to happen. (OST leader 3)

The same club leader pointed to the response of the parents when the club was closed as evidence of the level of support they enjoy in the community:

> The project closed a couple of years ago because the initial management of it shut down and it was closed for a while until parents kicked up and the service reopened again. It has been reopened now for four years and I think that spoke volumes. (OST leader 3)

Parents and education

When homework club staff spoke about their relationships with parents many did so in the context of parents' experiences of education. Staff felt that parents needed the homework clubs to provide the support in subjects that parents found difficult. Staff also indicated that because many parents had negative school experiences that this prevented many from approaching the school if their child had a problem:

> I would say that not only the size of the flats, that literally if you had 3 children, you don't have 3 tables where you can sit down and their homework with them, so in a very simplistic sense it is a space for kids to do their homework, but also the parents don't necessarily have the level of Maths, English and Irish that they would need to have to support their children. (OST leader 1)

> Certainly. But the first protocol is always to support the parent to do that on behalf of their own child. That's not always easy because parents of 10 year olds are probably in their 30's anyway, and some teachers are up there 30 odd years. So, you're going up to a teacher that you had a horrible experience with to advocate on behalf of your child, and it's so complex. It's not easy at all. It's such an important phase of our lives that you never shake it off, particularly if it's been a horrible experience. (OST leader 1)

Summary: OST staff interviews and focus groups

Homework club staff and leaders considered that their main function was to support children and young people with their homework. Staff felt that this support relieves young people's anxiety about homework. The support also establishes a routine for homework, and this is regarded as beneficial to young people's progress at school. While staff acknowledged the sporadic attendance of some children, the clubs try to facilitate the needs of those who attend regularly and those who attend less often.

For older children the provision of additional support, both academic and personal, particularly at exam time is seen as an important contribution to their academic success.

In addition to the homework club support, there is a strong focus on the creative arts in all clubs. These activities are regarded by staff as important not only for young people's enjoyment and skill development, but also because they provide an opportunity to enhance literacy and academic performance.

Staff reported that the clubs go beyond the provision of homework support by providing a supportive and safe environment in which young people can gain skills and confidence to engage with education. To this end they support young people in the transition from primary to secondary school and help young people who are enrolled in state examinations.

The quality of the relationship between staff and young people is regarded by OST staff as crucial to their work. Relationships with young people are described as warm and caring. They provide a 'listening ear' for young people who may experience problems at school or in the community. An important feature of the clubs was the provision of a safe and supportive space that they feel the children need. Staff felt that these positive relationships developed over time were key to young people's continued engagement and attendance at the club.

The relationship between the parents and OST staff varies from parent to parent. Many staff members have grown up and live in the area and know the young people's parents. Although staff and leaders reported that they know the parents, there appeared to be little involvement with them.

Homework club staff felt that young people's educational attainment is strongly influenced by the school system. Staff highlighted a number of areas where they considered that systems within schools acted as barriers to young people's educational attainment and future beyond school. These included streaming, subject choices, best approaches to supporting children with special educational needs, lack of homework, non-provision of core subjects and lower standards to accommodate those who have fallen behind. Yet there was no consensus among staff about the most appropriate approach that schools should take to address problems when children fall behind at school.

Homework club staff described mixed experiences of dealing with teachers and schools. Some receive regular contact from teachers and others only deal with schools when called on by parents or young people in times of crisis. Staff felt that there is a need for change in schools and that more needs to be done to develop better links between OST staff and schools. Staff reported that the homework club staff and schools differ in terms of their views and approaches to helping young people.

Chapter 9: Teachers' perspectives on OST activities

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 teachers in eight schools in the Rialto area. The aim of these interviews was to investigate teachers' knowledge and attitudes about out of school time activities (OST) in the area. Teacher perspectives on benefits of OST activities, the extent of linkages with community based homework clubs, and relationships with parents were also explored. In a broader context, teachers were asked about what they considered to be key factors that impacted on poor educational outcomes for children served by the school. Within this broad theme a number of sub-themes emerged which are discussed below:

Teacher interview themes and sub-themes:
- Children's involvement in after school activities
- Knowledge of and linkages with homework clubs
- Homework clubs in school
- Benefits of OST activities
- Barriers to educational attainment
  - Parents' experience of education
  - Low expectations
  - The social and physical environment
  - School factors
  - Poverty and complexity
- Relationships with parents
- Children's attitudes to school

Children's involvement in after-school activities

Teachers were asked about what they knew about children's involvement in activities after school. All teachers reported that their students were involved in a range of community-based extracurricular activities. These included football, dancing, kick boxing, drama, and pigeon breeding, but those most commonly referred to were dancing, majorettes and football. In general, the majority of teachers considered that there was a high-level of enthusiasm for dance among girls, and football among boys. Teachers were aware that children attended St. Catherine's sports club, St. Andrew's and the Ferrini Club:

> Everyone to be honest seems to be involved in something but definitely the majorettes and dancing seem to be the big ones (School 4, teacher 1, primary)

> Football clubs after school and some of the kids do majorettes and Irish dancing (School 3, teacher 1, primary)

> Outside the school, I wouldn't be overly familiar. I know they go to Catherine's, St Andrews and they go here and there. I mean, I know they would talk about their football club a lot. There's a few going to dance. A couple at drama maybe. But mostly it's football, and it's club and GAA. (School 5, teacher 1, primary)

> Yeah I can't think of specific names but I know a lot of them go to dance clubs . . . the girls go to lots of different things especially dance and majorettes, not so much into singing for example, football is big as well (School 8, HSCL, secondary)

Although the majority of teachers reported that boys in particular were involved in team activities, one teacher considered that team activities were in decline. In this teacher's view, activities had become more individualised as a result of the changed school demographics:

> See there used to be. I don't know what it is. It's just the way kids are going like. When I first started here it was huge, a lot of Gaelic football, soccer, they just don't have an interest anymore. Again, it's very fractured the kind of kids that we're getting, they're coming from all over the city. Since the (name of another school) closed down, you get a lot of kids coming out of there you know. The number of the kids in the area has decreased so the dynamics of the community has changed an awful lot from being an awful lot of kids around to being very few and them being scattered you know. So a lot of kids seem to be more into individual activities as opposed to team activities (School 2, HSCL teacher, secondary).

Knowledge of and linkages with homework clubs

In addition to finding out what teachers knew of their students' involvement in after school activities we also asked them what they knew about the Dolphin and Fatima homework clubs, and whether there were any linkages between the schools and homework clubs. All teachers had knowledge of the clubs, but with the exception of one school, this tended to be non-specific. The majority of teachers did not know in any great detail which students attended the Dolphin and Fatima homework clubs, and had little or no knowledge about how the clubs operated. When teachers were aware of a child that attended the homework club it was as a result of informal channels of communication, or because a problem had been brought to their attention:

> They'd be…not that, you know just kind of casually they'd be saying that they'd be going to majorettes here…I know a lot of the girls I had last year, the girls who were from Dolphin's Barn, there was a good crowd of them who went down to Dolphin's Barn, there was obviously somewhere in the area that organised a homework club and they went there. You'd notice if you were doing their reading with them sometimes, we'd get their reading signed and you'd notice that someone from whatever homework club had signed (School 4, teacher 1, primary)

> Do you know what I mean, now and again (name) would come in but quite often that would be to handle a crisis but I do think that should happen regularly, meet them at the school door and say I will see you tomorrow or I will see you tonight or whatever so that the lads know that they know that we know (School, 1, teacher 2, secondary)

> I would know there are activities. I wouldn't know what each individual child attends because I wouldn't be visiting the after-school clubs because my school day is 8.50 to 2.30 so I wouldn't be down in the clubs but I have a fair idea of what goes on in the area, what they all link into. I wouldn't know except I might hear it in passing . . . (School, 7, teacher, primary)

Although two teachers suggested that the Principal and/or Home School Community Liaison teacher would know more about linkages than the class teacher, there was a general picture of informal connections between schools and the homework clubs. While two schools mentioned a formal connection with the Fatima Regeneration Board Education Co-ordinator, the majority of teachers reported either no linkages or informal association. Again teachers gave examples of linkages with the homework clubs that were largely informal or that arose as a result of the need to complete documentation:

> No, only they would be the only ones that tell me. There wouldn't be any liaison between the after school clubs and the school as such. I mean, there would be other after school clubs in the school apart from the homework club. So, a lot of them would be going to that as well. There are other things going on. But after school clubs, we don't really liaise with them. Maybe we possibly should. It's just something that hasn't happened yet. (School 5, teacher, primary)

> We would also have the youth workers, the titles seem to change a bit, they're often young people themselves in their early 20's or that who will sometimes accompany parents to meetings in our schools. When I have, for example, needed to get Fatima parents up perhaps to sign the necessary documentation for psychological assessment to take place or to meet with the resource teacher, to talk through what supports we'll give. Sometimes the parents will be accompanied from somebody in Fatima regeneration. (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

In contrast, both teacher interviews at one primary school revealed strong connections between the homework club and the school. Teachers gave examples of issues that emerged in the classroom that were resolved with the homework club, e.g. a need for extra support for a student and a case of difficult peer relations in the classroom:

> The Fatima homework clubs…we would have fairly strong links there. One of the girls would usually come in and speak to the teachers early in the year (School, 3, HSCL, primary)

> In my experience anyway the links have been very good, and as well people from the homework club have been up here before, in the staff room introducing themselves and as I said last year we got invitations to come down to the homework club to see what work they do and to chat with the people who run it, so I think its really good (School, 3, teacher, primary)

In their responses to questions about linkages, teachers were keen to see formal linkages developed and volunteered their ideas on how such linkages between the schools and homework clubs could be improved:

> I suppose it could be a nice idea to do that with them, it would be a big ask to organise I guess, I suppose for ideas on reading and different things like that. The only thing there is that they would have girls from lots of different schools in the area, it wouldn't be just our school that they would be dealing with. Em…I suppose it would be nice to have more contact with the different organisations that would kind of…at the moment it is separate to school and just really through chatting with the girls that you would find out. (School 4, teacher 1, primary)

> I suppose it would be great if they came into the school to explain their role and how they go about it and then maybe we as teachers could offer our advice you know that … (School 4, teacher 2, primary)

> Yeah. Maybe at the start of the school year or maybe a month in when we've got to know the students, students that are known to both ourselves in the school and to the homework club. A meeting could be arranged with all the partners you know. (School 6, HSCL, Secondary)

The questions about knowledge and linkages with the homework clubs may have seemed superfluous to secondary school teachers. They indicated that because there was minimal involvement of secondary school students in the clubs it would be unlikely for the school to be involved with the clubs. Nevertheless, teachers acknowledged that although some first years might be involved, attendance by secondary school students waned after first year:

> Interviewer: So, would you know the kids who are attending say the Fatima homework club or the Dolphin homework club?

> I can tell you who were but aren't anymore, 'cause they tend to go in first year for a little while and then once they're out of first year they don't tend to go again after that. (School 2, HSCL, secondary)

> Well there may have been with the primary school but now I think…I am not too sure, I would be interested in your feedback but I don't think there are too many of the lads in first year, definitely not in second year, they tend not to attend the homework clubs which is a pity (School 1, teacher 2, secondary)

> Interviewer: I was going to ask you do you know the children who are attending?

> I don't. Again, that's something I would have asked for before and it's something that I would appreciate. I would be given the impression that every young person who lives down there, who goes to our school attends. However, sometimes when I'm on a home visit and I might say to mum how she's getting on with the homework or in the homework club, I might find out that she doesn't always go or she only goes the odd time or even from the student themselves when I'm speaking to them. Last year when I was setting up the laptop session for whatever research was being done last year. When I approached individual students to explain to them what was going on they said, 'but sure I haven't been in there in a year' or 'why are they asking me?' (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

Teacher perspectives on homework club practices

Although teachers were of the view that homework clubs were an important support to children and their families, a minority of teachers raised issues about the differences in the approaches of the school and community-based homework clubs. These comments occurred in the context of how linkages could be improved between school and community homework clubs, and in response to questions about how the school homework club operated[84]:

> I'm delighted that there's other things going on and particularly because the school year is so short that there's activities at mid-term break and over the summer and so on. But again, they need to complement each other so that we're not competing with them running something that they're already running. Again, I'm not, in case this sounds all one way I certainly don't mean it to. Schools need to be letting groups like Fatima know what's going on and if we have a student even maybe that we know lives in Fatima who's excelling in an area to flag, that so it's something that could be continued even if she is on our Gaelic team, that maybe it's something that could be continued over the summer months then, so they don't move away from training or whatever. I think a model like that where it's more personalised to the individual child maybe. What are this child's strengths? How can we both help her to develop her skill in art or sport, whatever it is? (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

> I have said to both (Name) and other individuals who would accompany parents up that I would prefer if there was closer linkages to deal with issues around students because even the homework club itself, I would like to think that similar methodologies were being used. People don't have to be qualified teachers to help with homework, parents help with homework all the time, they're not education professionals, but it would eliminate the possibility that there might be contrasting methodologies. Sometimes teachers have a little bit of a concern around maybe how much help they're getting…… is it appropriate help? Is it too much help? If there's for example a contrast between the homework that's done and then when a class test comes the very same problems the student cannot cope with it all, so just to discuss how much help is to be given, that the methodologies are not necessarily the same but complementary rather than divergent or confusing to the student (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

> Well the idea of them is brilliant – I do have a bit of a difficulty with some of the homework clubs, the non…that aren't in the school, because well generally its not a qualified teacher, and sometimes they are not able to help the child with the home work if the child has a difficulty in the way that I suppose the teacher might help them or sometimes I feel that the homework has been done, I suppose basically just giving an answer not allowing the child to do it themselves.

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[84] All of the eight schools that participated in the research operated a homework club in their school. These clubs were supervised by teachers. In some schools children were selected by teachers to attend because they were deemed to be in need of extra support. The schools provided food and drink at the start of the session, and students also had the opportunity to relax. The schools varied in the number of children who participated in the school homework club; one school had a maximum of 14 students, and another accommodated 40 in two groups of 20.

And then you found…from your own observations you say that there probably are other areas where there might be a bit of a gap between what your practice is and their practice. I just noticed from correcting that especially Irish that it wasn't…the kid hadn't written it, I know the helper was trying to help the child do their homework   (School 4, teacher 2, primary)

As well as concerns about practices in the homework clubs, a minority of teachers perceived areas of overlap between school and homework club programmes. These related in particular to programmes supporting children through the transition to secondary school. While these issues have been raised by a minority of teachers it is an important to consider these perspectives in terms of best practice in teaching and learning and the need for complementary practices. This may also contribute to improving linkages between the school and community homework clubs.

Benefits of OST activities

When asked about what they saw as benefits for children from involvement in out of school time activities all teachers reported that children's involvement was positive. These positive benefits were illustrated in multi-faceted ways that included increased self-esteem and confidence, the physical and social support of a place to do homework, and keeping children safe and away from harmful activities.

Teachers considered that involvement in out of school activities built up confidence and self-esteem which helped children in the classroom. They suggested that skills developed through children's involvement in arts, drama and dance activities transferred well into the school setting (most notably in primary school). It was also noted that activities that led to performances or competitions were particularly beneficial because they gave children the experience of success:

> Well, I think it can, because I think if they achieve in one area their self-esteem is enhanced. They get used to the idea of setting goals. To excel at anything is not easy, it's about training, it's about sticking with it, it's about not quitting when you're not having a good game or day or week or whatever. So, what I would notice is that a lot of our girls who go onto third level are students who aren't, it's not that they're only academic, they seem to be on the debating team, they captain a sports team, they're on the Green Schools Committee, they get stuck into lots of different things. Obviously, then it would appear that all of that together leads them to think that 'well, I'm an achiever, I can do things'. (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

> Yeah, I think so because a lot of those dance clubs they really improve self-esteem and you know that all links into their ability then, their performance in school or…they bring in their medal when they win a competition, you know. (School 4, teacher 2, primary)

> Oh the arts and crafts and the Ark have been working down a fair bit in Fatima over the years, yea I think all those kind of things, anything that they engage in you know like that it builds the self confidence, if they are succeeding in something or they perceive success…again thinking back to being a teacher in the classroom when children don't have confidence, they are afraid to try something in case they

get it wrong whereas confident children don't care, like they will just do it and it won't bother them. Em…I think all those kind of activities that they would be involved in helps to build confidence in themselves because they and it is their own valuation of how they do, they value what they do themselves, their activities and their parades. It also means they are not hanging around and getting into trouble, that is the other side of it you know if they are engaged in worthwhile activities. (School 3, HSCL, primary).

Teachers also spoke about the benefits of children's involvement in homework clubs, both school and community-based. Notwithstanding the findings reported above that showed a minority of teachers with concerns about the approach of the homework clubs, all teachers acknowledged that having a supportive place to do homework was beneficial for children. In particular, this was felt to be the case for children who required extra support and/or did not have a home environment conducive to study:

> Well, it's a routine. They're at a table and a chair. They may not have that at home. They have somewhere to do their homework. If they need help, they'll get it. There is somebody there. They're guaranteed that someone will help them with their homework. They have access to pencils, parers and erasers and they'd have the materials, which they invariably manage to lose in the big black hole which is their school bag. So, I think mainly they have somewhere to sit down and someone is going to help them with it, and it's routine. It's warm, quiet and properly lit.

> Interviewer: It's a safe place

> A safe, comfortable place to do homework and then they can go home. Homework becomes such a fiasco with a lot of parents and it's just done and that's the end of it (School 5, teacher, primary)

> I suppose it takes the pressure off at home then as well because they don't have to sit down for that…and we would just ask for every night for their reading and spelling and tables…kind of more oral work would be done at home (School 4, teacher, primary)

Although teachers commonly spoke about OST activities in terms of boosting children's confidence and self-esteem, for some teachers there was a recognition that extracurricular activities also kept children away from potentially harmful situations in the area:

> Oh definitely, because as what is the word, I suppose they are not getting involved in activities that they could be in the area because there are a lot of things going on in the area, they could be very much swayed by friends and peers, so if they are in sports…sports is definitely, I think its brilliant, it doesn't have to be a homework club but even if they are in sports teams they have an interest in something.. . . . . it's brilliant because it keeps them away from…you know any of the things that might be going on (School 1, teacher, secondary)

I think it is really important because it keeps them off the street and you know we have so many problems in Ireland, drink and drugs and I think…the government talks about closing down pubs early and stuff and you know the base, having rehab centres and stuff for people who are addicted to drugs, but I think you really need to start at primary level and give the kids different interests and then they won't go down the road of drugs and stuff which is a big temptation in this area obviously because they see it…so at least if they have other interests they can pursue those interests and that can stimulate them rather than getting stimulation from you know…drugs and alcohol and stuff, I think that is important. (School 3, teacher, primary)

But sure I mean it is wonderful, I was just looking at one child there who was…looking at his survey and the amount of activity he does is wonderful because what they do need is, they need to be kept off the streets because down around places like Dolphin House and that, they come out their front door and they are literally on the street. And I think it is great for them to be going somewhere that they are not going to be hanging around their block so I mean it is wonderful that kids get involved for confidence and for socialising it is very beneficial, it has to be. (School 7, teacher, primary)

Oh yeah, definitely, after school activities, anywhere where they're not just sitting down staring at a television and they're not on the streets up to no good. (School 5, teacher, primary)

Clearly teachers were positively disposed to OST activities and could see the range of benefits that involvement in these activities brought to children and to the community. While teachers have reported a wide range of benefits for children through participation in OST activities, notably in terms of developing confidence and self-esteem, teachers did not make explicit connections between OST activities and educational attainment.

Barriers to educational attainment

Parents' experience of education

We asked teachers what they considered to be the key factors that influenced the educational outcomes of the children served by the school. Parents were regarded as the key influencing factor by the majority of teachers. In discussion of parental factors, teachers acknowledged sympathetically that some parents' negative experiences of school could impact negatively on their child's educational experience in a variety of ways. Parents' negative experiences of education could contribute to not placing value on the school learning environment. In addition, teachers felt that some parents may have a fear of engaging with the school, or individual teachers because of past negative experiences or their own educational limitations:

Just the thing with the literacy and the numeracy and sometimes parents attitude to school, and sometimes they just can't really help them because they just don't have the skills to do that and like when I had the meeting at the start of the year I had three parents who showed up (School 4, teacher 2, primary)

I suppose low achievement by parents; low achievement within the family, poor attendance would be a big thing. Just so much comes back to the parents, a lack of interest on the part of parents. I suppose the quality of teaching is a big one (School 5, teacher, primary)

. . . because a lot of parents in the area, those who have kids in the school, are themselves from the inner city, they've had bad experiences of their own education so they see schools as being a place where they got beaten or wherever when they were in school. So they have a real negative view of schools. They're places of authority. So, they're very reluctant to come in (School 2, HSCL, secondary).

. . . you'd often have a lot of parents who have issues with their own educational abilities and they might be quite embarrassed about that, and the fact that they can't help their kids with their homework because their homework would be superior to the levels that they achieved you know. A lot of them would have dropped out when they were 12 and 13 you know, spent most of their primary school on the hop from school. So, there's that issue too, it would be quite big. (School 2, HSCL, secondary).

Low expectations

For some teachers low expectations about education on a number of levels contributed to poor educational outcomes for children served by the school. Low expectations were observed by teachers at a parental level, within children themselves, and in the wider community.

Three teachers considered that some parents had low expectations for their children's education and this impacted upon children's own expectations of education. One teacher illustrated their view with an example of a child with a poor attendance record. For this teacher such absences occurred because parents allowed their children to stay at home for 'small enough reasons':

Well obviously they all care for their children but you know like I have one child who has missed 23 days so far and if you talk to the parents you know like it's well she hurt her leg, or you know she did this, and you can't fight with the parent and say well I know she hurt her leg but she needs to be in school, I mean if that is what the parents are saying…

I feel as well a lot of them are kept home for small enough reasons, you know a pain in my tummy or you know, and I think that carries through into later life with the job you know I just have a pain so I think I will stay at home.

Yea so then when you are doing anything in school there is no sense of completion because "Oh I was missing for that…I don't have that I wasn't' here" and it is really frustrating because you kind of feel like when you are putting up kids work you have three quarters or half of the class.

And like she is very happy when she is in school, but it is just if her foot is sore she is allowed to stay home, that comes from the parents that it is being allowed, it is like they don't rate school highly enough to send her (School, 4, teacher 2, primary)

Low expectations for education were also deemed to be accepted by young people themselves and supported in the wider community. In this teacher's view, schools were able to offer many options but still some young people opted out and it was felt that this was tolerated in the community:

I'm very upset that children from Fatima and from some other areas don't go the distance. I think we all need to pull together to keep them in school. I know school doesn't suit everybody but we have the Junior Cert Schools Programme to help the junior cycle students. We have Transition Year and we have Leaving Cert Applied. I really think it's a very rare student that couldn't find advancement or satisfaction in some of those programmes. Unfortunately, girls who attend from Fatima have in the past drifted out of school before their Junior Cert or just after their Junior Cert. There seems to be a community attitude that that's ok and that they just don't like school or that school doesn't facilitate them enough. It breaks my heart when I go down around the new streets there and meet the girls that left our school 2 and 3 years ago, and they're still standing in their jim jams at 2pm, and they have not gone to Youthreach or they tried it for a week and it didn't suit them, or they tried this that and the other various community based things, and effectively they have no qualification. Some of those girls I have spoken to, most of them in fact were capable of achieving a Leaving Cert. (School 6, HSCL, secondary)

In a similar vein the following secondary school teacher spoke about how there was a general acceptance among some young boys about not achieving beyond a certain level. Such a view was mediated by a lack of maturity, and family attitudes about schooling and employment:

I would think for this area here and I don't think it is particularly. I would have a sense from listening to the lads over the years, the lads will do ok, but it is ok. Usually with the lads here and we encourage the lads, beg, steal or borrow to get them into third level. Now it could be a PLC course, it could be that we get the scholarships into Griffith college and places like that, we would have a few lads who would pick up apprenticeships but by and large we would encourage the lads to take another year because we don't have a transition year, so they are a bit young leaving us. Some of them would just be into seventeen or a few sixteen. So by and large that is a problem…that is a weakness because the lads need that extra bit of maturity. They don't get that here so if we are getting them into a third level college it does two things, they do get the sense that they have made the step into the world of business or study, whatever. They do have to grow up a bit, they also now have to make new friendships and new relationships. Whereas in the school they have had four or five years to develop that so they get a little bit smug in their relationships, do you know what I mean? So we would find the lads would say, I am ok I am not the best and I am not the worst, so I am ok and therefore there is no great push on them to do really well in the leaving cert, now you get a small

percentage would, but the bulk of them will be quite content to say, yeah, they will do one or two foundation courses, not that they are not capable of doing it but it is just that they feel at least if I get a C in foundation well it is still a C, do you know what I mean? So as such they manage that and it takes that extra year for the guys to say 'well I know I could', and you will hear them dropping out and repeating the leaving cert or moving on from a PLC to a Certificate and Diploma course.(School 1, teacher 2, secondary)

Nevertheless, this teacher acknowledged that educational expectations were changing for both the young people and their families. These were linked to maturity as well as structural changes within the school that supported young people:

> It is and it is not only maturity for them but it is also maturity for their family because you will find the year out from school because the routine has been broken and all of us…I mean to say choices have to be made and families would make positive choices, where before they will look around and say well should I push myself? So it is, and I mean to say, it is a while since I heard it but I do remember going back eight or nine years when one lad said it was the neighbours were saying 'your mum has looked after you for five years now in secondary school, isn't it time you started to bring in money'.

> Do you know what I mean, there was expectation there that that's it now you are on your tod and if you are going to go to college at that stage it is up to you, so for that reason we would try and the school here would try and give, I think it is about 15…20 something like that, so that a high proportion of the lads who do leaving cert would get some kind of funding to keep them in whatever learning they are doing and the small print is that they actually don't have to go working while they get themselves settled into the course (School 1, teacher 2, secondary)

Teachers commonly reflected on the multi-faceted nature of parental influence on children's educational outcomes. However, among a minority of parents teachers reported that serious negative parental influences related to drug and alcohol addiction contributed to poor educational outcomes among some children. The following excerpts illustrate how children of 'chaotic' parents fare in terms of school attendance, and the impact that this has upon their learning:

> As the Home School Liaison, I could give you an example of two children in this school whose mother and father are active drug users so they are not on any maintenance programmes, so they are foraging for their fix and the lifestyle of those children is absolutely chaotic. I mean we have had numerous families where the children would be neglected due to addiction issues and em…mostly addiction to tell you the truth it could be either alcohol or drugs.

> They would but the sporadic nature of em…the chaos in their lives mean that they might turn up the odd day and then other days they are not turning up for these things, no more than school, if their attendance is bad they are going to lose out on the foundation blocks of you know education, and when there is chaos in families attendance usually is bad. I would have to say it is a very, very small number, our attendance would usually work out about 93/94% but it is just that those particular

families would be particularly vulnerable. They are the ones that are often out and failing so there are factors like that, evictions, maybe due to addiction problems that kind of thing. (School 3, HSCL, Primary)

The social and physical environment

Two teachers considered that the physical and social environment of the area impacted on the educational outcomes for children served by the school. These teachers described a physical environment that was spatially restrictive and visually unappealing:

> . . . you know and I think it would be very difficult to live in a place like Dolphin house where you are so limited space-wise, you know I just think it's hard you know for them because everyone is on top of each other. Yea and obviously there is a community spirit there, you have that, but there is no sense of personal space and I just find….especially for the kids in the summer holidays and Fatima seems to be brilliant for putting things on there, but obviously if it's a rainy day they are just stuck inside in this flat and just…like I know in school we have once a month we have a video treat and last year by the end of the year none of them wanted the video they want to do things. You think normally a child would love to watch a video in school time but they would rather do something because they do that all the time at home. (School 4, teacher 2, primary)

As well as problems in the physical environment the following teacher considered that children's educational outcomes were negatively affected by stressors in the social environment. These were associated with drug usage and violence:

> I suppose negatively their environment, they live in a concrete environment, it is devoid of animals, grass, flowers, colour, landscapes of any sort. They are straight out their door they are into concrete, clothes lines…I could be down there doing home visits and there is drugs being dealt down there and so I think that is a huge problem for them as well. Then there is a lot of sadness in their lives, some of their families are in jail for various reasons, there is single parents mothers, no men as role models in their lives, like they are great children to be able to get up and come to school and their parents, I know they are getting a lot of financial support and they do get a lot of support from within the community but at the end of the day they have their children twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and a lot of the time the children are not getting that kind of calm attention that those of us who are lucky enough to have the two parents in the house or if that is not the case there is still a happy relationship between partners that would be separated but you have children coming in, I see children coming in here, now not a lot of them, but they are anxious, they are full of anxiety, worrying, they see a lot at home like there is violence in some families, there is a problem then in other families where the younger child has maybe four or five older brothers so it is as if the child has four or five fathers and they are all bossing him around and the house is filled with aggression loudness as it can be with males and this transfers into the classroom as well, this physicality (School 7, HSCL, primary)

School factors

While parental factors dominated teachers' responses to the question about poor educational outcomes, two teachers suggested that the school was also a factor that could impact positively or negatively on children's educational outcomes, particularly in its approaches to teaching and learning:

> I suppose then as well, I think it is good for them to do a lot of practical work as well rather than not just rote learning, it is the way you teach as well I suppose. Em…if you are doing activities that they are interested in and also teaching them to think for themselves, that is important. I think it is important that they are able to come up with their own opinions not just read a book and take someone else's opinion as well. (School 4, teacher primary)

> Quality of teaching and teacher expectations. I think teachers need to aim high as well, see the big picture. Just getting into trouble as well, hanging around with the wrong crowds after school. In that sense, when they're going to clubs, letting them be children and exposure to a range of trips, the zoo, museums, the art gallery. I mean schools can only do so much in the day. The clubs do have a huge input in that. It's having positive experiences at school. Making school somewhere they want to be and in the most part, primary schools now are. They are quite positive places. Very little actually comes down to academic ability, I don't think that's the main thing because there's definitely bright children in my class who are not achieving. So, I think, it's external factors and in the school as well. I think bad teaching is a disaster for a child, especially in these areas. Parental interest would be huge again. (School, 5, teacher, primary)

Poverty and complexity

Although teachers largely focused on parental factors as contributing to poor educational outcomes for children, it is clear from teachers' accounts that parental factors are multi-dimensional and mediated by a number of other factors. For two teachers, although they recognised the complexity of the issues of educational disadvantage, poverty was central to the problem:

> All the basic things you know. You'd find families would be very quick to splash out money they don't have on Holy Communions and Baptisms, and borrow up to their eyeballs and pay off them. We have a lot of cases now of sons getting caught with drugs by the guards and parents have to borrow money from credit unions and loan sharks to pay them off, that kind of jazz. Poverty would be a big one. There is a huge difference between what you find here in this community and in a school 3 miles up the road, . . . up in Templeogue, you know, a massive difference. (School, 2 HSCL, secondary)

Similarly, poverty was a factor in the account of the following teacher. The complexity of the issue was illustrated by highlighting that some families demonstrated resilience in the face of challenging circumstances:

Well I suppose just to give an illustration, imagine going in to Theresa's gardens and you have got one balcony and you have two families on that balcony, and those kids still have to walk past the drug dealers or the drugs in the morning and the dirt and the hassles, and yet one family or one student is able to come in on time, do her work and get on with life and be polite and whatever else and manage to achieve to the best of their ability and yet on the other side of the balcony is someone else who just couldn't. Their environment is exactly the same, their living conditions are exactly the same and yet one family manages to pull it together and the other doesn't and I suppose that is related to poverty and all the alcohol drugs misuse, could be bereavement, could be how many other factors are involved. (School 8, teacher 1, secondary).

Relationships with parents

The previous section has shown that teachers regard parents as a key influencing factor that can contribute to poor educational outcomes in children. Thus it is important to explore the nature of the relationship between schools and parents. To this end we asked teachers about their relationships with parents and the extent to which parents were involved in the school. Responses to this question revealed that, as might be expected, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers were involved with parents on a day-to-day basis. Much of this involvement centred on working with parents on issues of difficulty concerning their child's relationship with the school. Although HSCL teachers acknowledged that children with difficulties lived in families that experienced challenging circumstances, they were keen to point out that parents were positively disposed to the HSCL, and to the school. The following excerpt is a response to the question about influences on educational outcomes. Unlike most of the other teachers interviewed this HSCL teacher's response illustrated the positive and supporting influence of parents, but this was perhaps mediated by the relationship with the HSCL:

Parents are a big influence as well, I will tell you one thing from being in this school is, parents are great in this school, they are so good. If we have a problem with any student or if there is anything that we're not happy with, I would be on the phone three or four times a day already but they are always…the parents support the school one hundred per cent, I have never ever come across a parent that doesn't support what we say. If I say he did such you know he was in trouble and such they would be up to the school straight away, you could ring them they are up and we have a meeting any time if they are suspended or they are even on detention or if they get a ticket at all I would ring because I am the class tutor and they would always support you, and that makes a big difference if the parents are supportive, it makes a big difference to that child (School 1, teacher, secondary).

Other HSCL teachers echoed that their primary role was one of building positive relationships with parents. The HSCL teacher acted as a bridge between the world of the school and the community. As one HSCL described her job:

> Because I built up a relationship with her I would call up if there was a bit of trouble but if I was up in the estate I would always call in if there was no trouble and say I just came for another cup of tea so it is just about building up relationships and letting them see that the school supports the child and we support the parent and just come on board and you know we always had a good working relationship with the parents (School 7, HSCL, primary)

A similar role was described by teachers with a role in the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) who reported that their relationships with parents were positive. Teachers in the JCSP appeared to have a clear remit to liaise with parents about their child's progress in the programme:

> Well doing my job that I do, the JCSP, it's great because it's more positive, it's not a phone call with bad news, it's good news, he's doing really well, he's exceeding his targets today and it's great

> Interviewer: So you would make that phone call yourself?

> Oh definitely, like, the JCSP initiative… they send home Christmas cards every year to say the student is doing really well, there is a lot of positive things going on like we bring them to the zoo every year, a lot of teachers bringing them on a lot of trips as their reward for good behaviour, so it is very positive and the parents are positive. The parent-teacher meetings last week…great turnout, brilliant.

> Interviewer: Really

> The whole second year of parents most of them came and a lot of people left with happy faces (School 1, teacher, secondary)

Another teacher spoke also of positive relationships and the involvement of the parents of children in the JCSP. There was a realisation on the part of the teachers involved that many of these parents were hard to reach because of negative educational experiences in the past. The idea was to get the parents into the school to participate in enjoyable activities with their children rather than offering them more courses which were in plentiful supply in the community:

> Yea I suppose this year to give you an example, we set up a list of events that we want to encourage parents to come in to events in the school but rather than making them big one off just come in for the awards. We are trying to get them in to little things just so they can see their children in school and in class, so last term last year we set up a Christmas cookery class so the parents of the first year JCSP class were invited in – the pictures are on the wall behind you – where the parents or guardians were invited in to join their children making a Christmas log and it was a double cookery class just before lunch on a Monday, and they could take their cakes home after and so on…it was lovely, the adults could come in and do something with their children in the cookery class, see the school at work so to speak and it was great. The teacher herself really enjoyed it. The class loved having their family there…..exactly and the aim is to get people in to join with their kids or to promote a positive experience of education in the school and so on, so em…we just felt by small steps…and positive ones you know if you try to get someone to sign up to a

six week course it can be daunting, it is very hard to commit to that, whereas just a one off and if they enjoy it they are probably more likely to come back to something else and it is actually engaging with their kids (School 8, HSCL secondary)

While positive relationships with parents were revealed by teachers with a brief of HSCL or JCSP, both of which are explicit in terms of linking with parents, other teachers reported difficulties with involving parents in school life generally, particularly in relation to educational matters:

> Well it depends…one of the teachers is organising a cake sale next Wednesday so some of the parents would come in to give her a hand. If it is educational they would steer away from it particularly because we are a senior school and they think everything would be too hard for them.
>
> Interviewer: Right
>
> So for the maths for fun games for particularly fourth fifth and sixth, I would have trained sixth class and they would show fifth class with me and so on which is very good for them because it is reinforcing the concepts in the maths games. But that is the way we would work but parents have a difficulty coming in around educational issues still.
>
> Interviewer: And is there any way around that or how do you think that could be changed?
>
> Well you would have a certain number of parents that are interested in doing things, they are the more confident parents in the school and they will always be involved. I don't know any way around it because God, if I did I would have no difficulty really, you can't force them to come in and you can't make them feel bad about not coming in. My priority would be to get them to have a positive attitude to school and to reinforce the importance of education in their children's lives. (School 7, HSCL, Primary)

In one teacher's view, events such as confirmation generated greater parental interest than parent teacher meetings. Such a view was also held by another teacher, but in the context of how parents saw such events as very important and would go to financial extremes beyond their means. While in general teachers remarked on recent improved attendance of parents at parent teacher meetings, there was an acknowledgement that outside of these, parental involvement in other school events or courses still proved difficult. While some teachers perceived that a barrier to parental involvement in the school setting derives from parents own experiences of education, other barriers exist in terms of schools competing with courses offered for parents in the community. In the following quote a HSCL teacher notes that parent attendance at school meetings has improved but there is a difficulty in engaging parents in programmes offered by the school because they are attending courses in the community:

> I suppose the Department of Education is trying to be more parent friendly. We now have parent teacher meetings for example that have to be half in school time and half outside school time. So the one we had there last week went onto 6.15pm.

So, there is some flexibility, and that's why I'm there as well, so that I can go out outside of the normal parent teacher meeting times to see them. But some of them, well actually quite a number of them do have part-time jobs where they're doing courses. So, they can be hard to reach. Also, there is some overlap there. Home School offers courses as well, we offer free courses based in our local schools and you can do salsa, ECDL and we have an ESOL class because we have an increasing number now of international students and parents, so we're offering English as a second language to those parents. So, again, we have things going on but Fatima parents tend not to get involved as much as others and again I think that's because there's various things going on down there for them. (School 6, Home School Liaison teacher, secondary)

As noted above, School 8 has similarly acknowledged that it is difficult to attract parents to courses in the school because there is so much on offer in the community. Nonetheless, this school has, albeit in the case of the JCSP, tried alternative pathways that are aimed at parental engagement in their child's education through shared parent-child enrichment activities.

Schools also find that when courses are offered to parents it can be difficult to get people enrolled. A certain amount of 'cajoling' takes place and the numbers are often small. As the following HSCL teacher remarks, although the numbers involved in the parenting course are small, there is a hope of spreading the word among other parents:

Interviewer: Really, so that is just because they have engaged with this programme?

Yea and they are looking at things from a different perspective and they are learning.

Interviewer: And what kind of response do you get when you offer a programme like this?

Oh not great, there is a fair bit of cajoling going on but I would hope that if these parents find it successful that their story might encourage other parents. (School, 3, HSCL, Primary)

While difficulties are encountered by schools in attracting parents to the school-run courses for parents, some schools report that courses tend to attract the same groups. In one school the HSCL teacher reflected that she relied on the same small group of parents who have worked with her on maths activities, paired reading and extracurricular activities, and there was concern about where the support would come from when these parents no longer had children in the school:

I am going swimming and they come swimming with me, they take the money for after school soccer that I organise here, they em, like they are virtually the unpaid workers in the school, really they are wonderful, that is kind of a tradition in this school. Now they would have done the 'maths for fun' activities with me as well and they would have done the paired reading as well.

Interviewer: So is it the same group of parents?

So with the result that this year, they are here since their children came in here in second so they have five years done and so we're going to be in dire straits next year, their children will be gone. In fact one parent stayed on her child went last year (School 7. HSCL, primary)

Teachers also acknowledged that it was easier to engage with parents in the early years of primary school compared to the later years of primary school and secondary school. Much of the contact in the early years came from parents picking up and dropping off children from school, but as children grew older there was lesser contact with parents:

In this school em… it is poor enough because the children are older and they… the parents are working and like for example in second class for paired reading I got one mammy. Now the reason for that is that a lot of them are working and they don't come to school with the children either in the morning, so you have a problem there where they just won't come. In the (name of another school) because it starts with early start and goes right up to sixth, there is, like in the infant class this year I have got a good response, I have got three. A good response is three parents out of there is seventeen in each class up there. Senior infants then I have one class and I could only get one, so it varies, it depends on the parents on the day of each class but they are more eager to respond to the junior school

Interviewer: You mentioned parents, in what way does the school link in with parents?

Well, parent teacher meetings, out at the gate, parents would be called in a lot, any issues at all they would be called in, notes in homework diaries, just standard things really.

Interviewer: Do parents get involved much in the school?

They're around a lot because they all live across the road. So, they are in and out an awful lot, but not so much involved, we don't have a parent's association. We tried setting one up a couple of years back, but it just didn't work, there was just no interest in it, so that would be something that I would like to see developed in the school. (School 5, primary, teacher)

This is my first year of fifth class. But em…when you have the junior end you see the parents every day because they come to collect the children but the children go home on their own a lot in the senior end, so you don't see the parents. So, at the start of the year I met one parent because she came in to tell me an issue she had with her child and another child in the class, so I think that is the only time that I met a parent prior to the parent teacher meetings but I would always be open to meeting them if they want to come in, but they don't seem to. (School 3, teacher, primary)

Children's attitudes to school

We asked teachers for their views on children's feelings about school. Overall in both the primary and secondary schools teachers presented a positive image of children as happy at school and having good relationships with teachers. In the following excerpt this teacher suggests that the structure and routine of school is something that keeps children happy:

> Fine yeah. I mean I've had them for two years now so we have our moments, but in general we do get on well. I think a lot of them are more than happy to come back after a week off. They miss their friends, the routine, the security of it. They actually do seem quite happy. Again, unless they do something with clubs, for the most part they'll do nothing for their week off. It must be boring. It's not stimulating at all. (School 5, teacher, primary)

Similarly, a teacher at secondary school who supported students in the Junior Certificate Schools Programme considered that students were happy to have the calm and structure that the school programme offered them:

> They love being in school, even though they tell you but it's normality for them, it's just they come in and they know exactly what is going to happen, there is no change, and you will even notice when a teacher is out there is chaos in the classroom because it's different and they don't like different, they like everything to be the same. They like coming in at the same time and leaving at the same time and sometimes you would find some of them don't mind doing detention because they'd rather stay than go home.

> Interviewer: And would there…what kind of relationship would they have with the teachers, how would you describe it?

> They have a great relationship with the teachers, every day go down the corridor and they'll say hiya miss, how's it going and they'll always hello to you, I couldn't say that there is major problems at all, the discipline here is brilliant

> I would think that by and large, the majority… I would say probably about 95% feel that school is not a bad place to be. There are those at that stage as I say definitely second year, third year, fifth year it becomes a bit of a chore, that is true but the others seem to manage school and get on with school like school and the fact that they meet their friends so they can do that (School 1, teacher 2, secondary)

Teachers' reflections on children's attitudes to school reveal that the structure and routine of the school environment embedded within an atmosphere of mutual respect generates a positive disposition to school among children.

Summary: teacher interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 teachers in eight schools in the Rialto area. The aim of these interviews was to gain teacher perspectives on a number of areas related to out of school time activities. Specifically, each interview explored: teacher knowledge about children's after school activities; knowledge of, and linkages with homework clubs; teachers' views on the benefits of OST activities; perspectives on factors that influence educational outcomes for the children in their schools; their relationships with parents, and views on children's attitudes to school.

Teachers had some awareness of the types of after school activities in which children were involved. Teacher reports of these activities highlight that children are involved in gender-based activities; boys mainly played soccer or GAA, and girls were involved in dance.

With the exception of one school, teachers did not display any detailed knowledge of the operation of the homework clubs or of the children who attended. Where there was detailed knowledge this arose as a result of problems at school with individual students. In general no formal linkages with schools and homework clubs were reported. Teachers indicated that they would welcome such linkages; however this needs to be considered in the context that for some secondary schools, attendance by secondary school students is reported to be minimal.

Although teachers did not appear to have detailed knowledge of the operation of the homework club, a minority expressed some difficulties with the homework clubs' approach to doing homework. Teachers suggested that there was a need for the school and homework clubs to complement each other. This issue also arose because some teachers perceived an overlap between programmes offered by the school and the homework clubs, particularly programmes related to the transition from primary to secondary school.

Teachers see a wide range of benefits for children who participate in OST activities. The benefits that teachers describe relate mainly to children's social and psychological development. Teachers did not directly associate children's participation in OST with improvements in educational outcomes.

While teachers consider that the factors that affect educational outcomes for children are multifaceted, they see parental influence as central. Parents who have had a negative educational experience themselves impact on their children's education in various ways: low levels of engagement with school, low expectations for education, low expectations for their children. Low expectations among young people themselves and the wider community were also viewed by teachers as being a barrier to educational attainment. Teachers see other contributory factors that impact on educational outcomes as the social and physical environment, and poverty.

Teachers with a role of HSCL or within the JCSP describe very positive relationships with parents. Other teachers report difficulties with engaging parents in educational matters. This is compounded in some schools by the extent of community-based educational programmes and activities for parents.

Teachers portray a similarly positive picture of children at school. They feel that children are happy to be at school and have good relationships with teachers. Structure, routine, and mutual respect are considered to contribute to the formation of positive relationships.

Chapter 10 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings from the research. It draws together key results and provides interpretative commentary that refers where appropriate to relevant published research. The study had three main aims:

First, to compile data on various aspects of the well-being of young people who participate in OST activities provided by the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) and in the wider area. Second, to obtain the views of various stakeholders involved in the provision of OST activities, including young people, parents, OST practitioners, and teachers in local schools. Third, to contribute to the development of an evaluation plan for the next phase of the RLC project.

These research aims were addressed with a mixed methods research design. We drew upon a range of quantitative and qualitative methods that included structured quantitative surveys and observation, qualitative interviews and focus groups, documentary review and consultation.

The extent to which there is agreement or difference of opinion on the areas examined with the different stakeholders will also be explored here. In the final section, we outline some issues for consideration that draw on key aspects of the research and literature and have relevance for the future development of the RLC. The key findings are grouped under the following themes, and within each a number of sub-themes have been identified:

Theme 1: School attendance, literacy, and educational attainment

- School attendance

- Literacy and numeracy levels

- Learning support

Theme 2: Barriers to educational attainment

- Parental influence

- Low expectations

- The education system

Theme 3: Aspects of young people's participation in OST activities

- Nature of participation

- Benefits of participation

- Location of homework club - local community or school

- Support practices in homework clubs

Theme 4: Relationships

- Young people's relationships with OST staff in homework clubs
- Young people's relationships with teachers
- Young people's relationships with peers
- Parents' relationships with OST staff and child's school

Theme 5: Links between OST activities and schools

Theme 1: School attendance, literacy and educational attainment

School attendance

Information on young people's school attendance was gathered from schools for the full academic year (2007/8) and the current school year (2008/9) up to the time of data collection. A relatively high rate of absenteeism was found among primary and secondary students. In the last school year (2007/8), primary school students missed an average of 9% of school days compared to the national rate of 6%. Similarly, secondary school students missed an average of 13% of school days in the current school year (2008/9) up to the time of data collection, compared to 8% nationally. Furthermore, almost 3 out of 10 young people were found to have a seriously high rate of absence from school (officially defined as 20 days or more). There were some indications that young people in the study group were more likely to have serious rates of absence from school than the comparison group, but these differences were not statistically significant.

All of the study schools were designated as disadvantaged schools. These results are comparable to national rates of school absence for students in disadvantaged schools, and reflect research that shows that schools that cater for disadvantaged students have lower annual attendance rates (Weir, 2004). Therefore, the higher rates of school absence for young people in this study are not necessarily unexpected.

Nevertheless, the results indicate that absence from school is an issue of concern for both the study and comparison groups. This should also be considered in light of research that shows a link between school absence and mothers' level of education. A significant proportion of mothers in the parent survey were found to have an incomplete secondary education. National school absence data shows higher rates of school absence for children with mothers who have only completed primary education (McCoy et al., 2007).

It is well-established that school absence has a serious negative impact on early school leaving and on future life chances (Morris & Rutt, 2004).

Literacy and numeracy levels

Primary

The analysis of primary school students' results in standardised literacy and numeracy tests found lower levels of literacy in both reading and numeracy than the national student population. While they were just as likely to score 'average' on reading tests they were overrepresented in the 'below average' category and underrepresented in the 'above average' category than would be expected for the national population. With respect to numeracy, young people were less likely to score 'average' than the national population, while also being overrepresented in the 'below average' and underrepresented in the 'above average' categories.[85] Furthermore, young people in the study group were significantly more likely to score 'below average' in numeracy tests than the comparison group.

Secondary

The analysis shows relatively low literacy levels amongst secondary school students. The majority had a reading age below their chronological age, the average being 2.3 years below. Over 8 out of 10 had below average literacy levels.[86]

Learning support

The findings on learning support provide more evidence on the educational needs of young people in the study. Just over 4 out of 10 young people had received some form of learning support during the school year, and these were more likely to be boys. Almost one third of those in secondary school were taking the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, which is targeted at young people at risk of early school leaving.

Although just under one half of all young people received additional help and support at school, an issue of concern for the remaining young people with poor literacy levels is whether or not their educational needs are being responded to, either through the formal or informal education sector.

Consideration needs to be given to the persistent low levels of literacy and numeracy despite the extent of government supported programmes in schools with DEIS status. In addition, this study has shown that young people are also exposed to a good deal of community educational support and one of the homework clubs ran a literacy programme.

The study found that low levels of literacy among second-level students are associated with educational aspirations. Those in the study group with literacy difficulties were less likely to say that they expected to sit the Leaving Certificate examination compared to those who did not have such literacy difficulties. The research shows the importance of recognising the impact that literacy difficulties can have on lowering young people's expectations for education

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[85] The one exception to this trend was that young people were as likely to score 'well above average' in numeracy tests as the national population.

[86] It was necessary to combine this data as one of the four secondary schools did not provide information on reading age but gave the results of young people's performance in a standardised English test which was sat as part of the school entrance exam.

These results support other Irish research that shows the literacy performance of students in schools designated as disadvantaged continues to fall below those of other pupils (Eivers, Shiel & Short, 2004; Weir & Archer, 2004). Research by Barnardos (2006) found that one third of young people from disadvantaged areas had literacy difficulties and confirms the link between poor literacy and socio-economic status. Overall the findings in relation to school attendance, literacy and numeracy attainment indicate that students in both the study and comparison groups are at risk of poor educational outcomes.

Theme 2: Barriers to educational attainment

The influence of parents

Teachers and OST practitioners held different views about barriers to educational attainment for young people in the area. Many of the teachers believed that parents were the main influence on a child's educational attainment. In particular, where a parent had a negative experience of education, this could prevent them from contacting their child's school and building up a good relationship with their teachers. However, this was not borne out by the parent survey results. In contrast, parents reported very positive attitudes to their child's school. The majority were prepared to approach their child's teachers or school if they deemed it necessary.

Low expectations

Both teachers and OST practitioners highlighted that low expectations could impact on a young person's educational attainment. However, they differed in terms of the nature of these low expectations and who held them. A few teachers expressed the opinion that some parents could have low expectations of their child's education because of their own negative educational experiences. This in turn could impact negatively on the child who is at risk of adjusting their own expectations in line with their parents' views. Furthermore, a few teachers felt that there was an even wider impact where low expectations were accepted by others in the local community. One example given by a few teachers was in relation to school attendance where teachers perceived that there was a general tolerance of low school attendance within the community.

OST practitioners and some parents in the focus group considered that negative stereotypes were held by some education professionals about the educational abilities of some children living in the local community. Such views reflect research that has shown a gulf between the opinions of teachers, parents and teachers on pupil achievement and academic expectations (Eivers et al., 2004). Nevertheless, some parents considered that there had been much improvement in school and community relationships in recent years. In addition, Home School Community Liaison teachers spoke of children in terms of their potential rather than their deficits.

The education system

Certain aspects of the educational system were regarded as barriers to young people's educational attainment. Streaming was an issue identified by some OST practitioners as having a serious impact on young people's educational choices, including their decisions to continue with their education beyond second level. For example, where young people were streamed into ordinary or foundation level subjects for their exams, this was seen as restricting their future educational choices. Receiving additional educational support in school was also identified as an issue that could lower young people's expectations about their capabilities. However, an alternative method for meeting individual educational needs was not advocated.

A few teachers also pointed out that the school environment had an important role to play in young people's educational outcomes and highlighted such factors as the quality of teaching in the school and teachers' expectations. The impact of streaming on students' future subject choices is reported in Irish research. Smyth et al., (2006) examined the experience of students in their second year of secondary school and found that those in lower streamed classes in the junior cycle were unlikely to have access to higher level subjects. This restriction of subject choice also impacts on the possibilities for entry to universities. Lynch (1999) considers this an issue of inequality as working class students are likely to be disproportionately represented in lower stream classes. She points out that children in low streams or bands 'can be seriously curtailed in their higher education options at an early age' (1999: 270).

Theme 3: Young people's participation in OST activities

Nature of young people's participation in OST activities

Young people took part in a variety of activities outside of school time. It was clear that their lives outside school were very busy and a lot of their time and energy was devoted to taking part in OST activities, both school and community based. In relation to participation in after school clubs, e.g. homework clubs and youth clubs, young people in the study group were more likely to have taken part in such an activity during the previous week than those in the comparison group. The provision of OST activities in the local community was deemed to be plentiful for young people living in the area, with several OST practitioners saying that there were many activities available. It was obvious that many young people were making the most of what was on offer to them and getting involved in many different OST activities at school, at the RLC, and at other local organisations.

The findings show that young people have maintained participation in the OST activities over time. For young people who reported that they had taken part in an after school club in the previous week, almost one half reported that they had been attending the same club for more than three years. This was twice as likely for those in the study group (55%) than those in the comparison group (26%). The *frequency* of attendance was found to vary from young person to young person, with some saying that they attended the homework club once or twice a week and others reporting that they went every day. The importance of maintaining young people's participation in OST

activities has been acknowledged as contributing to positive educational outcomes (Mahoney, Cairns & Farmer, 2003; Goerge et al., 2007). Nevertheless, OST staff acknowledged the challenges of sustaining the participation of older groups. Research elsewhere suggests that OST programmes that seek to sustain the participation of older adolescents needs to provide them with meaningful and challenging opportunities that are relevant to their stage of maturity (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005; Chaskin & Baker, 2006).

Benefits of participation in OST activities

All stakeholders broadly agree that young people derive benefits from participation in OST activities, both school and community based. However, differing views emerged on the nature of these benefits. Some stakeholders emphasised educational benefits and others social benefits. Educational and social benefits can be considered as complementary and mutually reinforcing, rather than being viewed in isolation from one another. A wide range of US research confirms that OST activities generate positive outcomes across academic, social/emotional, prevention, health and well-being (Harvard Family Research Project). Furthermore, such benefits may be even greater for young people who experience particular social and economic disadvantage. Most of the discussion in this section is focused specifically on young people's participation in homework clubs.

Educational benefits for young people

The young people in this study primarily attended the homework club to get their homework done for school the next day. They saw this as the main benefit to them from their attendance at the club. There was a sense of fear among most young people of the possible disciplinary repercussions of not having their homework completed, ranging from 'getting a note' to more serious implications including suspension from school. This was echoed by the OST practitioners who talked about the main function of the homework clubs being to support young people to complete their homework and thus avoid feelings of anxiety and stress associated with non-completion of homework. Young people rarely made a direct link between doing their homework and better educational outcomes. They tended to view homework as an immediate task - something that just had to be done. To them, doing homework meant that they avoided getting into trouble at school, as well as not being 'told off' by their parents. There were a few exceptions to this where some young people spoke about how doing homework could contribute to getting a good education and also a good job when they left school. However, the immediate focus for young people was short-term.

While the young people in the focus groups rarely spoke about the longer term educational benefits of attending a homework club, the results from the student survey showed that they perceived that their participation in after school clubs (including homework clubs) had a positive impact on their schoolwork

Parents also noted the importance of homework completion. They felt that that their child's attendance at the club helped their child to get homework done on time. They went beyond talking about short-term educational benefits and spoke of the good habits

developed in terms of getting into a nightly homework routine. OST practitioners saw similar benefits.

Looking at the broader context of educational attainment in the community, a few parents spoke of the general improvements in young people's attainment that had occurred over time. This was attributed in part by them to the homework clubs. It is likely that such improvements are also due to other factors, such as changes in educational provision and support in schools, better links between schools and parents, especially through the Home School Community Liaison Service, and also such policy developments as the DEIS programme which incorporates the School Completion Programme.

Overall, teachers reported that homework clubs (both school and community) provided a supportive environment for young people to do their homework, in particular for those who needed additional help and support. However, they rarely saw a direct link between participation in OST activities and improvements in educational outcomes. Instead, they tended to emphasise the social benefits for young people who took part.

Social benefits for young people

All stakeholders place emphasis on the social benefits from young people's participation in OST activities, particularly in terms of building confidence and self-esteem. The student survey found fairly high levels of self-esteem amongst the young people. This echoes previous research undertaken with children in the Fatima area that similarly found them to have high levels of self-esteem (Children's Research Centre, 2007; Dartington Social Research Centre, 2007). The majority of students were involved in OST activities with almost three quarters, 70%, taking part in general OST activities, while 8 out of 10 participated in an after school club (e.g. homework club, youth club). Parents also highlighted the importance of non-academic activities that were available to their children and saw them as being just as crucial for their social development. In some cases, parents commented that they would not have been able to afford to pay for these activities if they had to do so, e.g. music lessons.

Making a connection between social benefits and improving educational outcomes was most likely to be articulated by OST practitioners. The role that good social skills have for a young person's ability to learn was noted by some OST staff. A few teachers recognised that taking part in OST activities contributed to the development of social skills that could be transferred into the school setting, in particular in primary school, given the nature of the curriculum. Having some experience of achievement was deemed by some OST staff and one teacher as contributing greatly to enhancing young people's self-concept. For those who are not high achievers in a social or academic context, doing well at a particular activity has a positive impact on confidence (Fredericks et al., 2002). This may be the case in the present study. Yet it is important to consider that this confidence, as noted by one OST practitioner remains within the confines of their immediate environment. Furthermore, while confidence and self-esteem appear to be well-developed among this group of young people, they continue to experience serious educational barriers as shown in their school attendance, literacy and numeracy results. Irish research on educational disadvantage (Eivers et al., 2004)

concludes that an over-concentration on self-esteem does not enhance achievement and may indeed be counterproductive.

Benefits for parents

Parents benefited in several ways from their child's participation in local OST activities. Many acknowledged that they found it difficult to help their child with their homework, especially those who had children attending secondary school. Some spoke of negative experiences of education and of leaving school early with no qualifications. Therefore, the homework support that young people received helped to remove pressure from parents to fulfil this role. These findings are supported by two Irish studies which report similar benefits for parents whose children received homework support (Ryan, nd; Hennessy & Donnelly, 2005). Although this was a relief for many parents, it does raise the question of the extent to which parents' role in helping their child with their homework was being taken away and highlights the need to consider ways of assisting parents to be more involved in their child's homework, where this is possible. Reducing parental involvement in their child's education is an issue of concern raised in other research literature, especially for parents who have low educational attainment themselves (e.g. Cosden et al, 2004).

Parents also benefited directly from their child's participation in OST activities. In particular, some parents spoke about the support provided by homework club staff when they were called to the child's school to deal with a problem that had arisen. For parents who had this experience, they appreciated having someone with them who could advocate on their own behalf and for their child.[87] In addition, parents benefited directly from accessing some of the resources in the homework club. This facilitated parents to seek further education courses and employment opportunities, where they may not have otherwise been able to do so.

Benefits for the wider community

Young people's participation in OST activities was deemed by all stakeholders to help keep young people away from harm as well as safeguarding them from becoming involved in risky behaviour. This corresponds with US research, where adolescents, particularly males, who were participating in performing arts activities were found to be less likely to drink alcohol than their peers (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Children also spoke of the safety of the homework club. These findings are important when we consider the locations of each of the homework clubs. While Fatima has undergone extensive physical regeneration the social regeneration is a long-term process and therefore children may still be exposed to anti-social behaviour in the local area. In addition, children in Dolphin await a physical and social regeneration in their community and there is recent evidence of a continuation of the anti-social behaviour and criminality that has plagued the area for decades. Thus the homework clubs may be viewed as protective from and preventive of acts of anti-social behaviour which has obvious benefits for the wider community and young people themselves.

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[87] This was deemed to be a fairly recent development and will be explored in more depth in Theme 5 on building links between OST activities and schools.

Support practices in homework clubs

The nature of support provided to young people to help with homework completion tended to differ between community and school homework clubs. Homework support seemed to be more 'interventionist' in the community homework clubs, where more one-to-one help was given. This contrasted with school homework clubs, where some young people who had gone to a school homework club in the past reported that they had to figure out problems on their own. This difference in the nature of homework support in both settings was supported further by perceptions held amongst a small number of teachers that children received too much help with their homework in their community homework club. This perception was contradicted to some extent by the description of homework support given by some young people, where they said they were encouraged to work out a problem for themselves. In addition, there was evidence that homework club staff supported young people to take an alternative approach to solving a problem so that they could come up with the answer themselves.

The importance of employing complementary methodologies in providing homework support was advocated by teachers. While they acknowledged that homework support does not have to be provided by qualified teachers, they felt that it was important that homework support outside of school did not result in confusion amongst young people.

Theme 4: Relationships

Young people's relationships with staff in homework clubs

The research found highly positive relationships among young people and staff at the homework clubs. The majority of young people agreed that the staff cared about them and listened to them. Many young people spoke about particular staff members with warmth and affection and often referred to them as friends. Similar positive attitudes were found in the student survey findings where 57% of all survey participants said they could confide in the staff of the after school club that they attended – this was higher in the comparison group (75%) than the study group (57%). Further support for this was provided by parents, a few of whom gave examples of particular instances where their child had told a homework club staff member something in confidence before actually telling their parents. This indicates that these young people had built up a certain degree of trust among OST staff members.

Young people's views on relationships with OST staff are supported by their parents. The vast majority of parents agreed that their child got on well with staff in the homework clubs. Several OST practitioners acknowledged the importance of good quality relationships between themselves and young people as being vital to contributing to positive experiences of taking part in OST activities for young people, as well as helping to contribute to young people's continued participation and attendance over time.

Young people's relationships with teachers

As with their attitude to the OST staff, young people's attitudes to their school teachers were also found to be largely positive, with over three quarters agreeing that their teachers cared about them and that they listened to them. However, young people in the comparison group were slightly more positive about their teachers than the study group. In addition, young people in the study group were found to be less likely to have positive attitudes to their teachers compared to OST activity staff. Nevertheless, two thirds of young people in the study group agreed that they could talk to a teacher if something was bothering them, which was a similar result to that for OST staff.

Young people's relationships with peers

In general, the majority of young people reported that they have good friendship networks. Based on the student survey results, 89% of the study group said they had five good friends or more. Similarly, 86% of the study group said that they had a best friend and the overriding opinion amongst young people was that they found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to talk to their best friend(s) about things that were bothering them.

In relation to attending OST activities, friendships were also deemed important, both in terms of enabling young people to spend time with their friends but also providing the opportunity to make new friends. Some young people felt that going to local OST activities gave them an opportunity to make friends with other young people living in their area. This was particularly important where young people reported that they did not get on with some of their peers in the local area. When they found themselves in the homework club environment this gave them a chance to talk and get to know each other. This finding is supported by UK research (Bailey & Thompson, 2008) where young people in a study support programme reported that they had made new friends with children of different ages and from other schools, which in turn increased their confidence in being able to make friends when they found themselves in new situations. Overall the present study shows that young people seemed to get on fairly well with their peers in the OST activity environment. This finding was supported by 97% of parents who agreed that their child got on well with other children in the homework club.

Parents' relationships with OST staff and child's school

Parents reported largely positive relationships with both OST staff members and their child's school teachers. The vast majority were happy to talk to the staff in the homework club that their child attended. Similarly, all parents stated that they felt comfortable talking to their child's teacher, and almost all parents said that they felt comfortable going up to their child's school. These results are contrary to some of the perceptions of OST practitioners in relation to parents' relationships with teachers in their child's school.

Teachers and OST practitioners perceived that relationships between the school and parents were influenced by the past negative educational experiences of some parents and this in turn impacted on children. Some OST practitioners spoke about their role in accompanying parents to their child's school on certain occasions. However, this tended to happen when there was a problem to be resolved with the school and this could contribute to the somewhat negative views held by some OST practitioners about parents' relationships with their child's school.

When we consider parental involvement in school and OST activities, the parent survey found that parents were more likely to say that their child's school gives them opportunities to get involved (78%) compared to the homework club (56%). There was a higher number of 'don't knows' for parental involvement in the homework club. This may indicate that there is a need to facilitate parents to become more involved in their child's OST programme. US research indicates that a feature of high-performing after-school programmes is that they have regular communication with families and provide them with support services (Birmingham et al., 2005). Children benefit when their parents are involved in OST activities as they are more likely to help with homework and attend after school events that non-involved parents (Dynarski et al., 2001). Furthermore, this should be considered in the context that the Home School Community Liaison Service has a specific remit of supporting parental involvement in their child's education in the home (Archer & Weir, 2004) and there would appear to be merit in considering how homework clubs can work with the Home School Community Liaison Service towards greater involvement of parents.

Theme 5: Links between OST activities and schools

We found that established links between OST practitioners and local schools were largely underdeveloped. Most teachers had a general awareness of the community-based OST activities but rarely spoke of direct contact with OST practitioners. One of the eight schools was an exception to this general trend. A few teachers said that they would not have known which children in their class attended the homework clubs unless they had been told by the children themselves. Although some parents reported increased contact between OST practitioners and schools over recent years, this tended to be as a response to a difficulty that a young person may be experiencing at school. An OST staff member might be involved by attending a meeting at the school to provide parental support. No other examples were given by any of the stakeholders where OST practitioners and schools came together jointly to consider how best to meet the educational needs of the child, except in crisis or problem situations.

Some teachers identified a degree of overlap in the services provided by both the OST services and schools. For example, one teacher noted that a programme to ease young people's transition between primary and secondary school was provided by both the school and a local OST programme, which was considered as an unnecessary duplication in terms of effort and allocation of resources. To a large extent the community OST services and the schools work towards common goals – for example the aims of the School Completion Programme mirror those of the RLC and techniques such as student profiles that are used in the Junior Certificate School Programme are quite similar to those proposed by the RLC. These findings support the research on effective OST service provision that calls for a joined up approach to educational

provision that involves partnerships of families, schools and OST providers working towards alignment (Pitman et al., 2004; Reisner et al., 2007; Downes & Maunsell, 2007). Rather than working alone and for their own goals, there is a need to build collective capacities among all stakeholders to work towards common goals (Reisner et al., 2007). Moreover, this approach is endorsed by the Department of Education and Science Education Disadvantage Committee that recommends closer links between school and community education initiatives in areas of disadvantage and a more flexible approach to funding and delivery mechanisms (DES, 2005: 29).

Issues for consideration

In the final section we outline some issues for consideration that have been highlighted by stakeholders during the course of the research, which may be considered in terms of the future development of the RLC.

Links with schools[88] and parents

- There was clear agreement among teachers and OST practitioners about the need for better linkages. This may help to counter the mismatch in perceptions among both groups about each others' roles and attitudes in relation to young people, education and the community. While suggestions of visits to clubs and meetings between both groups at the start of the academic year have been suggested, there may be a need for both groups to work on building a common ground before embarking on structural changes
- Parental involvement in the OST services is extremely limited. Although parents report that they attend their child's school, schools also find it difficult to involve parents. A first step that might be taken would be to provide more information to parents whose children attend the local OST activities and to create more opportunities for communication between OST staff and parents in the future.
- There is also potential for schools and OST staff to work with parents on approaches to supporting their child's education. This could involve, for example, parent-child education programmes that address literacy and numeracy.
- One potential role for OST practitioners would be to facilitate parents to link in with their child's school in a more positive way. This is more likely to happen if the links between local schools and OST activities were better developed, as suggested above.
- Developing greater links with other OST activities in the community, which are attended by the same young people who take part in activities run by the RLC, could contribute to the future development of the RLC. For example, this could

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[88] It is acknowledged that since the completion of data collection, the RLC Management Committee have set up a series of meetings with school principals in the area to promote better communication between OST activities and schools, and this is an important aim of their future work

prevent the duplication of particular activities available in the area and also help to ensure that the RLC is meeting a gap in current OST provision in the community.

Rialto Learning Community target group

- In addition to children in the Fatima and Dolphin communities, the Rialto Learning Community aims to provide OST services to children in the wider Rialto area. The student survey data showed that the vast majority of young people in the study group were born in Ireland and had Irish parents. However, almost 2 out of 10 young people in the comparison group were born outside Ireland. In its aim to encourage the participation of young people who live in the wider Rialto area, it is likely that some young people from non-Irish families will become involved. This has some implications for the future work of the RLC in relation to the inclusion of young people from non-Irish backgrounds and how their needs are responded to. It also has the potential to address social inclusion in an area that is undergoing regeneration.

- It is important to consider which young people would benefit the most from taking part in OST activities provided under the RLC in relation to improving their educational outcomes. Gender differences were found in terms of educational expectations with boys in the study group being significantly less likely to expect to sit the Leaving Certificate exam than girls. Those with literacy difficulties attending secondary school were found to be less likely to expect to sit the Leaving Certificate than those without literacy difficulties.

- While the difficulties of maintaining the participation of older students have been recognised by OST staff, it is important that secondary school students with literacy difficulties are targeted by OST services. However the approach taken should be appropriate to adolescents' stage of development and provide them with meaningful involvement in the design and delivery of the intervention itself.

- Work with secondary students could focus on encouraging and supporting the development of positive educational aspirations that will see them taking the Leaving Certificate exam at least, and possibly continue their education beyond second level. Promoting the continued participation of older youth in local OST activities will require an understanding of reasons for non-participation.

Future delivery of OST activities under the RLC

- The structure and delivery of homework club support might be considered given comments made about lack of time. Some young people said that they did not have enough time to finish their homework at the clubs at times. In addition, a few OST practitioners stated that pressures of time for programme delivery often meant that they could not undertake appropriate planning or reflection on their practice.

- Discipline was an issue that arose in relation to some current OST activities. While the more informal environment of a community homework club was a reason cited by many young people for attending their local homework club, it is important that the environment is conducive to completing homework.

- It is important to consider the physical environment and space in which OST activities take place. Having a clean and adequate space along with reasonable facilities, e.g. toilets, was important to young people. Parents also suggested that changes could be made so that there was more space for OST activities.[89] In terms of future provision of OST activities, consideration needs to be given to the appropriateness of the environment for the nature of the activity, as this is highly valued by the young people who take part in OST activities.

- The nature of future OST activities can be informed from this research. Swimming was the most popular activity that young people wanted to do, which appeared to be currently unavailable to them (although they could take up swimming lessons through one of the homework clubs). Amongst young people, there was a general consensus that art and creative activities were enjoyed immensely. The homework clubs gave young people the opportunity to take part in these activities.

- There is a need to agree complementary methodologies for homework support among homework club staff, teachers and parents, which in turn should contribute to a better understanding of, and more effective approach to homework support at school, home and at club level.

- Despite extensive provision of school and community-based educational support, young people in the area are at risk of poor educational outcomes. This suggests that there is a need to align the strength of the formal and informal education sector to work towards a common goal. This could involve curriculum alignment where possible, joint work with families, and strategies and actions to improve school attendance.

- There is a need for innovative work in relation to literacy and numeracy that involves school and community. While there is a strong legacy of community arts work in the local community, which has been shown to promote confidence and self-esteem among young people, there is a need to extend this approach and draw upon promising creative arts programmes that address literacy and numeracy issues.

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[89] The new facility in the Dolphin House complex was due to open shortly after the completion of the research

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Appendix 1

Notes and recommendations for the application of the Observation Instrument in the RLC setting

The observation instrument was based on a tool developed by the Policy Studies Associates, a U.S. organisation involved in education evaluation and research. The main aim of the observation of OST activities was to pilot test an instrument that could potentially provide useful information to staff about OST service delivery.

General administration issues

Practical issues

- It was difficult to observe and capture everything that was going on – many interactions between young people/young people and young people/staff going on at the same time.

- The ability to pick up on something that happened during the observation often depended on where the observers were sitting. A balance had to be struck between somewhere that was unobtrusive (not impacting on the activity) while also trying to take account of things going on outside of your range of vision/hearing.

- It was possible for the actions of one person being observed to have a big influence on the score given for any single indicator. The observers noted that it was difficult to take account of one person's actions in an overall score which was meant to represent the group.

- Some indicators for youth participation and relationships between youth/staff were not applicable to the activities observed. The instrument advises that a score of 1 be given in this case (on a scale of 1 to 7). However, this can contribute to a lower score (depending on the number of indicators that are found to be not applicable). Therefore, some consideration needs to be given as to how to take account of this while not depressing the total overall score.

- Some indicators seemed to overlap, e.g. 'use positive behaviour management techniques' and 'guide positive peer interactions'.

- The observers found that the four headings suggested for dividing up notes taken during the observation were not very useful – sequenced, active, personally focused, explicit.

Recommendations for the future use of the OST instrument in an RLC setting

Which questions should form part of an observation instrument for the RLC?

- The observers felt that the instrument pilot tested could be used as a basis for developing an appropriate observation tool for a future evaluation of the RLC – in particular the cover sheet, indicators of relationship/participation and environmental context questions.

- However, any part of the observation instrument should be of direct relevance to the RLC and its aims. The information compiled as a result of the observation would need to be of use to inform the future development of the RLC

- Therefore, the research team recommend that all the stakeholders involved in the RLC (project staff, management) meet to discuss and agree the content of an observation tool, in particular, the applicability of the indicators of relationship/participation. There are various indicators in this section and the research team felt that these could be reduced to reflect the most important aspects of the RLC programme in terms of promoting young people's participation and building relationships between staff/young people.

How should 'not applicable' indicators be scored?

- The research team recommend that if an indicator is 'not applicable' during the observation, that it is scored as 'zero', which will not affect the overall score

How many observations should be carried out of each activity chosen for observation?

- It is important to carry out repeated observations of the same activity (at the very minimum two observations) in order to attempt to capture all aspects of the activity

Who should carry out the observations?

- There is a need for observers to have some position of independence from the RLC. However, the research team felt that it would be beneficial for the observer to have some background knowledge of the activities before carrying out the observation. For example, one suggestion might be a community worker who is familiar with some of the activities but is neither a member of project staff or involved in the management of the RLC.