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IMPROVING LITERACY OUTCOMES

BRIDGING THE GAP



An analysis of literacy needs of children aged 12 - 18, as identified by teachers in DEIS Post Primary Schools, Youthreach Centres, Youth Encounter Projects and a short term educational centre. Undertaken by the Transforming Education through Dialogue Project (TED), Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.



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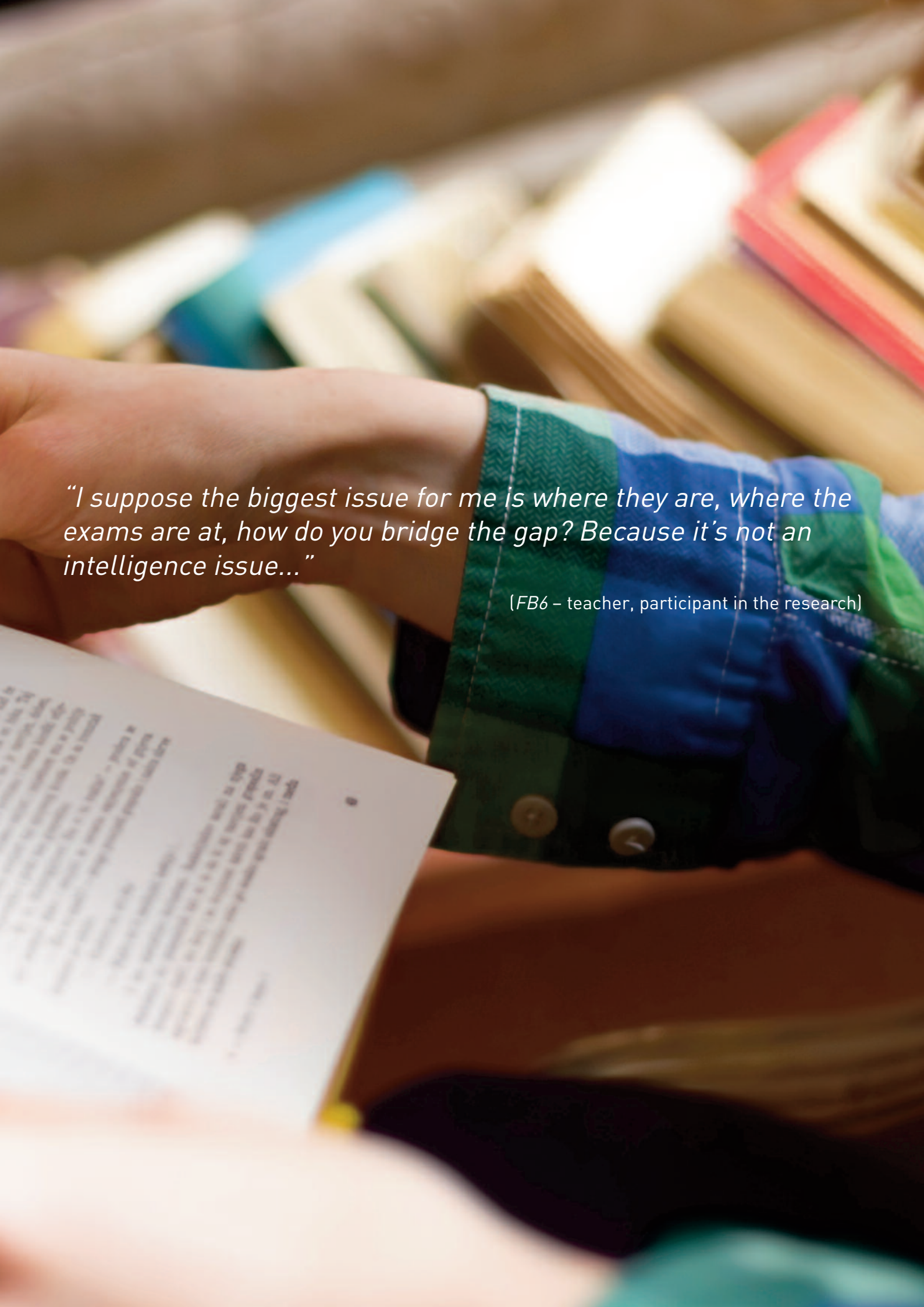
Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED)
Literacy Needs Analysis Report
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"I suppose the biggest issue for me is where they are, where the exams are at, how do you bridge the gap? Because it's not an intelligence issue..."

(FB6 – teacher, participant in the research)

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List of Abbreviations

CLVEC*	City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEAR	Drop Everything and Read
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEA	International Education Agency
ISPCC	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ISS	Inclusion Support Service (This new service includes the NBSS, SESS and VTHVI)
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCETB*	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCTE	National Centre for Teachers of English (USA Based)
NCTE	National Centre for Technology in Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NFQ	National Framework for Qualifications

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAT	Phonological Awareness Training
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PE	Physical Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (international study of reading literacy conducted under the auspices of the IEA)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (international study of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy conducted under the auspices of the OECD)
PLUS	Primary Liaison for University and Schools
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TED	Transforming Education through Dialogue
THRASS	Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills
UL	University of Limerick
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WIAT	Wechsler Individual Achievement test
WRAT 4	Wide Range Achievement Test 4
YEP	Youth Encounter Project

*The City of Limerick VEC, the County Limerick VEC and the County Clare VEC amalgamated to become the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board.

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Executive Summary

**IMPROVING
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Introduction

This report is based on needs analysis research carried out from March to May 2013 in 14 educational settings that included: Post Primary schools receiving support under the Department of Education and Skills (DES) programme, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)¹, Youth Encounter Projects, and Youthreach Centres. A centre offering short term educational placement for Junior Certificate students was also included.

The purpose of the research was to establish the levels of support needed by teachers and students in developing literacy skills with a particular focus on skills needed to improve outcomes for life, living and learning.

Methodology and participants

A questionnaire was developed for use as the basis for structured interviews with 24 teachers from the schools. The teachers were interviewed in pairs or individually. Seventeen interviews were held in 14 locations. The teachers who participated were English teachers, resource teachers, principals and teachers of a variety of subject areas.

Findings

Teachers identified significant need for support in developing literacy skills among their pupils. They felt that students also needed support in accessing the written content of Junior Certificate curriculum materials. The teachers described the strategies, resources and methodologies they used to support literacy skills development. Teachers' needs identified in this study, specifically in terms of CPD, were for targeted subject-specific literacy development techniques and strategies. Also indicated was a need for teachers to have opportunities to share the strategies and methods they had already developed.

Recommendations

The recommendations are given under four headings

- Recognition of the schools' work in retaining and educating the particular cohort of students
- Strategic development and sharing of expertise
- Proposals for improving literacy delivery through CPD
- Resources and materials

Recognition of the schools' work in supporting transitions, retaining and educating the particular cohort of students

- The work the schools do with their student cohort needs to be clearly recognised as potentially a "*last chance*" to engage with formal education for some of these students and should be supported in every appropriate way to give these students the best possible educational outcomes.
- Successful transition to Youth Encounter Projects (YEP) and Youthreach Centres and from primary to post primary education is a necessary part of the schools' work which is invaluable and needs to be supported.

¹ DEIS strategy: Delivering of equal opportunity in schools is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills which was introduced in 2006/2007 and delivers additional support and resources, including training, in schools operating in areas of particular disadvantage.

Strategic development and sharing of expertise

- Significant levels of expertise in dealing with children who struggle in education exist in the Youth Encounter Projects (YEP), the Youthreach centres and the DEIS Post Primary schools. Opportunities for sharing the expertise, strategies and programmes that have been developed in these contexts need to be provided.
- The YEP model of holistic support for the children is in line with best practice guidelines and should be supported so that these centres can respond to the levels of need in their communities.
- The level of one-to-one interaction and support that is possible in the YEP and Youthreach settings is a factor in the success/progress of the students.
- There is a role for parents and communities in developing improved literacy outcomes. Strategies for building home school community links within literacy programmes would be beneficial.
- Evidence-based strategies and interventions for promoting successful literacy development are available and should continue to be used.
- Strategies to support oral language development would be beneficial for many students and activities that include such strategies need to be developed.

Proposals for improving literacy delivery through CPD

- Literacy needs to be seen as the responsibility of all teachers, not just the English or Learning Support Departments.
- It is necessary for CPD with a specific focus on literacy to be readily available to all subject teachers.
- All CPD should have an element of follow up within a relatively short period of time after delivery so that teachers' questions on practice can be addressed, i.e., CPD should not happen in isolation, it needs to be of practical value and needs to include review and support for practice.
- Initial teacher education should include literacy and differentiation modules for teachers of all subject areas.

Resources and materials

- Although there are many resources and suitable teaching materials available, there is a cost issue that means that the schools² do not have either the range or quantity of resources that they need. A provision for additional funding for the renewal and replacement of such materials would be extremely useful.
- If current text books are at a reading level that is not accessible to students there is a need to support teachers through providing resources containing appropriately targeted teaching materials to support differentiation in the classroom.
- Themes which students are motivated to read are key elements of support for reading. It would be useful if the schools had flexibility to make purchases of such materials throughout the year.
- In essence, it is important to recognise that there is significant local expertise in the schools and that the strategies and resources, which are being used and are perceived by teachers to be effective in promoting learning for their students, need to be properly resourced.

Conclusion

The report concludes that the schools' work should continue to be supported and a series of actions, based on the findings are recommended as follows:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Action 1 | The work of the schools should be supported strategically and holistically through building on best practice to give these students the best possible educational outcomes. |
|----------|---|

² All of the educational settings are referred to as schools throughout the report.

- Action 2 The development of a Community of Practice across settings, possibly in partnership with Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and strategic agencies should be explored.
- Action 3 Teachers need to have specific training in how to use the individual learning/education plan as a target setting aid.
- Action 4 It is important to maximise the opportunities for individual and small group learning.
- Action 5 Modules in literacy skills, differentiation or/and SEN should be viewed as an integral part of initial teacher training for all post primary teachers.
- Action 6 Teachers may need support in developing or sharing classroom activities that include dimensions of topic focussed discussions.
- Action 7 The need for ongoing support and possibly developing supports across contexts was evident – perhaps through showcasing the resources and approaches that were in use. This implies the possibility of joint working on a range of age appropriate and interest generating materials to be developed, piloted and evaluated.
- Action 8 Liaisons between schools, parents and community agencies such as those existing within the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme in developing joint initiatives and practical activities with literacy dimensions should be nurtured. These should be priorities in those areas where parents have identified gaps in their capacity to support their children’s education.
- Action 9 Subject area teachers would benefit from ongoing structured CPD appropriate to the literacy demands of the relevant subject areas.
- Action 10 Additional funding for the renewal and replacement of teaching materials and resources would be extremely useful.
- Action 11 Schools should be enabled to build a library of suitable teaching materials that could be replaced and refreshed as needed.
- Action 12 Materials generated by the various schools could be gathered, shared and published as a resource for differentiated teaching. This could serve as a resource for all teachers.

A photograph of two young women in school uniforms sitting together and reading a book. They are wearing light blue polo shirts and dark blue trousers. The woman in the foreground has a black backpack with a yellow strap. They are positioned in front of a brick wall with a black metal railing.

Section 1

Context and Background to the Literacy Needs Analysis Survey

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Introduction

This report is based on needs analysis research carried out from March to May 2013 in 14 educational settings that included: Post Primary schools receiving support under the Department of Education and Skills (DES) programme Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)³; Youth Encounter Projects; Youthreach Centres; and a centre offering short term educational placement for Junior Certificate students.

The first section of the report provides a literature review of relevant theory and research into the concerns and issues relating to educational contexts with high numbers of struggling readers. The second section describes the context of the participating schools and outlines the methodology used in the research. The third section sets out the findings from the needs analysis. The fourth section contains the discussion of the findings and in the fifth section the recommendations from the research are outlined.

1 TED Literacy Project

1.1 Context and Background to the Literacy Needs Analysis Survey

The national literacy and numeracy plan (DES, 2009) has highlighted the need for action in ensuring that all schools leavers have a quality education and high standards of literacy and numeracy. The focus of the plan is principally on early years and on primary school but it cannot be assumed that all students will have reached these quality standards by the time they enter 2nd level education (Eivers, Shiel and Shortt 2004). The rationale for investing in literacy skill development for young people is well documented (Eivers et al. 2010; OECD 2010). Such research also highlights the impact of poor literacy skills on educational and employment outcomes. Indeed, literacy was identified by the former Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD, as *'among the most important life skills that our schools teach'* (DES, 2011:5). Furthermore, he posited that *'no child should leave school without having mastered these skills to the best of their abilities Ensuring that all young people acquire these skills in one of the greatest contributions that we can make to achieving social justice and equity in our country'* (DES, 2011:5).

It is in the context of the literacy needs of children aged 12 to 18 that the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project engaged in a needs analysis survey of those settings where clusters of low levels of reading ability had been noted. The objective of the TED project literacy needs analysis survey is to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of issues relating to literacy acquisition in specific contexts. The information gained will be used to inform the next stage of the TED literacy project. Additionally, the research will explore how teachers are addressing students' needs through assessment, literacy support programmes and targeted initiatives, and by engaging in continuing professional development (CPD). Literacy, for the purposes of this research, is defined, as in the national literacy and numeracy draft plan, (DES, 2011) in terms of reading, writing, spelling and oracy.

Since 1998 the TED Project has been working in the context of addressing equity of outcome in Education. TED's mission statement is to *"seek to improve and enhance educational outcomes for children. This is achieved through harnessing the expertise of Mary Immaculate College in the service of children, parents and teachers, primarily in DEIS contexts. Through dialogue and collaboration we seek to unlock the enormous potential within learning communities"*. (See <http://www.mic.ul.ie/ted/Pages/default.aspx> for more information). As part of this work the TED project facilitates three networks: PLUS, Cur le Chéile and OSCAILT. PLUS is a network of Limerick, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS⁴) primary schools and two additional schools, St. Augustine's and St. Canice's. Cur le Chéile is a network of DEIS primary school Principals based in the western and midland counties of Galway, Sligo, Mayo, Clare, Westmeath and Longford. OSCAILT is a network of 21 DEIS

³ DEIS strategy: Delivering of equal opportunity in schools is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills which began in 2008 that delivers additional support and resources, including training, in schools operating in areas of particular disadvantage.

Limerick city schools (15 primary and 6 post primary schools), the Department of Education and Skills and the TED Project. OSCALIT is dedicated to opening school for life leisure and learning.

TED is located in the Curriculum Development Unit of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (<http://www.cdu.mic.ul.ie/>) and works extensively with schools and organisations in the Limerick area and beyond to facilitate a connection between the expertise of College staff and the identified needs of schools. Partnership with schools, voluntary and statutory groups within the local community and at national level is a key feature of TED's work. TED has undertaken the development of networks, designed and delivered intervention projects and carried out research as a response to identified needs.

TED was approached by an education provider serving the needs of young people aged from 12-18 to explore how the TED project could support positive literacy outcomes for this age cohort of students. Specifically the request highlighted the need for targeted, relevant and accessible reading material that would help teachers to engage their students to develop their capacities and skills in accessing the written word. The locations surveyed included four Youthreach centres, five Youth Encounter Projects (YEP), four Post Primary schools receiving support under DEIS, and one additional short term educational support unit. For the remainder of the report these will be referred to as 'schools' when referred to in general.

1.2 Adolescent Literacy: Literature review

1.2.1 Introduction to the literature review

For most students the transition from primary to post-primary education is marked by greater demands in literacy. Students are asked not only to comprehend the meaning of words but also to critically analyse and interact with text for the purpose of knowledge building (Doherty, 2012).

There is concern that students who struggle with reading and literacy as they transfer from primary to secondary school may become disaffected from school due to the increasing academic reading load for which they have no capacity (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). In the Irish school system the focus of education, at post primary level, is often on the acquisition of knowledge required to pass state examinations. For the struggling reader these academic demands can be disenfranchising, leading to disaffection and dislike of school (Ryan, 2004, ESRI, 2009). This disaffection can lead to strategies of avoidance which include class disruption, defiance, non-co-operation and truancy. This recognition of such disaffection echoes the findings of researchers from the USA where it was noted that investment in supporting early readers had left a gap in supports for adolescent readers who need "homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed" (Moore et al., 1999: 9, cited in Jacobs, 2008).

A recent recommendation from the European Commission (European Commission, 2013) reiterates the right of children to be supported to achieve their potential through education by '*increasing the capacity of education systems to break the cycle of disadvantage, ensuring that all children can benefit from inclusive high quality education that promotes their emotional, social, cognitive and physical development*' (ibid: 7). This statement underlines the need for a broad, holistic approach to education rather than a narrow focus solely on attainment. Among the actions recommended in the document are the following:

- Provide for the inclusion of all learners, where necessary by targeting resources and opportunities towards the more disadvantaged, and adequately monitor results;
- Create an inclusive learning environment by strengthening the link between schools and parents, and,

⁴ DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools - Department of Education and Skills strategy for supporting schools in areas of designated disadvantage.

if necessary, provide personalised support to compensate for specific disadvantages through, for instance, training for parents of migrant and ethnic minority children;

- Address barriers which stop or seriously hinder children from attending or completing school (such as additional financial fees in compulsory education) by providing targeted educational aid in a supportive learning environment;
- Improve the performance of students with low basic skills by reinforcing the learning of literacy, numeracy and basic maths and science, and ensuring early detection of low achievers;
- Develop and implement comprehensive policies to reduce early school leaving which encompass prevention, intervention and compensation measures; ensure that these policies include measures for those at risk of early school leaving.

(EU Commission Recommendation 20.2.2013 C (2013) 778: 7)

Initiatives to implement some of these recommendations already exist in Ireland. Many of these recommendations would be familiar to those involved with the DEIS programme (Weir et al, 2011), recognising how the DEIS supports address barriers through targeting resources towards those most at risk of early school leaving. In addition to DEIS, Youthreach centres and Youth Encounter Projects although few in number are part of targeted provision that seeks to create the necessary inclusive and supportive learning environment as outlined by these recommendations.

As a response to a drop in Ireland's performance level in comparative tables of achievement⁵ in literacy, mathematics and sciences (PISA 2009; PISA 2011) a national draft plan for improving literacy delivery in schools was developed and a national strategy for improving literacy and numeracy in children and young people was published (DES, 2011).

The recommendations from the DES policy on literacy and numeracy suggest various supports and actions for literacy development and propose the following goals for literacy development at post-primary level:

- Ensure that each post-primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of its students in a school improvement plan
- Extend the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading to assess the performance of students at the end of second year in post-primary education; use data from these assessments to establish the existing levels of achievement and to set realistic targets for improvement, similar to those adopted at primary level
- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of post-primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading
- Increase the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or above Level 4 (i.e. at the highest levels) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by at least 5 percentage points by 2020
- Halve the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or below Level 1 (the lowest level) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by 2020

(DES, 2011: 18 http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/lit_num_strategy_full.pdf)

The strong emphasis on assessment and student performance on international tests points to a clear focus on quantifying literacy and it is interesting to explore the proposed actions for achieving this quantitative improvement⁶. Best practice suggests that multiple approaches and strategies are needed. The following sections explore how literacy develops and how, in light of the discussion above, literacy development in adolescents can best be supported.

⁵ It should be noted that Perkins et al. (2011) caution against the interpretation of an overall decline in Irish students' performance in the absence of any corroborating evidence of such a decline.

1.2.2 Oral language, reading and writing

A comprehensive review of oral language development shows that in the pre-school years there is a clear progression of stages through which children pass as they develop proficiency in speaking their native language (Resnick and Snow, 2009). As children progress to school, phonological awareness, phoneme recognition, rhyming, and vocabulary growth are stages that precede the development of literacy skills. There is, however, a wide range of variability among individual children in both oral language and reading skills development.

Recent focus on how multiple interacting factors contribute to language development (Shiel et al. 2012) also highlights that oral language development can subsequently have an influence on literacy development. One of the underlying supports of language development that has been given a more careful focus in recent literature is the quality of the child's engagement in social relations. The quality of social interactions may be influenced by factors such as poverty, lack of a print rich environment or absence of regular reading activities and in such cases there is a clear implication that oral language and reading skills may be impacted. It is evident within this paradigm that children with under-developed or with delayed development in oral language skills need opportunities for structured classroom talk, to develop oral language skills to support the development of literacy skills.

In the classroom, according to a review of decades of research (Cregan 2010), oral language interaction supports the development of academic language use. Cregan's work underlines that an approach that includes identification of both the vocabulary required to engage in the topic and the particular oracy skills required for the task (e.g. sustained monologue, debate, organising and structuring information, etc.) is what is called for in order to support the development of academic language skills that will in turn support literacy skills (Cregan, 2010: 170).

Although the relationship between oral language and reading development is highlighted in the section above it should be noted that reading and writing development can be delayed in ways which are not directly related to oral language deficits. Poor attendance at school can have an effect on the rate of development of reading and writing skills (Eivers et al. 2004) and some learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, affect learners' interaction with written text.

Early reading develops through explicit skills instruction (Jacobs, 2008; Rose, 2008). These authors, in reviews of research, identify two main skills that are the focus of early reading instruction: word decoding skills and language comprehension processes. Jacobs (2008: 13) indicates that these skills and processes develop through direct skills instruction (e.g. phonics, sight word recognition, alphabet knowledge and spelling) in addition to opportunities to practice and a rich language environment. Rose (2008: 38) highlights that different factors underlie each of these components and explains that children can have difficulties in word recognition while showing no evidence of language comprehension difficulties and vice-versa.

Further development of reading proficiency is strongly linked to achieving automaticity and fluency in reading and comprehension skills (Jacobs 2008: 13). Children who do not achieve automaticity and fluency will be "severely limited in their access to the more technical syntactically complex and dense reading of content based reading" (ibid). Furthermore, Jacobs highlights that having mastered the first skills of reading children need to be taught how to use reading, that is, how to explore and construct meaning from what they read. As Resnick and Hampton, (2008) put it, readers progress from the mechanics of reading to understanding and using written language.

⁶ Arguments against a reliance on standardised tests have been put forward, including a collection of papers in Pereyra et al., (2011)

1.2.3 Strategies and interventions to support literacy development

Alvermann (2002) has underlined the necessity of beginning instruction at a point that matches the individual student's capacities and needs. It is not a given that students arrive in the post-primary classroom with well-developed literacy skills that will need minimal guidance to activate (Eivers et al. 2004). The path to supporting improvement in literacy skills is not as well defined for post primary students as it is for beginning readers at primary level. Research indicates that the literacy demands of different content areas vary considerably and that teaching students how to read texts in different subject areas is a key part of teaching these subjects (Graves, 2000).

There are many commercial and educational programmes that are marketed as resources for supporting literacy development at primary and post primary level. A comprehensive survey of such resources by Brooks (2009; 2013) examines the research on the effectiveness of these resources. His examination suggests that many of these programmes are of value and have positive effects on reading improvement. Some of the best results were found in programmes such as Literacy Lift Off, Catch Up Literacy and the SNIP⁷ literacy programme which are used principally in primary schools. Similar findings were made in Gordon's (2009) smaller scale study of several programmes in use in the Waterford region. The author's research identified that the SNIP precision teaching programme and the Toe by Toe programme improved word reading, while she found that sentence comprehension improved most under *Acceleread/Accelewrite*. These findings related to both primary and post primary schools. A number of similar resources and supports are available throughout Ireland through the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), Junior Certificate School Programme⁸ (JCSP) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) websites and publications. Some of these supports are now delivered under the new Inclusion Support Service (ISS), which was established in February 2015 under the NCSE and includes the Special Educational Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI).

Studies (e.g. Brooks 2007, 2013, Gordon, 2007; NEPS, 2009) have shown that programmes for literacy recovery and support have variable outcomes. Generally measured in effect-sizes or ratio gains for groups of students, many programmes have shown effect sizes of between 0.4 to 1.0, ranging from a 'modest impact' to a 'remarkable impact' on learner ratio gains⁹ (Brooks 2013:15). Examples of such programmes include THRASS, Toe by Toe and other paired reading programmes. Brooks' examination of reports, and, in particular, research reports based on Randomised Control Trials (RCT), showed that many of these programmes produced modest gains in the relevant targeted reading skills. Brooks highlighted that students who were at a particularly low starting point showed most gains from these targeted programmes and that paired reading programmes were the most successful (i.e. showed most gains across a variety of groups of learners in several different studies). Additional whole class and whole school programmes have been developed in Ireland in recent years, such as *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney and Gleeson, 2008), which incorporates recent research findings on how reading comprehension develops. *Focus on Fluency* (Doherty, 2012) which makes the case for developing effective, rather than merely automatic reading skills, is also a valuable resource.

Support for learners with additional specific learning difficulties is also a feature of schools' approaches to teaching. Prevalence of dyslexia and specific learning difficulties within Irish schools may be underestimated as figures are based on the number of children with an assessment of such learning difficulties. For example,

⁷ SNIP literacy programme, also known as a precision teaching approach focusses on teaching high frequency words at word level. More at http://www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/precision_teaching.pdf.

⁸ The JCSP is an intervention programme which is targeted at young people who are identified as being at risk of leaving school early. These students receive a Junior Certificate upon completion of the JCSP, along with an individual profile that covers not only literacy and numeracy and academic skills, but also personal and social achievements. http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Junior_Certificate_School_Programme/

⁹ A ratio gain is described as the 'gain in reading age made by a subject on a reading test during a chronological time span, expressed as a ratio of that time span; that is, ratio gain equals reading age gain in months divided by chronological time in months' Topping and Lindsay (1992: 201; cited in Brooks 2013)

estimates of the prevalence of dyslexia among the school-going population are based on international research and in 2001 the figure was put at 8% in the UK (NCSE, 2011). More recent estimates, based on the data from the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study, would suggest that as many as 1 in 4 children may have special educational needs (Banks and McCoy, (2012)). There is a variety of supports that children with an assessment of special educational needs may receive. Such supports include learning support hours, exemption from Irish and other languages, exemption from 'mechanics' grading (i.e. grading of spellings and punctuation in English examinations) and use of a computer for homework and examinations. In some cases a scribe may be provided for examinations.

1.2.4 Attainment levels

As young people prepare for examinations that are the measure of their attainment in the post primary school system, the demands of literacy increase well beyond those expected at primary level. As Shiel et al. (2012: 28) explain "*every new text and communication context requires a refined application of literacy skills and abilities.*" However, literacy attainment cannot be limited to passing school examinations. The literacy skills developed in school must serve for life. As Shiel et al. also state, "*The new skilled worker needs adaptable reading, writing and problem-solving capabilities, as well as the ability to communicate in meetings and compose reports and other job-related texts*" (Askov and Gordon, 1999 cited in Shiel et al., 2012: 29). Shiel et al. go on to describe the life-long developmental nature of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and highlight that "*the ability to make meaning from and with text, as well as communicate and expand one's knowledge continues to increase throughout life*" (ibid. 32). If language and literacy skills learned at school are not adequate to deal with the complex literacy tasks expected in society and the workplace then the student will be placed at a lifelong disadvantage. Consequently, the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills at post primary level should focus on a lifelong approach in addition to supporting the skills students need for examination purposes (DES, 2011).

1.2.5 Literacy across the curriculum

In describing academic literacy Alvermann (2002: 193) points out that '*effective instruction develops students' abilities to comprehend, discuss, study, and write about multiple forms of text (print, visual, and oral) by taking into account what they are capable of doing as everyday users of language and literacy.*' This focus on what constitutes effective instruction carries an implication that teachers, no matter what their subject, need to be aware of their students' capabilities in language use and literacy and that all teachers have a role in developing these capabilities.

A comprehensive review of oral language in the classroom (Shiel et al., 2012) lists the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students in both teaching and learning. While it is beyond the scope of this document to explore the review in detail there are key points that are reiterated throughout that review.

- Teachers need to model and scaffold accountable talk¹⁰ across all content areas of the curriculum,
- Students need opportunities for structured talk in all subject areas in order to support the development of critical thinking,
- Students need opportunities to talk about language, its purposes, structures and meanings.

The aim of instruction is to ensure that students will be able to use talk to guide and to explain their thinking, to clarify understanding and to share ideas and points of view. Eivers et al. (2004: 176-177) recommend that areas "*with high levels of disadvantage and low levels of achievement*" should develop a "*substantive school wide focus on language and literacy*". They go on to state that where large numbers of pupils have reading difficulties the school needs to restructure the provision of reading instruction to maximise input from class teachers in all subject areas as well as support teachers.

¹⁰ Accountable talk is a term used to describe classroom activities where students develop and respond to themes derived from texts, or from other students in a discussion.

1.2.6 Supporting teachers and school leaders

Gordon (2007), in her report on consultation with stakeholders of Youthreach and Traveller education, has identified approaches that are useful in supporting adolescents who are below the average reading age for their cohort in their literacy skills development. In particular, she highlights the need for whole school approaches and a broader understanding of literacy development and support across all curricular areas. This finding is particularly pertinent as research highlights that subject teachers maintain a focus on the content material of their subjects and often do not use any strategies for literacy support despite the need for differentiated reading skills to match different types of texts (McCoss-Yergian and Krepps, 2006).

The DES strategic plan to support literacy and numeracy across the life span (DES, 2011: 54) highlights the need for intensive modules in the teaching of literacy and numeracy so that students in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) can '*adequately prepare ... the skills required to teach or progress their students' literacy and numeracy skills and to support the integration of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum*'. There is also a recommendation that provision and uptake of CPD should be improved, particularly in content area literacy. The strategic plan goes on to identify the actions that can be taken to support literacy development in the post primary sector:

- Increase time for explicit literacy instruction,
- Focus on a variety of texts,
- Support literacy tastes, especially of boys,
- Literacy support to be included in the ongoing Junior Cycle review,
- Use of students' work to assist in self-evaluation and formative assessment.

(DES 2011: 58)

As part of a whole school approach to literacy support the experience of DEIS is cited as a model of good practice. Schools supported through the DEIS initiative have shown that a whole school approach, with commitment on every level to addressing literacy and numeracy deficits in their target populations, is viewed as being highly effective in delivering programmes designed to improve educational outcomes (DES 2011). Lessons from DEIS highlight that positive staff engagement with programmes and supports is essential. Realistic target setting and appropriate use of resources to deliver planned improvements are also key features of the measured improvements identified in inspectorate reports (DES 2011: 63).

1.2.7 Parental role in promoting adolescent literacy

Parents are identified in the National literacy and numeracy strategy (DES 2011) as the primary educators of their children and much research over fifty years has established the centrality of this role to children's learning (Ryan and Galvin, 2012; Weiss et al, 2005; Epstein, 2001). However, "there is still much to be understood about how to develop supportive relationships that encourage families to contribute and support students' literacy learning as they progress through school" (Wiseman, 2011: 99). Moreover, studies have shown that the parental role in supporting education can be a challenging one for some parents, for example, an empirical study of family literacy practices carried out with families in areas of disadvantage in Ireland (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010) identified cycles of intergenerational educational disadvantage. The research explored parents' attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and understanding of family literacy. Among the recommendations from the research was the need to develop parents' confidence in supporting their children's education. Where necessary this could involve working with parents to fulfil their own unmet literacy needs. The key elements in developing parents' abilities to support their children were identified as a partnership approach and the need for Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) personnel to have training in the identification of adult literacy needs. Also noted in this research are the parents' suggestions for how training should be delivered: e.g., delivery by people

who share their experiences, on-site childcare, separate classes for fathers and mothers and involving children at later stages of the process. The study found that there was a high level of interest among parents in developing their skills to support their children's education.

Downes' (2014) report on prevention of early school leaving also highlighted a holistic approach to parental involvement in children's education with a partnership model considered to be most useful. Byrne and Smyth (2010) have also highlighted that research (e.g. McCoy et al., 2006; Smyth et al., 2007) has indicated that parents have the greatest influence on young people's educational and career choices. It is clear that any programme to improve literacy outcomes for students should envision a role for family involvement.

1.2.8 Motivation and encouraging reading among students

Gordon, in her review of current research in teaching literacy, has identified that 'finding ways to motivate and engage students in reading is an essential feature of adolescent literacy instruction' (Gordon, 2009: 4). Two of the critical factors in keeping students engaged are providing student choice and providing classroom environments where there are explicit connections to real life experiences (Guthrie, 2001). A research review (NCTE, 2007) identifies the following strategies to motivate students to read:

- A variety of texts should be available, including several identified by the students;
- Active and inquiry-based activities that link to the real world and engage reluctant readers/writers should be used;
- Set tasks for success: this works to increase students' sense of achievement and motivation;
- Students should be assisted in identifying books that they will enjoy;
- Use a balance of writing tasks that include writing for self and for specific purposes;
- Use technology to provide a wide variety and to give students greater options for choosing relevant tasks.

Developing students' intrinsic motivation to read widely is contingent on having valid, real-world reasons to read, finding information relating to the interests and activities in which the students are involved and filling gaps in their knowledge (NCTE, 2007). Such motivation can be supported by teachers allowing some classroom activities to be student led and project based. This is the direction proposed by the new Junior Cycle curriculum revision. Text books resources and materials need to be accessible and motivating for the students. ESRI research (Smyth, et al. 2004) into students' experiences of post primary school found that course content in textbooks was judged by school staffs as being too challenging for a significant minority of students and in particular for students with low literacy levels. In depth interviews with school staffs noted that teachers identified Junior Cycle textbooks as having a reading age of 15 which was judged as unsuitable for lower and even for average ability students (Smyth et al. 2004: 83). Principals also questioned if the curriculum was relevant to students' everyday lives. These are important issues in relation to the discussion above. In the absence of materials that they can engage with, students are unlikely to learn. Classroom resources, including textbooks, need to support the teacher in engaging students rather than being a source of frustration.

1.2.9 Cause for concern

The consequences of students not developing basic skills in literacy and numeracy can be far reaching (DES 2011: 8). In this policy document the DES points out that these skills are necessary in every part of life where communication is involved. Those without basic literacy and numeracy skills can be *"cut off from full participation in many aspects of life"* and *"have fewer opportunities to take up satisfying jobs and careers"* (DES 2011: 8-9). This national policy document highlights that mastery of literacy and numeracy skills brings social, health and emotional benefits – not only for the individual but for society as a whole. Other research (Snow and Powell 2008) has expressed concern that individuals without well-developed literacy skills may leave school early and become involved in anti-social or criminal activities.

The DES (DES 2011) recognises that all children of post primary age “*will require well thought out teaching and purposeful learning experiences in the post primary school to enable them to acquire the skills they have yet to grasp, to consolidate the skills they have already learned, and to equip them for work, further education and leisure*”. This recognition of the need to support literacy development at post primary level highlights the need for teacher development as well as enhancing learning experiences in schools. The ongoing reviews of DEIS and value for money reports on YEP and Youthreach centres have underlined the valuable work that is taking place in these contexts where the student cohort are those at risk of not fully developing literacy skills, and where there is a real danger that these students may not engage with employment opportunities and their communities (Shiel et al. 2012).

1.2.10 Conclusion

There is grave concern about post primary level students who are not developing age-appropriate literacy skills. There are a number of programmes in place and materials available to address this concern. What is required, in order to ensure all students achieve relevant literacy skills to engage with the academic demands of education and indeed for life, is that the necessary supports are in the right places and administered appropriately to support the students’ progression. The staff delivering such supports and the relationships they build with children are key factors in the success of such programmes.

1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report deals with the needs-analysis survey research including the findings, discussion and recommendations. Section two details the educational settings that contributed to the research and the methodology used. Section three sets out the findings from the research. In section four there is a discussion of the findings and the implications for actions arising from them. The final section contains the conclusions and recommendations from the research.



Section 2

Description of the Needs Analysis Research

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2.1 Description of the needs analysis survey

As outlined in section 1.1, this needs analysis was undertaken due to concerns raised among providers of educational settings for children aged 12 to 18, other than post primary schools, that their students were struggling with literacy and that there was a lack of materials, relevant to the students' lives and interests, available to assist in engaging them with the written word. Additionally there were concerns about the students' oral language proficiency and motivation.

The needs analysis is expected to be the first step in the process of developing either resources and/or options for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers in such educational settings. The next section outlines the needs analysis research objectives.

2.2 Research objectives

As outlined earlier (section 1.1) the initial request to TED specified the need for targeted, relevant and accessible reading material that would help teachers to engage their students to develop their capacities and skills in accessing the written word. Drawing on expertise in Mary Immaculate College, TED's initial focus was on exploring how such materials might be developed. However, in the intervening period there had been developments in both publishing and digital supports so that a greater range of commercial products for literacy support was available. International research was increasingly focussed on adolescent literacy and struggling readers and there had been an upsurge in both research and resource development (Jacobs, 2008). In light of these developments it became necessary for TED to focus its research on a review of what the needs of teachers and students in these settings were at a specific point in time. The developments in policy, including the publication of the national literacy and numeracy plan (DES, 2011), and additional supports that might have become available for the schools, were also factors in defining the direction of the research.

The research objectives were as follows:

1. to identify teachers' perceptions of the levels of need of young people in terms of reading, writing, oracy and spelling;
2. to examine teachers' perceptions of the availability of appropriate literacy materials and programmes to meet their students' needs;
3. to identify what programmes/materials/strategies (with emphasis on motivation) are in use in schools to address the literacy needs of young people in the age cohort 12-18;
4. to explore the need for continuing professional development in this sector.

2.3 Participants¹¹

The research was carried out across a range of settings. Firstly the research looked at the YEP centres, where the request to TED to carry out the research had originated. Additional settings, where it was identified that learners with similar profiles might be found, were also surveyed and these included: Youthreach Centres; DEIS post primary schools; and one other setting where short term education placements are offered to children at risk of early school leaving when they are referred by their post-primary school. A short description of each type of setting is given below.

¹¹ We are extremely grateful to the teachers and principals who generously gave their time for interviews. We do not provide specific details on those interviewed in order to maintain confidentiality.

DEIS post primary schools

The DEIS initiative, an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), aims to bring together and to build on existing interventions and to support schools in areas which have been identified as having concentrated levels of educational disadvantage in order to provide a greater equity of educational outcomes. The DEIS programme provides additional supports to 852 schools: These comprise 658 schools at primary level and 194 second level schools under the programme (see <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/> for more information).

Youthreach Projects

Youthreach projects form part of the national programme of second-chance education and training in Ireland and are funded by the Exchequer under the National Development Plan. Responsibility for the programme was at the time of this report, shared between two Government Departments - Education and Skills, and also Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The programme is directed at unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20. The aim of the Youthreach programme is to offer the participants opportunities to identify and pursue viable career options by providing training and educational options leading to certification. It operates on a full-time, year-round basis and is delivered through centres managed by the Education and Training Board (ETB) and by SOLAS¹².

(Source <http://www.youthreach.ie/aatopmenu/AboutYR/about.html> accessed March 19th 2013).

The centres, described as 'out-of-school settings' on the Youthreach website, are distributed throughout the country, generally in areas of disadvantage. Centres are locally managed by the Youthreach Coordinators, and programmes in each centre reflect the local social, economic and cultural environment. This focus on local management is one of the pillars of Youthreach programme delivery and therefore no two centres are identical in how they deliver their programmes.

Youthreach is often seen as offering an alternative to mainstream education. However, frequently these centres offer Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied courses. There is often a focus on the practical subjects available in these examinations, so that woodwork, technical drawing, Art and Home economics are included in many of the local programmes. English and mathematics are also offered to the students on these programmes.

(Source http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Value-For-Money-Reviews/des_yep_vfm_report_2008.pdf)

Youth Encounter Projects

The five Youth Encounter Projects (YEP) in Ireland cater for 'young people at risk of falling into vandalism, delinquency, school dropout or expulsion' (DES, 2009). They are a non-residential and community-based alternative to mainstream schools. Children referred to YEP schools are deemed to be 'at risk' (at risk being defined as 'on the fringes of delinquent, anti-social behaviour, in contact and in conflict with authority i.e. Gardaí, and because of learning difficulties, at risk of dropping out of school' (Egan and Hegarty, 1984, cited in DES, 2009)). Although the stated age group is from 10 to 15 years provision is occasionally made for children from 8 years of age. Two of the YEP settings were originally defined as special schools but are now included in DES provision under YEP. There are specified limits on the number of students that a YEP can cater for (maximum 25). The focus is on the holistic development of the children, including emotional and social well-being and this is catered for by the inclusion of a Bean/Fear an Tí¹³ and on site catering facilities. Teachers are with the children at all times, sharing meals and leisure activities with them.

¹² This research was conducted immediately prior to the amalgamation of the VEC into the Education and Training Authority and the renaming of FAS to become SOLAS

¹³ Sometimes anglicised as 'housekeeper'.

Short Term Educational Provision

The short term educational centre offers intervention programmes to students identified by their second level schools as being at risk of not completing their education to Junior Certificate level. The programme offers a *'safe caring learning environment that fosters respect for oneself and others'*.

The centre provides an eight week teaching programme that covers a range of subjects following the Junior Certificate syllabus and works with a small cohort of students. The programme also involves a commitment to work with agencies and other local supports that the student may be availing of. This short term educational placement also welcomes parent involvement.

2.4 Methodology

A questionnaire was developed to serve as a question schedule in a semi-structured interview. Consultations on the first draft of the questionnaire were carried out with staff members from the Education Faculty in Mary Immaculate College who were specialists in all aspects of literacy (reading, writing, oracy) to ensure that the questionnaire included a comprehensive range of diverse aspects of literacy skills, resources, testing and assessment methods and literacy supports. The semi-structured interview was piloted with teachers working with this age cohort. In addition to a brief section on background information relating to the specific educational setting and on teachers' experience of teaching, there were three main elements to the questionnaire:

1. Literacy assessments, supports, strategies and interventions
2. Teachers' ratings of students' literacy skills and motivation
3. CPD experience, availability of CPD and identified CPD needs

A final section of the questionnaire consisted of a number of open questions to give the teachers an opportunity to express their own views on literacy development in their settings; to assess how students' literacy needs affected their teaching; and to suggest ways that improved literacy delivery could be achieved in their settings. Finally the teachers were asked what their hopes were in relation to their students' literacy development.

2.4.1 Participants

Seventeen interviews were held across 14 sites and involved 24 respondents, all of whom were teaching staff. The 14 sites included four DEIS Post-Primary schools, five Youth Encounter projects, four Youthreach centres and an additional centre that was included by request as it works with a population of students at risk of school failure/drop out¹⁴. The schools were located in Limerick, Cork and Dublin.

The semi-structured interview was conducted by TED researchers. Interviews were held with teachers either individually or in pairs, depending on their availability within the setting. The questionnaire served as a guide for the interviews and teachers were encouraged throughout to expand on their responses, as they considered appropriate. This was to ensure that rich data was captured when questions did not allow sufficient scope for them to describe the practices in their own particular context. In addition to the settings profile section, there were three sections to the questionnaire. The first dealt with the range of literacy assessment procedures and resources in place in the setting and the teaching strategies that the teachers used. The second section asked for teachers' perceptions of the students' literacy needs and their motivation to engage with text and the third section asked the teachers to identify the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities that they had participated in and also asked them to identify CPD which they believed would benefit them in their work or which they needed.

¹⁴ The terminology 'students at risk of failure in education' originates in the historical development of the special schools and an evaluation of YEP which was carried out in the 1980s (Egan and Hegarty 1984)

The questionnaires had both quantitative and qualitative components. In the analysis of the questionnaires the first step was the breakdown of the quantitative sections within the questions. The frequency with which assessments were used was noted and the most frequently used assessments/tests were identified. A frequency count of the types of resources and strategies in use was carried out. An analysis of the teachers' ratings of their students' literacy abilities and of their attitudes to literacy related activities was charted. The teachers' identification of CPD requirements was also quantified.

The teachers' responses to the questionnaires were recorded. In some instances the responses to the questions brought forth an extensive response of explanation of practice or statements about the student cohort in the setting. Where appropriate, these more extensive responses have been included in the analysis to give a greater depth to the questionnaire findings.

The next section profiles the findings from the questionnaire. The findings are presented following the outline of the question schedule (see Appendix 1 for the full question schedule).

Section 3

Research Findings



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3.1 Introduction

The findings from the semi structured interviews are presented here following the sequencing of the questions in the question schedule (see Appendix 1 for the full question schedule). As indicated in section 2.4 above, where appropriate, the comments recorded during the interview are included to give the broader picture that emerged as the participants expanded on practice or gave reasons for particular strategies and the outcomes from their use of strategies or interventions.

3.2 Participant organisation profiles

The researchers gathered data from across four Post Primary schools, four Youthreach centres, five Youth Encounter Projects and one setting providing short term educational placement for Junior Certificate students. Two of the YEPs identified themselves as special schools, stating that '*we're under YEPS for ease of administration*' (FE3¹⁵). The post primary schools had student numbers that ranged from 120 in the smallest school to 450 students in the largest school while the other two schools had 300 and 320 students. The Youthreach centres varied from 20 to 75 learners and the five YEP centres reported having approximately 25 students each. This latter group have rolling enrolments and enrolment numbers changed throughout the year. Three of these YEP projects reported having a waiting list of students who are failing in, or not attending at, their mainstream schools. There were six students attending the short term educational placement centre which runs on a cyclical basis with new groups forming every eight weeks.

The staff numbers in the post primary schools varied from 18 to 42 teachers, most of whom were full time. Youthreach centres had between 10 and 18 staff, most of whom were full time staff, while the Youth Encounter Projects had between 3 and 5 staff members with additional part time teachers, usually with around 10 contact hours. The short term educational placement centre was similar to the YEPs in terms of staff to child ratios but this was variable in each eight week cycle, two teachers were full time and one was part-time.

Table 3.1 overleaf sets out the student and teacher numbers in each location and also gives the ages and the class levels taught in the schools and other educational settings.¹⁶ The age ranges in the settings varied, as illustrated in table 3.1 overleaf. In the DEIS school settings the age range was from 12 to 19 (first year to sixth year classes), however, in several of the Youth Encounter Projects there were children from 8 to 15 years. Youthreach centres had an age range of between 13 and 21 with most of the settings reporting that their students were generally aged between 14 and 20 years.

¹⁵ Each interview had a unique code assigned to it.

¹⁶ School is used as a general term throughout this report for the educational settings involved in the research except in contexts where it is necessary to make a distinction in relation to the findings.

Table 3.1 Participant settings: Student and Teacher numbers and class levels

Setting	Student numbers	Age range	Teacher numbers	Class levels
Post Primary 1	340	12-19	35 (+5 p/t)	All
Post Primary 2	435	12-19	42 (+4L/S)	All
Post Primary 3	300	12-19	25 + Principal	All
Post Primary 4	130	12-19	18	All
Youthreach 1	75	15-21	18	All
Youthreach 2	25	12-16	4 (+1p/t)	All
Youthreach 3	25	15-20	6	All
Youthreach 4	25	15-19	4 (+1p/t)	All
Youth Encounter 1	24	10-15	4+ Principal	1st - 3rd year
Youth Encounter 2	25	8-16	4+ Principal	1st - 3rd year
Youth Encounter 3	24	10-16	4 (+Art)	1st - 3rd year*
Youth Encounter 4	20	10-16	4+ (1p/t)	1st - 3rd year*
Youth Encounter 5	22	10-16	3 (+ Art and 4 p/t)	1st - 3rd year
Short term educational centre	6	12-15	2 (+1 p/t)	1st - 3rd year

*both of these settings reported that they had occasionally had younger or older children in their groups.

The teaching staff (which included 3 teaching principals) had teaching experience that ranged from 7 years to 30 years with an average of 15 years teaching. The respondents from the post primary schools were Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) or National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) coordinators who had additional subject teaching responsibilities, (subjects included history, CPSE, languages other than English and maths) or English teachers and one teacher of other subjects, (CPSE and a European language). Two of the post primary school teachers also identified themselves as learning support teachers. Teachers in the Youthreach and YEP centres frequently taught a wide range of subjects and described a large part of their work as learning support or resource teaching, thus referencing the fact that much of their teaching context is small group or one-to-one settings. Three respondents from these settings also had roles as literacy or JCSP coordinators. All of the settings had a literacy plan in place or in development and twelve had a designated literacy coordinator while the other two settings had a team approach to their literacy plan.

In most of the settings a wide variety of subjects were taught, these included the full range of Junior Certificate subjects in the Post Primary settings. Many of these subjects were offered also in the YEP and Youthreach settings with the addition of foundation level English and practical subjects such as graphic design and woodwork.

3.3 Literacy assessment, supports, strategies and interventions

3.3.1 Literacy assessment: procedures and assessments used

The questionnaire listed a number of literacy assessment procedures and the teachers were asked which of these, if any, were in use in the school. Additionally they were asked to identify any additional assessment methods that were used in the school. Teachers were asked about the frequency of literacy assessment in the school and also to state how useful they found information obtained from assessments. Questions about sharing the information with other staff and with parents were also asked.

It emerged that although there is a broad range of assessments available, the schools used only one or two of these assessment options. In most schools the WRAT 4 was the main assessment tool with 12 of the settings reporting its use. This test was most used in general testing of all pupils entering the DEIS post primary schools and with most of the pupils on entry to the other settings. Additional assessment procedures were reported as being used with children with special educational needs or in learning support contexts only. The extent to which the assessments were carried out was found in some instances to depend on a number of factors including availability of staff to carry out same, as one teacher pointed out '*there's only me, if I were to test everyone in the school....*' (FE6), with the implication that testing all of the first year students was beyond the capacity of just one teacher. In another setting with fewer students this question generated a very comprehensive explanation about target setting:

FB6 Speaker 2: "Right, well my input would be in the whole school with the literacy and we have our school improvement targets set for this year as required by the SSE strategy so like say for example we analysed attainment levels in LC/JC and we got percentage compared to national averages and so on and how the school is tracking them. We've also got our own in-house testing the WRAT test, the Drumcondra reasoning test and all that so the targets were born out of those figures, so here's an example: let's say the number of students taking foundation level Junior Cert, //or sorry the number of students failing Junior Cert or ordinary level English was four times the national average here, so we aimed to reduce the failure rate to the national average of 3%, that was an aspirational target and it was even better at the end, so that was one target. The number of students taking foundation level Junior Cert English is roughly 7 times the national average and that would be appropriate for the setting here because you know the disadvantaged area of it, in terms of improving things we thought we should aim to bring it down anyway, so we thought 3 times the national average about 9% would be appropriate for people doing foundation level English that// they're the kind of targets we have".

The teachers who were coordinators for JCSP or for literacy were familiar with most of the tests used for assessment identified in the questionnaire and were able to identify others that were in use in their settings or that had previously been used in the setting. Subject teachers were more likely to respond 'unknown' to these questions and also to questions about whether or not information about assessments was shared with parents.

Table 3.2 overleaf illustrates the main tests used in the schools. The WRAT 4 is the most used test. The schools also identified the use of additional tests in individual cases as needed and some tests that had been used in the past.

Table 3.2 Literacy assessments in use

Assessment	Number of settings	Comment
WRAT 4	12	Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT4) is a diagnostic test used to measure reading, spelling and mathematical computation. It is used from age 5 to 94.
WIAT	1	Wechsler Individual Achievement Test® is used to assess academic strengths and weaknesses. The third edition is used from ages 6 to 50.
New Group Reading Test	1	Sentence completion and reading passages. Used from age 6 to 16.
Diagnostic Reading Analysis	1	The Diagnostic Reading Analysis is a modern oral reading test designed specifically for less able readers from age 7 to 16.
Neale Analysis of Reading Ability	0	The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) measures the accuracy, comprehension and rate of reading in children from the age of 6 to 13.
Single Word Reading test	2	The Single Word Reading Test provides a measure of a child's word reading skill and contributes to the assessment of reading achievement, as well as informing teaching and learning strategies. It is used from age 6 to 16.
Graded Word Spelling test	1	An 80 word spelling test graded in order of difficulty for assessing pupils ages 5 to 18.
Edinburgh Reading Test Version 4 (ERT4)	1	ERT4 provides norms which allow effective monitoring from age 11:7 to 16+.
Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	2	The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test-Revised (DPRT-R) is a group-administered test of achievement in reading. There are six levels of the test for use with classes from age 7 to 12 (1st to 6th class).
Other¹⁷		
Dolch list	3	A list of high frequency words.
Dyslexia assessment	2	A test battery used in assessing children with a diagnosis of dyslexia.
Schonell	2	Used by schools in conjunction with the ARROW ¹⁸ programme.
Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities	1	A co-normed set of tests for measuring general intellectual ability, specific cognitive abilities, oral language, and academic achievement and can be used from age 2 to 80+.
Salford Reading Test	1	The Salford Sentence Reading Test is a simple and quick individual test of oral reading based on sentences of carefully graded difficulty. Can be used from age 4 to 13+.

¹⁷ 'Other' refers to tests that were not listed in the questionnaire and that were reported as being used in the settings.

¹⁸ ARROW™ is an acronym for Aural, Read, Respond, Oral and Write. ARROW™ is a computerised programme using self-voice. It is internationally recognised as a dynamic, cost effective method of multi – sensory learning for both adults and children alike.

Sharing information from assessments with staff was part of the responsibilities of the JCSP coordinators or the literacy coordinators and in most of the settings this was done both formally and informally. Formal systems included access to the assessment results in written or digital spreadsheet format which was presented at staff meetings. The coordinators usually combined this with additional information on students identified as having learning support needs. The literacy coordinators were also available for consultations with staff on individual cases. Many of the settings reported informal discussions around individual students as an ongoing part of the assessment process. These informal discussions led to an additional focus on the individual student's progress and a refocussing of input to respond to needs. Post primary school staff tended to be less satisfied with the dissemination of results of assessments with two coordinators suggesting that class teachers had little opportunity to access test results outside of staff meetings as the results were available only in hardcopy and kept as confidential files in an office.

There were mixed responses to the question about sharing the assessment information with parents. Most of the schools gave an abbreviated form of information to parents. There were exceptions to this, particularly in the YEPs where the students all had an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and parent input was considered part of the process of developing the IEP. In some of the other settings the teachers made it clear that they were, in a sense, protecting the parents from knowledge of the low rate of achievement of their children on national tests. In one instance one teacher explained how she regretted a decision to share this information with the parents:

"At a parent /teacher [meeting] we invited parents to hear those results and it was more difficult than I thought because you know 1st year and you know how positive everyone is about 1st year and teachers were, and they were going around hearing he's doing really well in English and he's doing really well in his history and in his geography and he's even getting 80% and 90% in these subjects and then when he comes to us and when their percentiles and standard scores were low there was a lot of explaining to do". FD1

The following list of how information from assessment was used in the schools highlights the complexities that surround literacy assessment and the use of information gained from such assessment.

The information from testing and assessment was used as follows:

- Some schools used the information to "form class groups";
- YEPs used the information to identify student's individual needs and progress;
- The information was included in IEPs and to identify each student's 'base level';
- To identify a starting point for the individual student;
- For comparison with year group;
- For comparisons with previous groups or between individuals and to measure progress of individuals;
- For identification of special educational needs;
- To inform teaching.

All of the schools indicated that the information from testing was very useful and highlighted how the information was used for class planning, and also in general discussions among staff in order to address specific needs for individual students. One school highlighted that identifying the base level for the student was the key use and then measuring progress with subsequent assessments or retesting. In two cases where assessment was not seen as useful, the teachers pointed out that the students were at such a basic level that they performed poorly on the tests and that it often happened that the tests did not reflect the teachers' experience of the child. In this latter instance, the teacher differentiated between the child's ability to work in the classroom environment and the more pressured environment where a test might take place.

3.3.2 Target setting and oral language goals

There were two main forms of target setting identified from the questionnaire responses. In the smaller settings of Youthreach and YEPs reference was made to IEPs as a general framework for target setting, which was associated with planning for the individual progress of each student. In addition, four of these settings identified JCSP targets as being relevant and in use. DEIS post primary schools also used JCSP targets and two also identified NBSS targets as used in their setting. The DEIS schools also have a whole-school DEIS plan with literacy and numeracy as two of the pillars. These plans state the targeted areas for development and often the changes are stated in terms of percentage increase or decrease in the specific target area.

In response to the question of whether literacy targets included oracy there was a wide range of responses. Seven settings indicated that oracy targets were generally included in JCSP or in curriculum targets. One teacher encapsulated the use of JCSP statements as follows:

“Yes we have JCSP statements that cover a large area, speaking and listening. There are/ it’s all under that umbrella and they’re lovely statements actually/ aren’t they? You know they give the kids a sense of achievement as well. And they’re concrete so that they can see where they’re achieving, that they’re working down through them” FB1

One of the subject teachers highlighted that the use of presentations in her subject meant there was a clear focus on oral language development. In two of the YEPs the oral language needs of the students were identified as being significant and there were clear targets in relation to oral language development set out.

FB1 “I know reading is vital but I think language for the particular cohort that I’m working with// if our children can’t express themselves – the behaviour just deteriorates the frustration just deteriorates and they just fall out of school because they don’t feel they belong to the school environment setting and if they’re withdrawn they’re not able to communicate for themselves their behaviour just // it exacerbates their behaviour their existing behaviour and frustrations and so what happens is they end up then on outreach programmes being suspended from school. When they’re suspended they find it very hard to get back again // so it has a real knock on effect in a negative way so I do think that language is just crucial, and we need to be aware of that [when] teaching teenagers that have very poor reading, that we don’t just focus on the reading and we have to focus in on the language as well and give them as much opportunity as possible to be able to speak “

There were four settings where oracy targets were not explicitly stated within literacy targets and one of the teachers stated that there was no time for specific oracy as it was not part of exam preparation. One of the subject teachers stated that there was no oral dimension in her subject but then reflected that interviews were part of the project work for the subject and there was an oral dimension associated with preparing the students to answer questions in that interview.

One setting highlighted the necessity of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) assessment in ensuring that appropriate supports could be put in place for the students.

3.3.3 Literacy strategies and interventions in use in teaching

In this section the teachers were given a list of literacy strategies that support literacy development and assist learners to access texts. This list was developed from the consultations with experts in the area of literacy and education in the initial development of the questionnaire. Supporting readers to access complex text goes beyond word identification and decoding and best practice, as outlined in the literature review, suggests that multiple approaches and strategies are needed.

Table 3.3 illustrates the strategies that were available and in use in the schools. The teachers responded to this section by indicating whether or not they used the strategies and the frequency with which they used these teaching strategies. As is evident from the table, multiple strategies were used by all of the teachers. Vocabulary supports such as use of word identification strategies and use of dictionaries as well as specific focus on new vocabulary items were used by 17 teachers. Comprehension strategies, including pre and post reading activities, assessing texts for readability and mind maps or other scaffolding were used by all teachers either on a daily or weekly basis. Writing frames were reported as being used frequently by all of the teachers, as were spelling strategies. Discussion in groups was also used by 17 teachers but was less frequently used than other strategies, with 8 teachers indicating that they used it weekly and only four using this strategy daily. Dictionary work was also used as a weekly activity by 7 teachers.

Table 3.3 Strategies available and in use

Strategies in literacy teaching	Available	In use			
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Other
Explicit Vocabulary teaching	17	9	4	0	4
Assessing texts for readability	17	9	4	0	4
Mind maps or scaffolding	17	9	6	0	2
Comprehension strategies	17	8	5	0	4
Writing frames	17	8	4	0	5
Literacy starter finisher activities	17	7	5	0	5
Spelling strategies	17	6	4	1	6
Word identification strategies	17	5	7	1	4
Discussion in cooperative groups	17	4	8	1	4
Dictionary work	13	2	7	1	3
Supports for digital literacy	7	2	5	0	0
Specific apps or software	5	2	3	0	0

Somewhat surprisingly, in relation to digital literacy specifically, a number of the participants reported that they were not using any specific strategies to develop digital literacy. The seven schools who did state that they were addressing this form of literacy identified a number of educational apps that they were using in their ICT classes, such as Wordshark, Numbershark and ARROW. Most of the teachers identified the Junior Certificate School Programme¹⁹ as one of their primary access points for resources and intervention strategies. Those who were JCSP coordinators for their schools had received training in a variety of literacy and numeracy programmes supported by the JCSP team.

3.3.4 Resources for literacy support

To identify resources available for literacy support a short list was compiled from the wide variety of such resources that are commercially available or recommended by literacy support experts. The teachers were also asked to identify additional resources that were used to support students' literacy. Table 3.4 indicates the resources most used and the number of settings that reported using them.

¹⁹ [JCSP] (Oireachtas Report, 2008)

Table 3.4 Literacy programmes and resources in use

Literacy programme/resource	Available	In use	Comment
Graded readers	12	12	Several brand names were referred to and were considered ideal for use with the students.
Hi-Lo books	16	16	These high interest, low readability books were used in most schools.
Subject book boxes	11	11	There were different methods in the use of subject boxes. Some were used only by individual staff members rather than being available throughout the school.
School library	9	9	
Variety of dictionaries	16	14	
Audio books	9	7	
Other literacy supports used by teachers			
Word shark	5	5	Wordshark is a literacy programme used widely in schools. It combines the excitement of computer games with the strategic task of learning to read and spell. It is a commercially available phonics based programme.
Catch up literacy	4	4	Although designed for use in primary schools this approach was considered as very effective.

The teachers were asked to identify supports for literacy used specifically in learning support and various commonly used resources were identified and listed in the questionnaire. These included:

- Toe By Toe
- Precision Teaching and SNIP Programme
- PAT
- THRASS
- Alpha to Omega
- Phonographix
- Acceleread/ Accelewrite
- ARROW
- Read & Write 10 GOLD (ICT)

The ARROW programme was used by five settings and was considered very useful for students in tracking their own progress. A similar claim was made by the setting that used the Accelerated programme.

Several of the supports were used in one of the schools but programmes such as Precision teaching, PAT and Read & Write 10 Gold were not used in any of the schools. Catch-up literacy and a number of phonics programmes that were designed for use in primary schools were nonetheless found by participating teachers to be suitable for the students' needs.

Digital literacy and ICT

The teachers mainly stated that there was no specific focus on digital literacy and teaching of strategies in accessing web based materials. There were a number of teachers who explained that students used computers for research and that this was an ongoing feature of learning support or general ICT classes.

Most teachers could not identify specific computer programmes to support literacy that were available in the school. However, as stated above, some schools were using online programmes such as Accelerated, ARROW, Wordshark, and other programmes that they could access through the JCSP website. There was evidence therefore that digital literacy was supported in schools but not necessarily in the context of a programmed or planned approach.

3.3.5 Effectiveness of literacy resources

In terms of the effectiveness of literacy resources the teachers were asked to comment on the strengths of the programmes they were using and to identify why they used those particular programmes. The 'success factor' was the most frequently cited reason for using the resources. In particular, the teachers mentioned those resources which had a high level of built in progression, particularly sequences of graded readers. The following comment illustrates the teachers' views of the effectiveness of these resources:

FB3 "The readers, the packs that they come with and then the way that the readers repeat some of the words throughout, that sort of thing. The material is relevant there's good storylines for predicting and there are a lot of these comprehension things and it has different levels of questions and some people might be doing level A but some get to level C and there are some on factual stuff also the NALA stuff can be a bit old fashioned at times but they do cars and dogs and subjects that the lads are interested in so I just get a lot of that kind of stuff"

Motivation was mentioned by eight teachers, all of whom specified that the resources they used were motivating because of the interest evoked and the enjoyment experienced by their students. The resources also offered teachers opportunities to vary their teaching and classroom practices (2 mentions) and to promote independent working (2 mentions) varying classroom practice to take into account different levels of ability was also highlighted as a feature of these resources (4 mentions).

3.3.6 Whole school initiatives to support literacy

A range of available whole school initiatives and approaches designed to promote literacy, mainly those supported by JCSP, were included in the questionnaire and teachers identified those that were in use and also identified their rationale for using the initiatives. They also identified other whole school initiatives that were in use. Table 3.5 overleaf profiles the range and frequency of initiatives and supports used in the schools.

Table 3.5 Whole school and other literacy initiatives and supports

Literacy Initiatives	Available	In Use
DEAR	10	10
Paired reading	14	14
Peer Assisted Learning	11	11
Other	11	11
Literacy supports		
Graded Readers	12	12
Hi Lo books	16	16
Subject Book Boxes	11	11
School Library	9	9
Variety of dictionaries	16	14
Audio books	7	7
Other	13	13

From the 17 questionnaires it emerged that paired reading was the most widely used strategy, with 14 of the schools using this initiative, sometimes as part of a buddy system in partnership with local schools and sometimes as part of a specific reading programme (e.g. catch-up literacy). Peer Assisted Learning and DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) were also widely used. Eleven of the schools were using other initiatives and supports which included computer based programmes such as WORDSHARK, activities such as make a book and readathons (e.g. 6-weeks 6-books) or one book one community initiatives.

Among the literacy supports in use Hi-Lo books, dictionaries and graded readers were the most widely used. Audio books were the least used and some of the schools had plans to increase their use but found them a costly option.

3.3.7 Benefits of using whole-school literacy supports

The teachers were asked to identify the specific benefits they perceived from using the whole school literacy initiatives. Many of the teachers highlighted that the JCSP supports were well structured and appropriately targeted for their cohort of students and were invaluable resources. Catch-up literacy programmes from the NBSS and some of the computer based programmes were particularly successful both in terms of promoting students reading and for keeping students motivated. Another source of student motivation, according to the responses, were projects undertaken around the students' own interests. It was noted, however, that working in groups was often not an option within some of the student groups due to behavioural issues and that one-to-one programmes were often more effective in addressing students' literacy needs and learning styles. However, despite their evident benefits, post primary DEIS schools were constrained in their use of such programmes, because they could not timetable sufficient one-to-one support.

The Youthreach centres also operated a timetabled withdrawal system for learning support within which computer programmes for literacy development could be used. However, because most of their students needed learning support they were grouped according to ability levels for small group teaching and a limited amount of one-to-one teaching was available. This in turn limited the number of programmes that could be used with the students.

Subject teachers spoke of the usefulness of CPD sessions and materials from organisations such as NALA and they had also found the input on literacy accommodation guidelines for children with mild general learning disabilities in SEN courses very illuminating and practical.

3.4 How teachers rated students' literacy skills

An extensive section of the questionnaire examined the range of skills that are required for competent literacy and asked the teachers to identify on a 5-point scale where their students' abilities would lie. As terminology such as 'below average', 'average' or 'above average' can be very subjective, the teachers were asked to identify what their comparison point was for their students. Several defined 'average' as a pass in Junior Certificate exams but others focussed on a basic ability to read and understand text as their mid-point. Three of the teachers, in relation to specific questions, such as general reading and oral language ability were able to use the results of assessments as the basis for selecting their 'average'. In relation to their identified mid-point the majority of the schools identified their cohort of students as 'below average' or 'requiring additional support' in most facets of literacy skills.

Table 3.6 below gives a summary of the teachers' responses to this question. In the table the number of interviews (i.e. 17) is used as the number for 'all' teachers because when two teachers were interviewed together there was a consensus in their ratings in this section of the questionnaire. It was difficult to establish common measurability across sites in the absence of access to hard data on the students' test scores or exam outcomes. The ratings reported below are the teacher's individual or joint perceptions based on their experience of their student cohort. The five point scale ranged from 'requires additional support' at its lowest level, to 'excellent' at its highest point (See Appendix 1).

Table 3.6 Teacher ratings of students' literacy skills

Literacy skill	Teacher ratings from 17 interviews
Oral English	4 teachers selected 'Requires additional support' for at least 50% of their students. 10 selected 'Below average'. 1 selected 'Average'. 2 selected across the board with 20% at each of the 5 points on the scale.
General reading	15 selected below average or requires additional support for the majority of their students. 1 selected 'Average' for 80% of students. 1 described students as being evenly distributed across the 5 point scale.

Literacy skill Cont'd	Teacher ratings from 17 interviews Cont'd
English Language and literature reading	<p>12 teachers rated their students as 'Below average' or Requires additional support'.</p> <p>1 teacher identified students as being evenly distributed across the lower 4 points of the 5 point scale.</p> <p>1 teacher identified 65% as below average with the rest average except for three above average readers.</p> <p>3 subject teachers did not rate their students on this question.</p>
Subject specific reading	<p>12 teachers indicated their students were below average or required of additional support.</p> <p>1 teacher stated 70-80% of students were average.</p> <p>2 teachers identified students as being variable across 4 points on the 5 point scale.</p> <p>2 teachers did not want to commit to a general answer for this item as they were able to identify a lot of variability in the students depending on their interest in the subject or the literacy demands of the subject.</p>
Capacity to communicate in written English	<p>11 teachers rated their students as 'below average' or requiring additional support.</p> <p>1 teacher rated students as 70-80% average with the remainder evenly divided between below average or requiring additional support.</p> <p>5 teachers also noted that their students were reluctant to write and that some did not have the 'basics'.</p>
Subject specific writing	<p>12 of the teachers felt this was a particular weakness for their students and selected the 'requires additional support option' for this skill.</p>
Spelling	<p>All teachers stated that their students were below average at spelling but that this was in line with their general literacy ability.</p>

In addition to gaining an overview of teachers' ratings of their students' literacy skills the semi-structured interview facilitated the collation of more detailed information on oral language skills, reading, writing and spelling through the teachers' comments on the range of literacy skills that their students displayed and how these varied across their current cohort and across different cohorts. This enabled the development of a more detailed understanding of teachers' perceptions of their students' literacy skills. A selection of the comments is included here

Q *Would literacy levels of JC students be a cause of concern?*

A04 *Yes they would be. So for example out of 9 students doing Junior certificate some are doing 8 full subjects, 3 of 9 students are doing 6 subjects and 4 of 9 need readers in different subjects. They can have very good skills at listening and observing but not for writing the information. Generally there would be concern especially with spellings, problems with punctuation. So there's literacy support so those students who have difficulty with numeracy and literacy and they can get a little more one-to-one.*

A03 *Very much. I'd say some of them are, like, basic grammar, basic punctuation are very bad. I'd say some of them are functionally illiterate. If you gave them a manual they would struggle. I would imagine now it would be a minority would survive without help*

Ability to use Oral English

As evidenced from table 3.6, above, the teachers judged the students to be below average in oracy. However, the analysis of interviews reveals the complexity of the current situation regarding oracy levels. The teachers' comments indicated a range of concerns about their students' ability to express themselves and the competencies they lacked in terms of what the teachers defined as 'average' attainment.

Several other teachers also identified that their students had a low range of vocabulary, resulting in an "inability" to express themselves. Receptive language difficulties were also mentioned by two of the teachers. Teachers highlighted that such language deficits made it difficult for students to "*verbalise what is wrong—what they need*" (A07). Two teachers, however, expressed a view that was different to that of the majority. For example, one teacher explained that "*a lot were above the average, they rely on speaking so much*" and added that "*their oral skills are great, if only they could transfer that to paper*" (A02). Another pointed out that the students were intelligent and streetwise with life experience and that their oral skills encapsulated that, but not in language that was useful for exam purposes. This mirrors the findings of Cregan (2007) where she discusses variations in language style in primary schools in areas of designated disadvantage.

Ratings in general reading and English literature

The teachers indicated that their students were below average or in need of additional support in general reading. In the comments, many of the teachers highlighted issues underlying low levels of achievement. Six teachers pointed out that the students' measured reading ages were from 7 to 9 years, indicating that few of the cohort in their schools were reading at their appropriate reading age. There were some differences between the settings. The high support settings reported lower overall reading abilities. In the Youthreach centres there was a more varied picture with a range of reading ability across the cohort but teachers did indicate that, in general, they were concerned about students' low levels of reading ability. Indeed one teacher highlighted that the students could read the words, but did not understand what they were reading. In the post-primary settings there was also wide variability in students' levels of ability and a large number of students that required additional support. This finding reflects teachers' perceptions, noted in the ESRI report on students' experiences of post primary school (Smyth et al. 2004), that there is a significant minority of students with reading difficulties. Ratings in English literature reading showed 12 out of 14 schools agreeing that their students had difficulties with engaging with and understanding literary texts. One of the schools pointed out that their focus was on the basics, and literature was '*not much done*'. Two other schools stated that their students were unlikely to read outside school and that reading was seen as a chore. Three of the schools pointed out that their ratings of students as below average was in comparison to the abilities of the general population cohort of students in the same year groups as the students with difficulties.

Subject specific reading and writing

In terms of subject specific reading and writing there were two questions that asked teachers to rate their students in this regard. Most of the teachers (15) judged their students to be below average or in need of additional support but one teacher commented that it could be very variable and that the individual student's level of interest in the subject was a factor in their level of reading and writing skills. Two subject teachers judged their students to be average or below average in their reading and writing levels in their subjects.

Ability to communicate in written English

All of the teachers judged their students to be below average or in need of additional support in communicating through written English. One subject teacher explained that her students could not produce a basic letter without a considerable amount of scaffolding. Another explained that the students might write something in an exam context "*but it wouldn't be what the examiner was looking for*" (FB4).

Spelling

In relation to spelling the teachers all stated that their students were below average in spelling skills. However, they did focus on the variability between students, indicating that there was a wide range of ability levels. One teacher commented that the students were good at text language, but that their formal spelling was 'bad' (A02). One teacher also highlighted that the students were not confident in spelling and that they could '*do more than they realise*' (A06).

3.4.1 How teachers rated their students on attitudes to reading and literacy

The 2009 National Assessment of Reading and Mathematics highlighted that attitudes to literacy were a factor in success in reading (Eivers et al. 2009). The questionnaire included a series of questions for the teacher to rate their students' attitudes in terms of willingness to read, enjoyment of reading and ability to choose appropriate texts independently.

There was a 5 point scale for the teachers to select from, ranging from 'none' to 'excellent'. In most cases they stated that their students would have 'some interest' to 'slight interest' in reading for enjoyment and in reading additional material in subject areas. There was, however, a strong sense of the variation between individual students making a difference to this finding. Teachers in 14 of the interviews highlighted that there were some students who would, if interested, follow up with additional reading.

The subject areas that students were likely to read included local *Buy and Sell* magazines, dog magazines and car magazines and, in one case, science fiction. Once again the teachers' responses in this section highlighted the success of graded readers and high interest/ low readability (Hi Lo) books in raising the students' level of interest in reading. Although the teachers identified a number of titles and also genres such as crime fiction that their students were interested in, they, nonetheless, believed that there was a need for more titles in these genres and more targeted texts that reflected the world of their students.

Motivation

Teachers were asked to identify what motivates their students to read and write and to engage with text. The principal finding to emerge was that the material had to be meaningful to the students. As one teacher expressed it, students are motivated to engage with text '*when it's real*' (FB1). Teachers also stressed the importance of the material being designed to give the students a sense of achievement and success. Particular mention was given in this regard to the Hi Lo readers and other graded readers that structure reading progression in a way that can be identified by the students and that allows them to recognise that they have made progress. These graded readers will be explored in more detail in section 3.3.8.

The importance of stories and texts that related to the student's personal interests also emerged strongly from this section of the questionnaire. A number of types of subject matter were highlighted:

- Stories/factual texts involving horses/cars
- Footballers' lives
- Stories about prison or detectives and crime
- Local newspapers
- Magazines related to individual interests (cars, dogs, babies, etc.)

3.5 CPD experience, availability of CPD and identified CPD needs

3.5.1 Teachers' experience of CPD

In most of the settings CPD with a literacy focus had been offered both to the whole school and to the individual teachers. There was a great deal of variability in the CPD offered, however, a number of commonalities emerged. JCSP, NBSS or NALA courses had all been accessed by the teachers and they reported that they had learned useful strategies from the courses they had attended. PDST and SEN courses (both short term SESS courses and more extensive courses such as accredited Level 9 courses) had also been undertaken by a number of the teachers and they reported that they were very satisfied with the courses. On the whole teachers recognised that they had been able to modify their teaching following their in-service training. A selection of their comments is included below:

A03 *'We did a [one-day] literacy programme about / it could have been two years ago and what I got was using fonts and changing sizes and so on we got something you'd need to live it rather than be told you'd need to be aware of it every single day.'*

FB1 *'How I speak, my tone, the material I put in front of them. Now I'm much more careful about how I speak to allow the predicting and the skimming and the scanning and all of those things.'*

FD1 *'I trained in Mary I [Mary Immaculate College] and I'd have to say the skills they gave me in literacy changed totally the way I teach it.'*

Int *That was in your initial teacher training?*

FD1 *No I did the Grad Dip in Special Needs so I just thought they gave me// I did feel that when I came back I'm confident I might have experience. I might have changed things around but I keep going back and saying whatever they taught me, there was an awful lot of truth in it.'*

One of the two themes that were most prominent in relation to CPD was that training provided the teachers with new strategies so that they were able to modify their teaching. This was particularly the case with the subject teachers who were able to identify the modifications necessary to make texts accessible to their students, or at least to challenge their assumptions about their students' ability to access classroom materials. A second theme to emerge strongly was the value of accredited SEN training at NFQ level 9. Teachers highlighted the many teaching techniques and strategies that they had learned during these courses and had found particularly helpful. It was mostly teachers of English, learning support and resource teachers and literacy coordinators who had undertaken this training.

In two cases the teachers were unsure about who had delivered the short course/one day training they had attended and this raises the question of whether there is sufficient information about the training before it takes place and also raises issues in relation to follow up and support post-training.

There was a wide range of CPD opportunities, both in terms of those that had been availed of and those that were available to the teachers at the time of the research study. There were some differences in the CPD opportunities availed of by teachers who identified themselves as subject teachers and those who were either Behaviour Support Teachers or JCSP coordinators. The latter were more likely to have availed of CPD opportunities that had a specific focus on aspects of literacy such as reading, phonology, fluency etc. Teachers of English were also likely to have attended courses on literacy or to have been participants in training on ICT programmes related

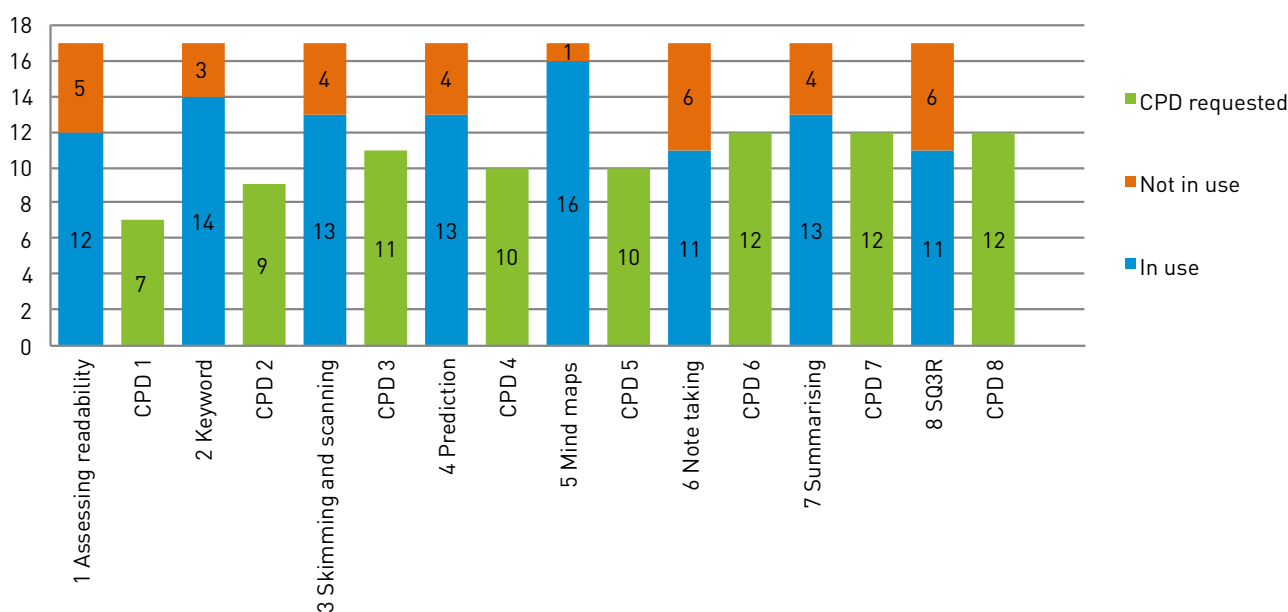
to literacy. Other subject teachers had little training in literacy but some had attended whole school input from NALA or JCSP and had picked up useful tips and practices which they had adopted and were implementing in their teaching. This finding emerged particularly from the teachers in the Post Primary schools. The teachers in the YEPs and Youthreach centres had either had extensive training through accredited post-graduate courses in SEN or, alternatively in some cases, no specific literacy training.

In terms of availability of CPD, all of the teachers expressed the view that they would be facilitated to take on any CPD that they identified as being useful for them once the significant issues of substitute cover (i.e. release from school is dependent on the school being able to obtain substitute cover for the teacher attending course days and especially block attendance at courses) and funding for the selected course could be addressed. Two of the subject teachers noted however that they would prioritise CPD in their own subject area rather than literacy, while one of the JCSP coordinators stated that targeted CPD in incorporating literacy in specific subject areas would be really valuable for staff in her school.

The list of strategies from the questionnaire was used to identify specific areas where teachers felt a need for CPD inputs. The following figures (Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) show the strategies that were available and in use and the number of respondents who indicated that they would be interested in additional CPD in these areas. The strategies are divided for ease of reading into reading, writing, oral language and spelling. Several of the teachers selected all or most of the strategies as useful areas for additional CPD with a view that *'everything is useful'*.

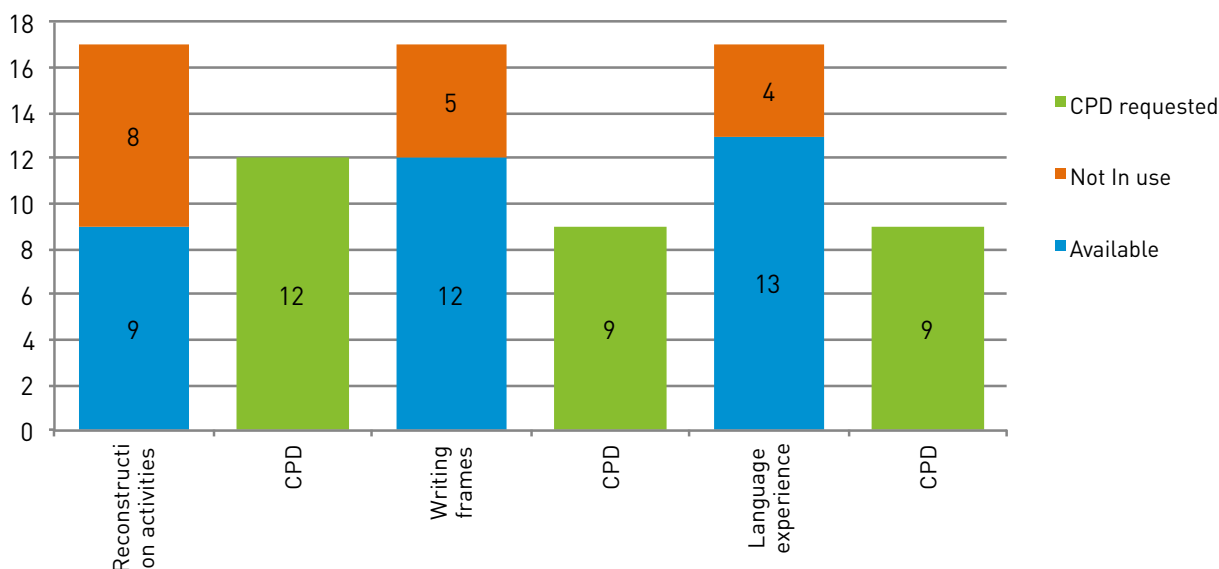
Most of the teachers used a wide variety of strategies in their classrooms as can be seen from figure 3.1 below. Almost all of the teachers (16) used mind maps as both pre and post reading supports. Keyword strategies were used by subject teachers as well as being used as a whole school strategy in some schools. Twelve teachers assessed texts for readability before using them with their students and, as can be seen from the relatively small number who identified a need for CPD in this area, they were satisfied with their ability to do this. Strategies to support comprehension and recall of text, such as skimming and scanning, prediction, and summarising, were used by up to 14 of the teachers and most teachers were also interested in CPD on using these strategies. The least favoured strategies were note taking and the structured reading programme SQ3R. Teachers were, however, interested in accessing CPD in these strategies.

Figure 3.1 Strategies for Literacy support: Reading



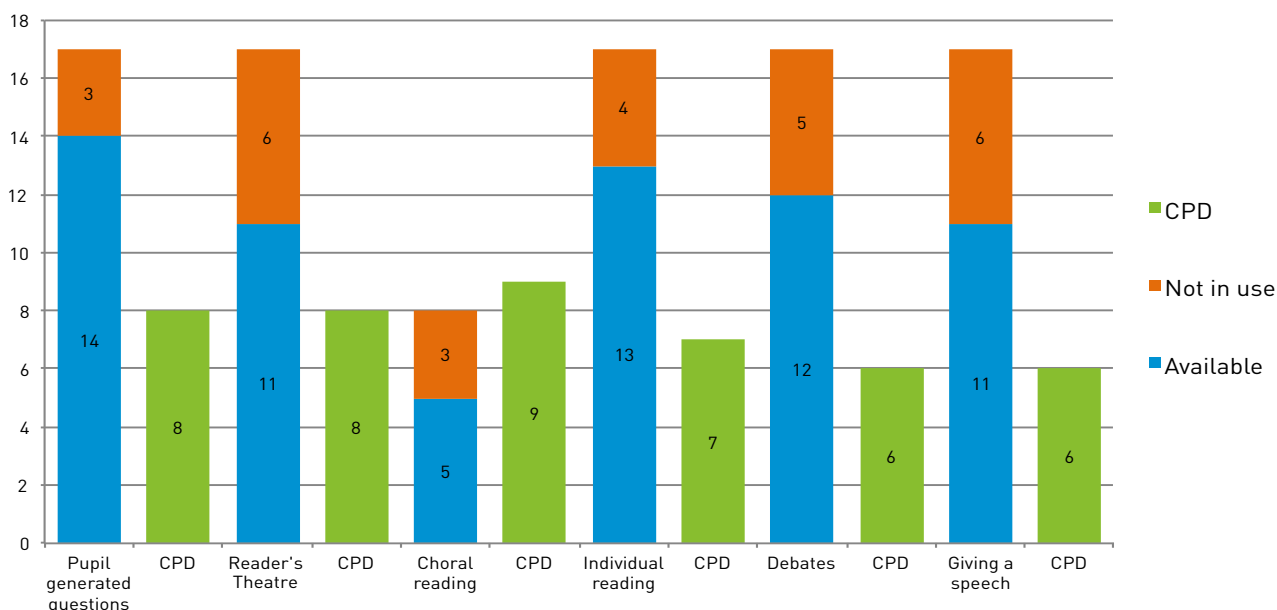
As can be seen from figure 3.2 there were mixed responses across the writing strategies used. Text reconstruction activities were used least and there were more teachers interested in CPD in these activities than in the more used strategies of writing frames and language experience writing. The teachers' comments from the interviews showed that they focused on the writing requirements for the Junior Certificate examinations and used the strategies that supported the forms of writing expected in the exams. It was in the context of responses to these strategies that several teachers explained that their students would be reluctant writers and that even if they knew the information they would have difficulties in structuring a text or a written answer in the exam.

Figure 3.2 Strategies for Literacy Supports: Writing



As can be seen from figure 3.3, the teachers used a wide range of strategies in supporting the students' oral language development. The least favoured strategy/activity was choral reading while pupil generated questions and individual reading were widely used. Debates and speeches were also used to a large extent. Indeed, one of the post primary school teachers noted that this was 'very useful'. Conversely, one of the YEP teachers explained that debates were not always useful in the setting as the students did not always 'understand how it worked' FE3.

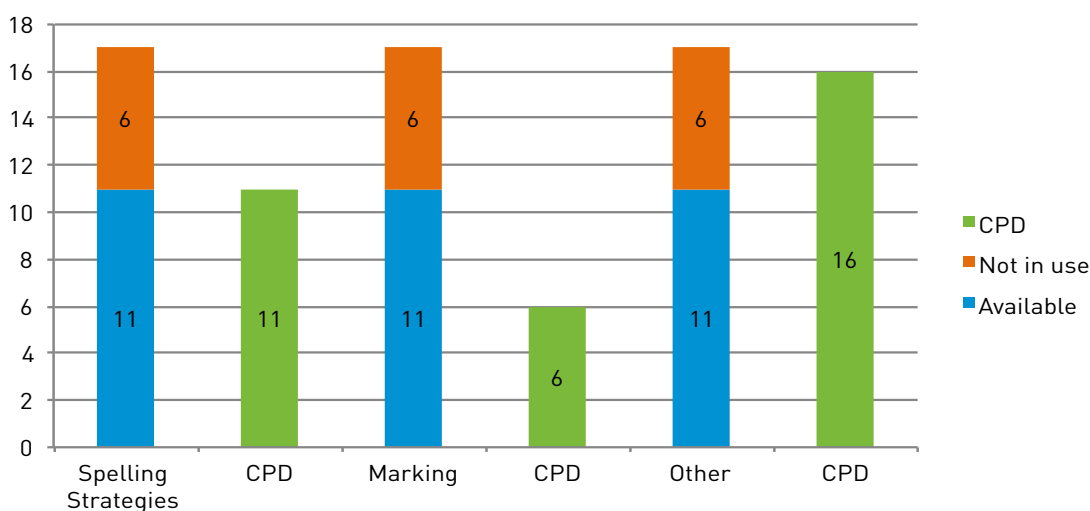
Figure 3.3 Strategies for Literacy Support: Oral Language Development



As mentioned above the least used strategy from the list was choral reading and one of the teachers commented that her students found it childish. This strategy had to be explained by researchers to a number of the teachers to whom it was unfamiliar. In relation to individual reading, several of the teachers described their students as reluctant to engage with this strategy and two teachers described building up their students' confidence in their reading to the point where they would take part in the activity. There were two subject teachers who explained that this would not be a way of working in their subject areas. Although Reader's Theatre is a strategy for developing reading fluency several teachers linked it with oral language development. On the whole, there was close attention to oral language development and to providing opportunities to students to develop their oral skills through a variety of methods. Some of these methods were related to the strategies listed but much of the time it was simply a case of using opportunities for discussion and engagement with the students and allowing them the space to express themselves.

The question relating to specific spelling strategies generated a good deal of commentary from the teachers particularly in relation to the negative effects if the students' texts were returned with all spelling errors marked. Teachers indicated that there was potential for the students to lose motivation/ become demotivated if there were too many spelling errors shown in their work. In terms of other spelling support strategies the teachers described key word approaches, self-marking and word lists that they used. These are illustrated in figure 3.4

Figure 3.4 Strategies for Literacy Support: Spelling and Other



Among the other strategies mentioned there was a wide variety that demonstrated the abilities of teaching staff to adapt their teaching to the needs of the students. These included using videos on You-Tube, newspapers and magazines to heighten interest. Teachers also reported using computer games such as word puzzles on JCSP, NBSS or NALA websites or commercial programmes such as Word shark, ARROW and Accelerated. The high level of interest in CPD indicated in the figures above reflect the teachers' openness to additional strategies that might benefit their teaching or their students. It also indicates their strong commitment to enabling and facilitating their students to succeed.

3.6 Qualitative responses: getting the teachers' point of view

The final section of the questionnaire focussed on teachers' qualitative responses to how literacy was delivered in their schools. It included issues such as: how literacy should be delivered; how delivery could be improved; and what hopes the teachers had for their students. The teachers' responses are set out under the following headings:

- How students' literacy needs affect teaching
- Developing a literacy plan
- How literacy delivery could be improved
- Teachers' hopes for their students
- Additional comments and insights

3.6.1 How students' literacy needs affect teaching

Teachers agreed that students' literacy needs affected teaching '*hugely!*' Teachers identified the strategies that they used and the adaptations they made to both their teaching and to the materials they used in order to ensure that they were working at a level that facilitated students' progress. Two teachers explained that they modified their teaching but tried to maintain the 'pace' of the class at the same time. In the smaller settings, where students were in a small group teaching context, there was considerable emphasis on making texts accessible to the students while at the same time ensuring they were not discouraged by realising that they were working from text books for primary school pupils.

A06 *"In a big way – to be honest just to find materials at the correct level can be tricky. When you do have the materials at the correct level or materials that are a slight little bit of a challenge—not too much of a challenge but the students find them still challenging but if they're at the correct level that's when it falls into place"*

FE3 *"Well it's all individual, you have to, the way we work here you have to work at their level"*

FB4.1 *"You can't just come in and say we have to do poetry today and think just that you know you can come in and teach poetry and you can't, so you just have to come in and do// you know pick poems that will suit, look at different angles remember that some of them probably have no experience of poetry, so it's huge".*

FB4.2 *"Differentiate is very much it".*

In some of the teachers' contributions it was evident that they were very conscious of the challenges they faced and they recognised how they adapted their teaching to respond to these challenges:

FB3 *"Well I do ... everything comes from them when they arrive here. Some are very weak at reading but we don't know why. So you have to investigate each individual person, so a lot of it comes from them; what they need, what they want to learn and then you see as you go along they actually//do they have the ability to learn to spell? Some of them really are always dependent on the wordcheck and the text check and all that. But you have to be led a lot by them and then you see the improvements they make and you can change things. I would love if they could be assessed by psychologists before they get to us because you get them in here age 15+ and the last assessment they had was when they were 10".*

FE2 *"Hugely! you know I have to take into account where they're at you know I have to do my utmost to try to move them along but there is no point in ignoring where they're at. So everything I do is influenced by where they are".*

It was clear from the teachers' contributions that they were employing strategies to differentiate the curriculum for their students through individual learning or education plans. It would be necessary to explore differentiation further with the teachers.

3.6.2 Developing a literacy plan

One of the interview questions asked participants' "What advice they would give on developing a literacy plan in a school, to principals, managers etc." The majority of the respondents were clear that the starting point was the individual student's needs. The teachers were very clear on the need for a whole school approach to the task of developing a literacy plan for any of their settings. It was evident that they felt each member of staff needed to identify their role in literacy development throughout the school, and that literacy was not just part of the English curriculum or the responsibility of the English or learning support teachers. Some of the teachers suggested strategies for developing such an approach while others focussed on the outcomes for students if all teachers took a role in literacy development. A selection of the comments is included here to show the range of views expressed.

FB2 *"Not to leave it to one person. It just shows that it's everybody's responsibility. All staff are responsible—we all have a written element to every subject, including Maths and the new project maths is even, how would I put it, having literacy needs because of the way the questions are structured. Kids are finding it very hard to extract what's being asked."*

FD1 *"Whole school, no department, no English department, can do it, it has to be every subject has to take responsibility."*

Int *And have you strategies for doing that?*

FD1 *"For doing that em you have to get every department to look at their subject and to say what are the literacy needs within their subject. And I think then that literacy needs to be the greatest priority in the school you know it needs to be number 1."*

A02 *"I suppose it has to go across, everyone is responsible for it and that's just coming from I suppose my background as teaching English. It's often well [Name] is responsible for that but// well I can't teach them to spell words in technology or in maths. That it is something that everyone has to be aware of "*

Some of the teachers also suggested that CPD had limited use if it was not applied in practice thus indicating the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to the delivery and subsequent support for whole school or subject specific CPD. The teachers noted that CPD had to be applied in practice, not just provided and then filed away.

3.6.3 How literacy delivery could be improved

In terms of improving literacy delivery in their own school the teachers spoke of the importance of adopting a whole school approach. They referenced in-service training, strategies for engagement that they were already using, and how additional resources or time with the students would help them achieve their goals. The themes that emerged from this question included:

- Resources and supports: Teachers identified the need for additional support personnel and the funding needed to allow them to invest in new resources.
- Motivation of students: The teachers expressed the views that the students' engagement in their own education was a key factor in success and that they would do whatever it took to engage the students.
- Skills and professional development of teaching staff.

Sections of the transcript show how varied the responses were and how, nonetheless, it was evident that the teachers were united in wanting to respond to the students' needs:

FE2 *"If our children had completely different lives outside of school and were able to see the value of a future where they were literate and that there would be a value for them and a reward for them in society. It is very sad to say that because of their whole situation because by the time they get to this stage you know being// not being as literate as their cohorts in the whole country isn't going to be as relevant, because they are going to // they know already they are not going to be reaping the rewards of literacy"*

FB1 *"We need to do a lot more whole school work and sharing of resources and ideas and strategies and professional development as well. I'm a firm believer after doing this course [that] anyone teaching in a special school needs to have specific training [The course described is an accredited post graduate qualification in SEN at HETAC level 9]. I think it's a very complex piece of work. You know every child is an individual and their needs are so great and how do we find out really what their needs are only through assessment and how can we assess comfortably unless you're shown. So you know to write an IEP means nothing without having thorough assessments. To me now, and I would have been doing it myself, I'm not judging. Being trained, I would have been writing IEPs myself without really having the knowledge behind it"*

FB5 *"I think that we need to identify the vocabulary needed in every subject. I think that needs to be the strategy going forward; everybody coming together and saying these are the words I need to be taught for this week and with the help of the learning support that we'd teach these words in learning support but also that the mainstream teacher needs to take responsibility that literacy needs to be taught in class as well and it's not the job of the primary school teacher [i.e. before the students arrive in post-primary school] or the learning support teacher. It has to be across the board everyone taking responsibility. I think it would be brilliant out there if there were courses that would give literacy support to // or ideas or strategies, useable ones that they could use in class."*

A02 *"I do think we're quite good at it. If I had a magic wand we have a small class size so I can't really complain about that but there's so much diversity in the class"*

Interviewer: In what way?

A02 *"Well I suppose you can't really go any faster than the weakest person and sometimes the strongest person gets bored and I think that's a lot of the basis for behaviour issues will come from 2 or 3 being bored while you're trying to get a point across to someone who hasn't quite grasped it the first time"*

A03 *"I'd say greater staff awareness. It is included in our staff meetings, it's on our ILPs [Individual Learning Plans] now and I think and just basically the staff should know how good or bad these kids are"*

These comments reflect several of the key points that have emerged throughout the research:

- The need for teachers to respond to students as individual learners.
- Teachers' support for a whole school approach.
- Relevance of the Level 6 and level 9 SEN courses for teachers working with children in these contexts.
- The need for strategies and activities that teachers feel confident to use in class.
- The importance of teachers knowing how to differentiate for mixed ability groupings.

3.6.4 Hopes for students

There were three main themes running through responses to the question which sought to understand teachers' hopes for their students:

- Literacy for life:
- Breaking the cycle
- Personal success

Literacy for life

The majority of the teachers focused on the outcomes for the students' lives and they hoped that students would get enjoyment from reading and also be able to have functional literacy to participate fully in society. Practical examples of life skills included the ability to fill in forms and find information on the internet, book a holiday and read a paper.

FB4.1 *"To believe they can read a book and enjoy it, you know to believe that they can kind of fill in a form with confidence and you know and that they can write a letter. That they can communicate orally without shouting and just that they can talk and carry through a sentence on one idea"*

Breaking the cycle

Under the second theme the teachers highlighted that their students should be able to read to their children and to recognise the value of literacy and education for themselves and for their children.

FB3 *"just really that I hope they learn enough, improve their literacy enough here to pass their exams and that they carry on their reading and writing when they leave here and I always say to them especially the ones who have kids to read to their kids from an early age and go into the teachers and don't be afraid to say, because a lot of them have their own kids now, and don't be afraid to get help and just to continue on with it. I just really hope that I can help them pass their exams".*

Personal success

In terms of personal success the main features identified included the ability to get a job that was satisfying and that the students would be able to communicate effectively in the workplace.

A02 *"There's two things when they leave because aside from the fact you're preparing them for exams you want them to I suppose like reading and then the second thing is that they can use language for themselves the really basic things like they can fill in an application form, they can write a letter of application for a job, they can understand the census form even. That they'd have enough to survive themselves because I think that's a big area."*

There were additional comments which give an insight into the feelings of the teachers about the context in which they were teaching:

FB5 *"I think it's positive [the students' future] because whoever I've come across they've really wanted to learn and if they want to learn then you can work with someone who wants to learn and wants to improve. Like no one wants not to be able to read or write or spell you know it's embarrassing even if you're a 15 year old or a 20 year old in here you want to be able to have these the basic skills, they will do their Junior Cert as well, they will do very well, I mean without learning support they still will get there but maybe get on better, hopefully at the end of it [school]"*

The teachers also commented on the aspects of the context that were challenging, such as the home lives of the students, the lack of a 'reading culture' in the homes, the issues within the communities that affected the students and the students difficulties in engaging with education. All of these had affected the students'

engagement with reading and with literacy in general and the teachers had to work very innovatively in order to promote literacy and a value for literacy within their students.

3.6.5 Teachers' Final Comments

The final question asked teachers to add anything that they had not had the opportunity to comment on during the interview. For the most part, the teachers had little to add and they reported that the interview had covered what they expected. In their additional comments three teachers expressed concerns about the future of Youthreach. Four proposed systemic changes, such as a coordinated whole school approach to literacy development, additional CPD, or greater resourcing that might facilitate their students to improve literacy skills and three expressed concerns about their students' future outcomes. The following selection of comments gives a sense of what the teachers added at the closure of the interview.

FD1 *"I do think literacy is a huge problem and I don't know if it's worse than we have ever had and we have kids coming in here and if they are so bad I don't know if they'll ever catch up and if they come in at that level I don't know where they'll be going [after leaving the setting]."*

A02 *"I suppose the biggest issue for me is where they are, where the exams are at, how do you bridge the gap? Because it's not an intelligence issue."*

In the next section a brief discussion of the findings highlights the themes, issues and proposals for action that came from an analysis of the interviews.

Section 4

Discussion

IMPROVING
LITERACY
OUTCOMES
BRIDGING THE GAP

4.1 Introduction

In this section we discuss the findings outlined in section three and also draw on the analysis of the qualitative aspect of the interviews. The qualitative data serve to further contextualise our findings in relation to the literature reviewed in section 2 and this contextualisation offers a deeper understanding of the challenges of ensuring students attain literacy skills.

The findings of the interviews across settings were shared in the preceding sections. The questionnaire structure was used as a guide. The interviews were designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data. Analysis of qualitative data revealed a number of key themes which serve to contextualise and illuminate the preceding findings.

There was recognition by all the teachers across all the schools that their students are not part of '*your average student cohort*' and that all of their comments, suggestions and observations need to be interpreted with that in mind. Keeping in mind that the average length of teaching career, of the teachers interviewed, was 15 years it was clear that the staff had had the time and experience to both build up strategies and methods and to be aware of the challenges in addressing the needs of their students. It was apparent that the teachers had hopes and aspirations for their students that went beyond success in the examinations.

When the teachers were asked what their aspirations were in terms of achievement in literacy skills for their students they indicated that achievement was measured, in the short term, by the students passing subjects in Junior Certificate examinations. The longer term aspirations for the students appeared on occasion to be very modest as the following comments indicate:

To fill in a form, even the census form (A06)

That they'd read to their children (FB4)

To be able to book a holiday for themselves (A05)

However, these have to be taken in the context of a much broader picture. This is expressed by one of the teachers who stated her aspiration that the students would, as adults, succeed in '*breaking the cycle*' (FE1).

The discussion below focuses on the strengths and challenges identified in this study in addressing the literacy needs of the students. The final section outlines the recommendations arising from the needs analysis research.

4.2 Strengths in addressing literacy needs

Themes which emerged under strengths were:

- Staff expertise and dedication
- Effective strategies and initiatives
- Reading materials and resources

Staff expertise and dedication

One of the early themes to emerge was the dedication of the staff. They showed high levels of flexibility and adaptability in providing for their students' needs in these challenging contexts. It was evident in all of the schools that there was a great deal of expertise in dealing with students who had difficulties in engaging with

education due to the range of issues in their lives at home and in their communities. The teachers described the substance abuse, family disruption and local tensions that affected the lives of these students. They added that these difficulties left students with low levels of resilience to help them cope with the demands of education. In terms of their own work the teachers described the steps they could take on a daily basis to help the students to engage with education.

There was evidence of personal support from the staff and, in the YEPs, this also included the Bean/Fear an Tí who looked after physical needs such as food and self-care. YEPs stressed the value of outings such as swimming, cinema visits and schools tours to activity-centres for their students as necessary for their social development which the staff envisaged, in accordance with their mission statement, as a vital adjunct to academic education. These social outings were highly anticipated by the students and often were used to encourage full participation in classroom activities in order to 'earn' outings. This holistic approach follows the recommendations in the guidelines for best practice outlined in research literature (e.g. Egan and Hegarty, 1983; European Union Commission, 2013; Smyth and McCoy, 2009). In the DEIS post primary school the holistic approach is frequently managed through collaboration with the SCP and other agencies who run targeted provision of breakfast or lunchtime clubs as well as providing after-school activities. It is often the case that teachers from the schools are involved in running these after school activities.

Effective strategies and initiatives/Available supports

While the teachers identified a variety of challenges to literacy attainment they also highlighted a number of teaching methodologies which they found to be effective. The following is a brief summary of the activities and approaches currently used and considered by teachers to be effective in addressing both perceived and measured literacy deficits:

- The inclusion of short-term as well as longer term targets in each student's IEP.
- Development of materials: Student writings being part of a revision book e.g. in history, students select a personage or event and become 'experts' in this area. The student types a chapter or section and illustrates their area of expertise for inclusion in the book which becomes reference material for subsequent years and gives students an incentive to add to the book and see their name 'in print'.
- Readers' Theatre performance of suitable texts (e.g., *The Field*).
- Reading materials that students like to read such as *Buy and Sell*, Car magazines, etc. being available for 'settling in time' in the morning (YEPs) or in a 'reading area' that is accessible to the students.
- Hi-Lo books and graded readers with clear progression so that students can become aware of their own gains in reading ability. The teachers had a preference for those series of books that have activities and worksheets for classroom use included within the books. The drawback to these materials is that the range of topics is insufficiently broad and that these resources can be expensive.

The majority of teachers identified that the supports they found or were directed to on the websites of JCSP, NALA, NBSS and NEPS were key support features in their work.

Reading materials and resources

Teachers identified a wide variety of available readers and literacy development materials, which were appropriate for their students. Additionally, the teachers ensured that materials that the students found interesting (e.g., *Buy and Sell*, local newspapers, national newspapers, themed magazines) were readily available and that the students had dedicated reading time which was viewed as leisure time. At the same time the teachers identified that there was a lack of age appropriate and culturally relevant differentiated texts so that they were often faced with American or British texts that students did not easily relate to. The next section

on challenges identified in the findings returns to the discussion of materials and resources for this reason.

To support texts in use in the classroom, additional visual resources such as DVDs of films and plays related to core curriculum texts and You-Tube videos on curriculum related topics were also used extensively. However, there was a gap in availability of suitable content-area text books for several subjects – business studies and history were named – as few textbooks were judged as accessible due to high reading demands of the text. This bears out the finding from the ESRI study (2004), noted in the literature review. Several of the schools reported that teachers were using heavily disguised primary level materials to cover curriculum topics in a way that was accessible to the students but they were aware that this was not good practice. This serves to highlight that there were issues with general textbooks for Junior Certificate, and this will also be dealt with under identified challenges.

4.3 Identified Challenges

The analysis of the questionnaire findings highlighted some of the challenges faced by the schools in working with their students to develop literacy skills.

Four main themes will be dealt with in this section of the discussion:

- Involving the whole school
- Bridging the gap
- Resources and materials
- Appropriate and targeted CPD and follow up
- Gaining respect and recognition within education

Involving the whole school

It was evident from the findings that there were some differences between the English teachers and the other subject teachers in their perception of their responsibilities and roles in literacy skill development. One English teacher commented that she was '*disappointed*' (FD1) in her English in-service as it made no mention of how the English department could lead the school-wide response to literacy. The focus of that CPD was on '*classroom techniques in the English classroom*' (FD1). A literacy coordinator pointed out that her subject colleagues did not have a wide range of techniques and skills for including literacy development strategies that would be useful in assisting struggling readers in their subjects. One Maths teacher stated that literacy was not her focus as she had to work on developing students' numeracy, while an IT teacher explained that she was not involved in specific literacy development, other than individual vocabulary items. This is illustrated in the following comment:

A03 “*You know I don’t teach them as a word I would not have a standalone thing in my brain where it says literacy. it’s one subject. It might be okay that they wouldn’t be able to spell icon, so I’d isolate icon and start from there*”.

It was evident in the findings that there was a growing perception that literacy support was a whole-school concern. Nonetheless, it will be necessary for all teachers to fully support moving this from acknowledgement in principle to acceptance in practice. Such a move would also involve teachers having appropriate training to make such practice possible. It was notable that subject teachers who had attended training in literacy development were re-evaluating their practice in light of that training.

An additional area in which a difference was noted between English teachers /literacy coordinators and teachers of other subjects was in their level of familiarity with assessments used in the schools and with how information from assessments was shared with parents. The YEP staff were more likely to have this knowledge as the majority of their students had an IEP that included this information.

Bridging the gap: Literacy levels of students on entry and literacy demands of text books and examinations

Issues that emerged strongly included the literacy levels of students on entry to second level, the variability in students’ abilities, and how there was a large gap between the literacy demands of the examination syllabus and the literacy capabilities of the students.

One of the teachers explained the gulf that existed between the academic demands of the examinations and where the students were at in terms of literacy attainment and posed the question “*how do you bridge the gap?*”. This question set out the general dilemma that became evident through the research. A significant number of students in these educational settings were rated by the teachers as having low levels of literacy and, sometimes, also low levels of engagement with reading and text in general. Additionally, many of the students were rated as having difficulties with oral language development. Several teachers posed the question “*why are we getting them with these low levels?*” putting the focus on primary school provision. While this emerged as a serious consideration, it generally arose in terms of addressing students’ attainment, specifically in relation to expected academic achievement for the purpose of passing the Junior Certificate Examination. It was evident, from the teachers interviewed, that the current strategies are bridging the gap to the extent that the students pass a number of subjects in the Junior Certificate examinations, but there was a question over whether or not this amounted to students attaining the necessary level of skill development to enable them to have literacy skills to address life requirements.

Resources and materials

Closely linked to the issue of literacy levels was the question of suitable teaching materials and the accessibility of text books. Text books were judged to be too difficult for the students and most of the teachers reported using them only occasionally, if at all. In most cases the teachers prepared worksheets for the students, sometimes at differentiated levels, based on the textbook topics and the requirements of the Junior Certificate examination. One of the teachers commented that the readability of Junior Certificate CSPE text books was around age 15 and with a large section of this cohort reading at ages ranging from 7 to 12 these text books were considerably out of their reach. Teachers were adept at finding suitable visual materials on You-Tube etc. to support their learners at interpreting the topics presented in the text books. However, they admitted this approach did not always support learning in ways that would make the students successful in ‘*giving the examiners what they want*’ (A02). This approach also involved considerable time and effort in terms of preparation by the teachers as the following comments suggest:

FE4.2 *"... I would check. I wouldn't give something to a student – you wouldn't either [Name]. I did have a reading chart up there for assessing but I gave up on it. Like that I just know by looking at it that it's too hard for them. So I summarise the textbook and I give them worksheets. I can't find a textbook at their level.*

FE 4.1 *I find that they react very badly to being given what they call baby work so like I'll take what is baby work and I'll type it up so that it looks like Junior Cert work and I'll stick JC 1st year at the top of it and because it's typed up on a work sheet it looks like everybody else's they're happy to do it whereas if you presented them with pictures of whatever they wouldn't do it."*

It should be noted that some teachers could access dedicated websites related to teaching in their subject areas where materials and approaches to topics were shared and discussed. Such communities of practice can be very useful as a source of resource material when regularly moderated and updated.

Appropriate and targeted CPD and follow up

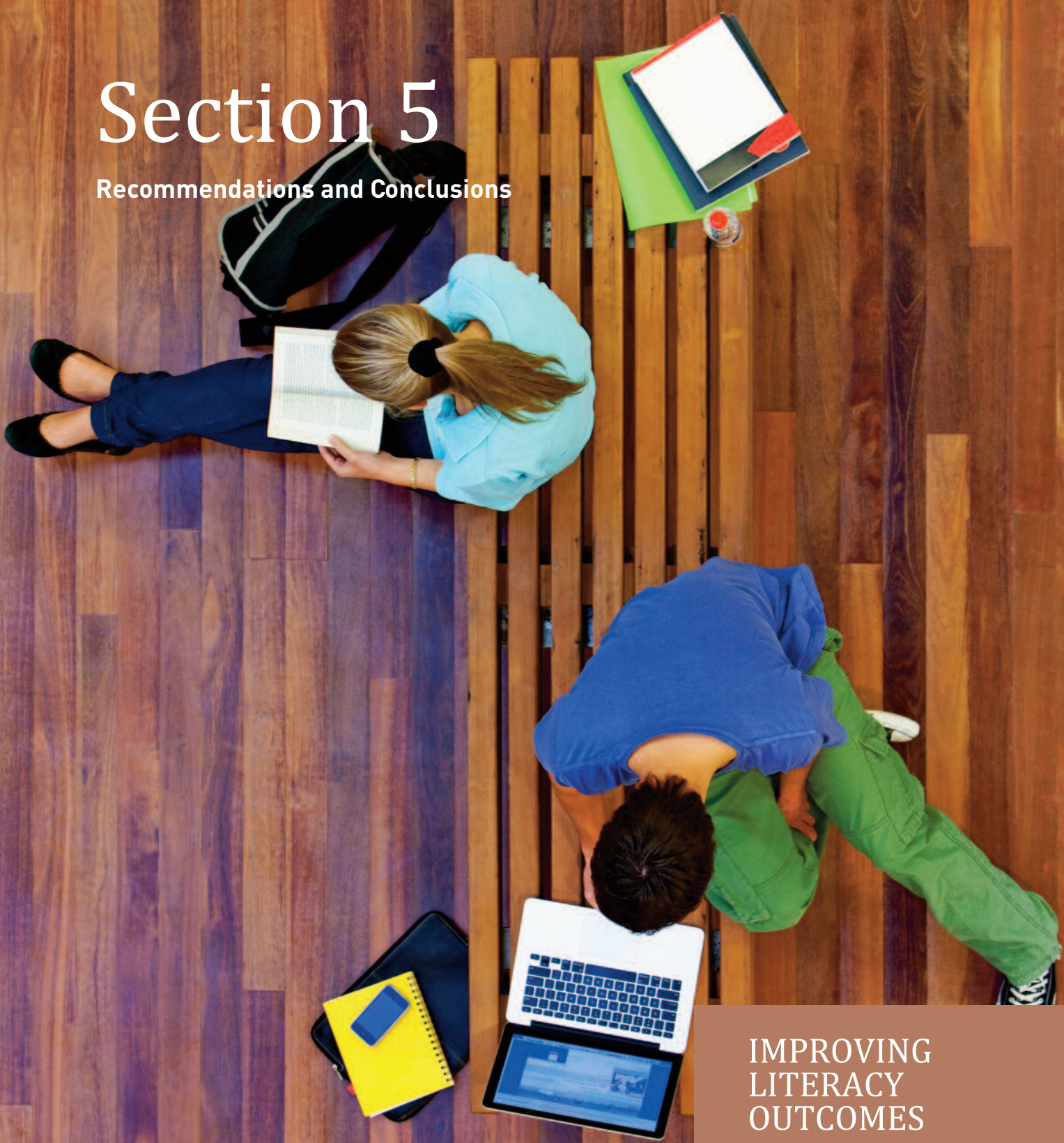
As indicated in the findings the teachers had participated in CPD opportunities within their schools and also more widely, through the PDST and other organisations offering opportunities for upskilling. However, some of their comments suggested that their CPD had limited usefulness as it was not appropriately targeted for their students' levels of need, or did not include strategies for literacy support that could be linked with methodologies for subject teaching. There were indications that if CPD was not applied in practice and reviewed through a process of follow up it was then just filed away. This finding indicates the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to the delivery and subsequent support for whole school or subject specific CPD. Similarly, there is a need for CPD that has stages of progression rather than once off activity. This position is underlined by the Teaching Council policy on CPD which highlights that "CPD should be linked to school development and improvement and should empower teachers as professionals working within a coherent school programme rather than focussing solely on skills training" (Teaching Council: 2011: 21).

Gaining respect and recognition within education

Several YEPS described their origins as 'special schools' and how the YEP appellation was 'for administrative purposes' (see DES, 2009). There was a sense that education in their schools was undervalued in relation to other schools, despite value for money reports that show how the profile of YEP students who continue in education shows a steady rise in the age at which students leave school (DES 2008). Youthreach centres also pointed out that they follow the same curriculum as schools in general and prepare their students for the same examinations. These two settings did not have access to many of the supports that DEIS post-primary schools were offered for literacy and numeracy support, despite having similar needs among their student cohort. The sense of having their work undervalued was less evident in the DEIS post primary schools, although the recent cuts have impacted on their capacity to respond to the level of need within their student cohort.

Section 5

Recommendations and Conclusions



IMPROVING
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5.1 Recommendations

This section outlines a number of recommendations identified from the needs analysis, organised into four key areas:

- Acknowledgement and recognition of the schools' specialist work
- Strategic development and sharing of expertise
- Proposals for improving literacy delivery through CPD
- Resources and materials

Recognition of the schools' work in supporting transitions, retaining and educating the particular cohort of students

- **The work the schools undertake with their student cohort needs to be clearly recognised as potentially a “*last chance*” to engage with formal education for some of these students and should be supported strategically and holistically to give these students the best possible educational outcomes.**

One of the objectives of this needs analysis research was to identify the supports in place for, and the needs of, the cohort of students already identified as struggling within literacy. It is evident from the research that the YEP schools, Youthreach centres and DEIS post primary schools are addressing the needs of a population of students with significant needs in the area of language and literacy. These schools report that a large number of students (from 40 to 80% in some schools) consistently score below the average percentiles in reading-based tests. These students often have a reading age that is below their chronological age by a number of years. These settings work toward achieving the best possible outcomes, through holistic approaches to education that engage and retain this cohort of students to achieve at least Junior Certificate education standard. However, more than this, the settings all work to instil a level of engagement with reading that will stay with the students and be a factor in their future engagement with education through their children. This intergenerational aspiration is of great importance in breaking the cycle and needs to be recognised and supported.

- **Successful transition to YEPs and Youthreach centres and from primary to post primary education is a necessary part of the schools' work which is invaluable and needs to be supported.**

The schools are transition points for the students as they move from mainstream education, or from out of school situations, to the new educational environment. Some students will also transfer back to mainstream education and will need to be prepared for that transition. The issues related to transition (e.g. familiarisation with new ways of working, expectations and rules etc.) are usually the first issues that the schools deal with.

The time taken by the schools to ensure a successful transition is invaluable and needs to be recognised and supported as a necessary part of the students' educational experience. The transfer of student information between schools as students transfer, particularly from primary to post primary settings, could include pupil profiles thus creating opportunities not only for passing on information, but also opportunities for teachers to share strategies that were seen to work well with their students. Additionally, the exploration of how successful transitions are negotiated across educational contexts would greatly enhance a shared understanding of best practice in this area.

Strategic development and sharing of expertise

- **Significant levels of expertise in dealing with children who struggle in education exist in the schools that participated in the research. Opportunities for sharing the expertise, strategies and programmes that have been developed in these contexts need to be provided.**

The teachers' descriptions of the multiple techniques they used to promote development of literacy and oracy skills showed significant expertise and flexibility in responding to the needs of the students. There was a wide range of variability among the students and also from year to year and the staff have developed an array of creative strategies for responding to the students' needs. The teachers' abilities in selecting and managing individual learning approaches for the students are a significant factor in the promotion of literacy development for these young people. Sharing such techniques and strategies would be extremely valuable and this was noted in the YEP *Value for Money* report of 2009 (DES, 2009). In addition the teachers noted the need for ongoing support and possibly developing supports across the schools through: i) showcasing resources and approaches used successfully in the schools, and ii) facilitating knowledge sharing. The development of a community of practice across settings, possibly in partnership with MIC, JCSP, NBSS and/or NEPS should be explored.

- **The YEP model of holistic support for the children is in line with best practice guidelines (DES, 2009; Egan and Hegarty, 1983) and should be supported so that these centres can respond to the levels of need in their communities.**

Research reports (Gordon 2007, DES 2009) have highlighted that an approach that is holistic and includes the social, emotional and health elements of the child's well-being is a first step in promoting the child's ability to engage in learning. Such an approach often requires a significant level of one-to-one interaction with the student and the need to embrace a range of different teaching and learning styles. Several of the schools reported that targets for the students included social and behavioural targets in addition to learning targets. It was noted, however, that teachers did not always use the information from ILP or IEPs in whole class teaching. Target setting in classroom situations should be highlighted and linked to ILP and IEPs. Teachers need to have specific training in how to use the individual learning/education plan as a target setting aid.

It is possible that the impending review of the Junior Certificate (DES, 2012) may support the approaches already in place in YEPs and Youthreach centres as '*the focus of assessment should now be on supporting learning*' (DES, 2012: vi). Additionally the proposed introduction of short courses could facilitate and support a focus on personal learning plans for these students²⁰.

- **The level of one-to-one interaction and support that is possible in the YEP and Youthreach settings is a factor in the success/progress of the students.**

Where the student/teacher ratio allowed for more individualised instruction there was a perception that the level of one-to-one support provided was a key factor in students' progress. In the schools with greater student numbers and less favourable student/ teacher ratios, less time was available for one-to-one teaching. This was signalled as a difficulty for the learning support teams in some schools where one-to-one teaching was available only for students who had assessments of need (i.e. psychological assessments). Given that one-to-one and small group teaching have been shown in a number of studies

²⁰ See <http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle.aspx> for additional information on the short courses and personal learning units (PLUs)

(Brookes, 2013) to promote success in learning it is important to maximise the opportunities for individual and small group learning.

- **Evidence-based strategies and interventions for promoting successful literacy development are available and should continue to be used.**

From the findings it emerged that literacy development programmes and initiatives which have been used successfully included Catch-up literacy (NBSS), Wordshark (Commercial, online), Drop Everything And Read (DEAR), (JCSP) and Make a Book (JCSP). These are readily available and teachers reported that they work well in promoting literacy in each context. Other supports for which there is evidence of reading proficiency or comprehension gains included Toe by Toe, SNIP and paired reading including Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) (Brookes, 2009 and 2013; Gordon, 2009). These programmes were not frequently used in the schools but have demonstrated positive effects in similar contexts and should be considered as part of the resource/intervention repertoire. This suggests the need for CPD to develop teachers' familiarity with the various evidence-based programmes and opportunities to implement them in practice. Additionally, there are a number of recent publications targeting reading development (e.g. Doherty, 2012; Courtney and Gleeson, 2008) which should be considered as key resources for the development of literacy skills.

- **Strategies to support oral language development would be beneficial for many students and activities that include such strategies need to be developed.**

Research cited in the literature review has highlighted the link between oral language and literacy (Cregan, 2010). The use of 'accountable talk' in the classroom gives students options for developing critical thinking skills, sustained discussion and sharing and debating information (Resnick and Snow, 2009). Oral practice of this kind supports the transfer of these skills to their writing practice (ibid.). Furthermore, structured talk in the classroom leads to deeper processing of information (ibid.). Teachers may need support in developing or sharing classroom activities that include dimensions of topic focussed discussions.

- **There is a role for parents and communities in developing improved literacy outcomes. Strategies for building home school community links within literacy programmes would be beneficial.**

There is evidence that children's educational outcomes are positively impacted by receiving support in the home for their education. Research by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA, 2010) explored parents' perceptions of how they could support their children's education. Several of the recommendations from that report are evident in the National Strategy Plan (2011-2020: 20). Recommended actions include supporting initiatives that enable parents, families and communities to support children's well-being and education and investigation of best practice in DEIS schools as a base for family literacy programmes with parents with low levels of educational attainment.

Proposals for improving literacy delivery through CPD

Proposals for supporting schools through CPD are discussed in relation to whole staff responsibility for literacy, targeted CPD for subject teachers, CPD scaffolding which would include training and follow up supports, development of communities of practice, development of partnerships with key stakeholders and skill development during initial teacher training.

- **Literacy instruction needs to be seen as the responsibility of all teachers not just the English or Learning Support Departments.**

It was apparent from the findings that the teachers supported whole school approaches to literacy development and that there was a sense that subject-area teachers need to be equipped and supported to play a full part in literacy development. Several settings indicated that CPD in supporting literacy skills development needed to be targeted and relevant to subject areas and at the same time focussed on embedding literacy support as a whole-school activity. The findings highlighted the need to develop a shared responsibility for literacy instruction across the whole school. To assist this process, subject area teachers would benefit from ongoing structured CPD appropriate to literacy demands of the relevant subject areas.

- **CPD with a focus on literacy to be readily available to subject teachers.**

The teachers were able to identify key areas of their teaching that they had modified following CPD training. However, they also highlighted the limitations imposed by a lack of capacity in terms of resources and time to implement new strategies as they would like. They cited both curriculum demands and the volume of material they had to cover with the students to meet the demands of the examinations as barriers to developing their capacity to assist in literacy support in the classroom. They also mentioned the perceived gulf between the students' literacy levels and the academic demands of the examination. Importantly, they highlighted the difficulty in identifying where to start in terms of bridging that gap. The need for ongoing support and possibly developing supports across contexts was evident – perhaps through showcasing the resources and approaches that were in use. This implies the possibility of joint working on a range of age appropriate and interest generating materials to be developed, piloted and evaluated.

- **Developing ongoing links with external agencies and providers of CPD is a key factor in developing and delivering targeted and appropriate CPD.**

CPD should not happen in isolation, it needs to be of practical value and needs to include review and support for practice. Options for linking with and developing supportive relations with Mary Immaculate College, other Colleges of Education, other bodies and individuals that have a remit and expertise in developing literacy skills was mentioned and could be explored.

- **Initial teacher training should include literacy and differentiation modules for all teachers.**

Teachers reported that they had little training in the development and support of literacy skills. They perceived this as a significant gap in skills for teachers working in the settings that were surveyed. One way of addressing this lack of training would be to deliver modules in literacy skills, differentiation or / and SEN as an integral part of initial teacher training for all post primary teachers.

Notwithstanding the focus above on CPD we recognise that the types of support a school needs, in order to support the children's learning, move beyond CPD for the staff and into the types of scaffolding and supports which would improve outcomes. These might include: access to psychologists and /or speech and language therapists (SLT); developing links with parents; and finding ways to work in partnership with parents and other organisations that may be involved in the child's life.

Resources and materials

Resources and materials are discussed in relation to cost, suitability and availability of materials, sharing of materials, the need for theme-based materials.

- **Although there are resources and suitable teaching materials available, there is a cost issue and the schools reported that they do not have either the range or quantity of resources that they need.**

Teachers identified resources and materials that were available commercially and were useful in their teaching context. These included Graded readers, Hi Lo books and ICT programmes. There was a cost factor involved in most of these resources and this precluded some of the settings from renewing or updating the materials at sufficiently regular intervals to support the students' developing interests. A provision for additional funding for the renewal and replacement of such materials would be extremely useful.

- **If current text books are at a reading level that is not accessible to students there is a need to support teachers through a resource for differentiation in the classroom containing appropriately targeted teaching materials.**

Teachers reported that the text books for the Junior Certificate syllabus were not at a reading level that was appropriate for some of their students. This was also highlighted in research (ESRI, 2004). In most settings teachers responded to this by devising supporting visual materials or worksheets that made such textbooks more accessible. In some subject areas teachers were resorting to the use of textbooks that were not designed for the developmental stage of their students in addressing this issue. It would be extremely useful if materials generated by the various schools could be gathered and shared and indeed published under an umbrella group as a resource for differentiated teaching. This could serve as a resource for all teachers.

- **Themes which students are motivated to read are key elements of support for reading and motivation. It would be useful if the schools had flexibility to make purchases of such materials throughout the year.**

Reading materials that reflected students' areas of interest were identified as key motivators in engaging the students in reading. Teachers noted that there just '*aren't enough*' materials that relate to the themes that students were interested in. Similarly, the teachers noted that while there were books that reflected some parts of their students' life experiences these tended to be elements such as footballers' lives, horses, crime and prison life, etc. It would greatly facilitate schools if they were able to build up a library of suitable materials that could also be replaced and refreshed as needed.

5.2 Conclusion

As evidenced from the findings in this report and in other reports (Gordon, 2007; DES, 2009) there is a strong need for support for a specific cohort of students. This need for support is concentrated in, although not limited to, educational settings such as YEPs, Youthreach Centres and DEIS post primary schools and other short term educational placements.

The focus of our recommendations has been on developing ways of sharing the knowledge and expertise present in the schools. The paramount aim is to systematically and strategically support teachers to perform their

valuable work. The current revision of the Junior Certificate curriculum offers opportunities to explore new and effective ways of working in the classroom, particularly in light of the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* and also in relation to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* which identifies 'achieving in all areas of learning and development' as one of the anticipated outcomes.

There is a level of expertise in the schools which leads to success for many of the students. However, this expertise needs to be shared and supported so as to maximise its value to the teachers, students and schools. We have suggested a number of ways in which the teachers can be supported to do their valuable work, to ensure equity of educational outcomes for children, despite other inequities that exist in their lives and communities.

The findings have indicated that there is a need for a variety of actions to support students and teachers in enhancing literacy outcomes "to bridge the gap". These can be summarised as follows:

- Action 1 The work of the schools should be supported strategically and holistically through building on best practice to give these students the best possible educational outcomes.
- Action 2 The development of a community of practice across settings, possibly in partnership with Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and strategic agencies should be explored.
- Action 3 Teachers need to have specific training in how to use the individual learning/education plan as a target-setting aid.
- Action 4 It is important to maximise opportunities for individual and small group learning.
- Action 5 Modules in literacy skills, differentiation or/and SEN should be viewed as an integral part of initial teacher education for all post primary teachers.
- Action 6 Teachers may need support in developing or sharing classroom activities that include dimensions of topic focussed discussions.
- Action 7 The need for ongoing support and possibly developing supports across contexts was evident – perhaps through showcasing the resources and approaches that were in use. This implies the possibility of joint working on a range of age-appropriate and interest generating materials to be developed, piloted and evaluated.
- Action 8 Liaisons between schools, parents and community agencies, such as those existing within the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme, in developing joint initiatives and practical activities with literacy dimensions should be nurtured. These should be priorities in those areas where parents have identified gaps in their capacity to support their children's education.
- Action 9 Subject area teachers would benefit from ongoing structured CPD appropriate to the literacy demands of the relevant subject areas.

- Action 10 Additional funding for the renewal and replacement of teaching materials and resources would be extremely useful.
- Action 11 Schools should be enabled to build a library of suitable reading materials that could be replaced and refreshed as needed.
- Action 12 Materials generated by the various schools could be gathered, shared and published as a resource for differentiated teaching. This could serve as a resource for all teachers.

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Appendices



Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project

Literacy Needs Analysis Project

QUESTION SCHEDULE

Welcome; Introductions; Literacy needs analysis project rationale; housekeeping.

BACKGROUND

0.1 Rationale: to explore literacy needs in the age cohort 12-18.

Structure of interview (schedule of questions and comments), duration 60 minutes

3 topics areas will be discussed

0.2 School and Teacher profile

1. Is your setting a DEIS school? Yes No
2. Is your setting a Youth Encounter Project Yes No
3. Is your setting a Youth Reach Project Yes No
4. Is the school Rural or Urban? Rural Urban
5. Is it a single sex or co-ed setting? Single-sex Co-ed
6. How many students are in the setting?
7. How many teachers are there in the setting/department?
8. How many years have you been teaching? years
9. What class levels do you teach?
 1st Yr 2nd Yr 3rd Yr Transition Yr 5th Yr 6th Yr Other
10. What subjects do you teach?
11. Does your school/setting have a literacy plan?
12. Does your school/setting have a literacy coordinator?
13. Has the school /setting had speakers on literacy /training in literacy approaches etc. during CPD.
14. What CPD opportunities have been offered to you in the area of literacy?
15. What form of target/goal setting is used /do you use in your classroom/in your teaching
16. Do these targets/goals include oral language (oracy)?

SECTION 1

1.1 What Literacy Screening And Assessment Procedures Are Currently In Place?

1. How regularly is literacy assessed throughout the school?

Once a term Once a year Never

Comment

2. Are the results of literacy assessments communicated to the teaching staff? If yes, how?

3. Are the results of literacy assessments communicated to parents? If yes, how?

4. How useful is this information/How is this information used?

5. Are any of the following assessments used to screen student literacy levels?

a) Wide Range Achievement Test 4(WRAT4)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) New Group Reading Test (NGRT)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Diagnostic Reading Analysis	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Neale Analysis of Reading Ability	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Single Word Reading test	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Graded Word Spelling test	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Edinburgh Reading Test	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Drumcondra Reasoning Test	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Other:	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify the stages at which these assessments are used

6. As a general observation, are literacy levels of junior cycle students a cause for concern?

Yes No Sometimes

Comment:

7. As a general observation, are literacy levels of senior cycle students a cause for concern?

Yes No Sometimes

Comment:

8. Do students struggling with their literacy have access to learning support/resource teaching? (If yes please go to Q9)

Comment

9. Are any of the following interventions available during learning support/resource teaching for students struggling with their literacy?

- a. Toe By Toe
- b. Precision Teaching (SNIP Programme)
- c. PAT

- d. THRASS
- e. Alpha to Omega
- f. Phonographix
- g. Accelerread/ Accelewrite
- h. ARROW
- i. Read & Write 10 GOLD (ICT)
- j. Other:

1.2 What Literacy Strategies/ Programmes Are Teachers Currently Using?

1. Do you use any of the JCSP literacy interventions (e.g. Between the lines; Who wants to be a word millionaire; Time to read; Largy dictionary initiative; Other).

2. How often are opportunities provided in(your) classroom(s) for

a) Explicit vocabulary teaching

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

b) Dictionary work

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

c) Word identification strategies in classrooms

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

d) Literacy starter/finisher activities (Activities that activate global knowledge, predict text content, etc.)

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

e) Explicit teaching of spelling strategies

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

f) Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies for before, during and after reading

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

g) Structured discussion in cooperative groups

Daily Weekly Monthly Other

3. Do you assess texts for readability?

Often Occasionally Never

4. Do you use writing frames to support students' writing?

Often Occasionally Never

5. Do you use scaffolding or mind maps to guide students' interaction with text?

Often Occasionally Never

6. Do you use specific strategies to support digital literacy? What are they?

7. Are there any literacy specific apps or software in use in your school/setting?

8. Are any of the following whole school initiatives to support literacy available or in use in the school/setting?

	Available?		In Use?	
a) DEAR	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Paired reading	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Peer teaching	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
d) Other	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>

Specify

9. Why do you use these initiatives? What benefits do you perceive from them?

10. Are any of the following literacy resources available or in use in the school?

	Available?		In Use?	
e) Graded Readers	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
f) Hi-Lo books	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
g) Subject book Boxes	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
h) School Library	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
i) Variety of dictionaries	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
j) Audio books	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
k) Other	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify (newspapers, TG4, radio programmes may emerge)

11. Why do you use these resources? What benefits do you perceive from them?

12. How could these resources/ initiatives be improved (prompt for age appropriateness/cultural relevance if these do not emerge spontaneously)

13. How effective are these resources/initiatives and how is this measured?

14. How appropriate are these resources/initiatives in the local context?

Not at all relevant Some relevance Very relevant

Please explain

15. Can you identify particular strengths of the /initiatives/resources you are familiar with?

16. What strategies are used to motivate students' reading? (e.g. variety of interesting books, HI-Lo readers, graded readers, use of ICT and online literacy, competitions, 6 weeks 6 books, One City One Book initiatives, 'Who wants to be a word millionaire', use of newspapers, digital media, television channels, games, etc.?)

SECTION 2 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY NEEDS

(Interviewer will explore these questions with reference to key skills in each area).

2.1 Considering the full range of all classes you teach, how would you rate your students' abilities, in terms of percentages relative to their age cohort, in:

a) Oral English

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

b) General reading

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

c) English language and literature reading

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

d) Subject specific reading

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

e) Capacity to communicate in written English (formal, informal, text messages, letters, etc.)

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

f) Subject specific writing

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

g) Spelling

Requires additional support Below average Average Above average Excellent

Please explain the basis of your ratings

Additional comments:

2.2 How would you rate Students'

a) willingness to read independently from school?

None Slight Some High Excellent

b) enjoyment of reading independently from school work?

None Slight Some High Excellent

c) motivation to read additional subject material?

None Slight Some High Excellent

d) ability to comprehend subject specific vocabulary?

None Slight Some High Excellent

e) ability to use subject specific vocabulary orally?

None Slight Some High Excellent

f) ability to find meaning in what they have read?

None Slight Some High Excellent

g) ability to identify key points in something they have read?

None Slight Some High Excellent

h) comprehension of register (i.e. use of formal/ informal language)

None Slight Some High Excellent

i) ability to choose appropriate texts independently?

None Slight Some High Excellent

j) need for additional instructional time with the whole class in literacy?

None Slight Some High Excellent

k) need for additional literacy instruction through learning support?

None Slight Some High Excellent

l) need for specific training in developing strategies for word identification?

None Slight Some High Excellent

2.3 Can you identify what motivates your students to read/write/engage with text?

SECTION 3:

3.1 Continuing Professional Development for Teachers to Support Students' Literacy

1. What CPD opportunities are currently offered to you in relation to literacy teaching?

2. Do you know of any of these listed strategies for literacy support? Tick the strategies for which you might like more information.

Strategies for literacy support	Know of	Use	More Info.
Reading			
• Assessing readability of text	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Using Keyword Approach	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Skimming & Scanning	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Prediction	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Mind Maps	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Note Taking Skills	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Summarising information	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• SQ3R	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
Writing			
• Reconstruction Activities	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Writing Frames	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>
• Language experience	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No <input type="checkbox"/>	More Info. <input type="checkbox"/>

Oracy

• Pupil generated questions	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Readers' theatre	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Choral reading	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Individual reading	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Debates	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Giving a speech	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Spelling

• Spelling strategies	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Marking assignments	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes/No	<input type="checkbox"/>	More Info.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Specify

3.2 How do your expectations/perceptions of your students' literacy needs influence your teaching?

3.3 What advice would you offer to teachers/principals/project advisors/project managers engaged in developing a literacy plan for their school/project?

3.4 How could literacy delivery be improved in your setting?

3.5 Do you consider you have all the qualifications/skills necessary to deliver successful literacy development programmes to your students? If no, what further skills do you need? If yes, what are these skills?

3.6 What are your hopes in relation to students' literacy development?

Any additional comments you would like to make:

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this survey!

Organisations and initiatives engaged in literacy support

Organisation/ Initiative	Brief description	Supports offered	Interventions offered	Where policy and practice link with research findings
<p>Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP): Post Primary http://jcsp.slss.ie/ JCSP is subsumed under the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).</p>	<p>A programme offered alongside the Junior Certificate Programme. Students work towards personal statements of knowledge, ability and skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for JCSP coordinators • Per capita payment/ funding/ subventions for activities • Certification of Student Profile Statements • Time allocated for meetings 	<p>Range of short term initiatives for literacy and numeracy support on website http://jcsp.slss.ie/jcsp_initiative/ list All schools can access these resources</p>	<p>In service training in identifying students, developing student profiles. CPD (IPD) in literacy differentiation. Initiatives, support and positive promotion of literacy and numeracy. Available in all post primary schools and in most of the YEPs</p>
<p>National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS):* Post Primary. (Transition programmes include work with primary schools). http://www.nbss.ie/</p>	<p>Works to promote positive behaviour in learning contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Behaviour Liaison Teacher http://www.nbss.ie/home/positive-behaviour-liaison-teacher • CPD for teachers • Initiatives: e.g. Comprehension strategies resource; Catch up Literacy; Academic language, literacy and study skills support. 	<p>Level 1 School wide: Behaviour support, academic literacy and language support Level 2 Targeted students e.g. supporting transition to post primary Level 3 Individual students</p>	<p>Schools can enter partner arrangements and deliver the initiatives in schools. There are a number of Behaviour Support training options that schools can access. See http://www.nbss.ie/model-of-support/level-1/professional-learning-development-support for more information.</p>
<p>Special Education Support Services (SESS):* Primary, Special Schools and Post-Primary</p>	<p>The role of the SESS is to enhance teaching and learning in relation to special education provision.</p>	<p>Seminars Online training Whole staff training; primary and post-primary level Funding for teachers on specific courses. http://www.sess.ie/professional-development</p>	<p>Online resources http://www.sess.ie/resources/teaching-methods-and-organisation</p>	<p>Teachers of pupils with special needs can access a range of resources and supports.</p>
<p>Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS): Primary and Post Primary: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/</p>	<p>A DES school support initiative targeting schools in areas of recognised disadvantage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSCL: To promote School-Family links. • General support – class size, attendance tracking, literacy lift off, catch up literacy, Máta sa Rang among others • Individual/ targeted support through SCP. 	<p>3 action pillars • Literacy and Numeracy • Attendance • Parental involvement</p>	<p>Current DES policies and supports. Range of targeted supports, evidenced based interventions and subventions. Support for smaller class sizes. Reviews and 3 year plans are a feature of the schools' activities.</p>

Organisations and initiatives engaged in literacy support Cont'd

Organisation/ Initiative	Brief description	Supports offered	Interventions offered	Where policy and practice link with research findings
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): Primary and post primary. See: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html	The role of the NEPS service is to work with both primary and post-primary schools in relation to learning, behaviour, social and emotional development.	Information for schools. Guidelines and resources for teachers available on website. Individual interventions if necessary. Crisis intervention. Partnership approach including working with families and communities.	Consultation, tests and assessments, ILPs, special projects and research. Promotes evidence based interventions.	Schools reported close links with the NEPS service in developing approaches to literacy testing. NEPS has an accessible report on literacy supports and activities: available at http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Media-Library/Literacy-Resources/
Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST): http://www.pdst.ie/postprimary Primary and post primary	The PDST developed from a range of teacher support initiatives and it provides a range of professional development initiatives that support teacher learning, collaboration and evidence-based practice	Support with whole school approaches. Resources available at http://www.pdst.ie/node/465	Literacy Link teacher initiative Response to schools' requests for support. CPD in leadership, ICT, literacy and numeracy. Additional online courses for CPD.	Several schools identified PDST as having delivered CPD for staff
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA): https://www.nala.ie/	In addition to developing teaching etc. NALA informs policy around literacy strategies with a focus on adult and family literacy.	Community based activities that it may be possible for schools to link with.	Family literacy initiatives, policy documents, research reports, activities, partnership links. See https://www.nala.ie/what-we-do	Schools reported involvement in NALA-run 'One Area One Book' initiatives.
HETAC level courses	Courses in SEN available in higher education institutes	Not applicable	Courses run in Colleges of Education, for example: http://www.mic.ul.ie/education/sen/Pages/GradDipMEdinSEN.aspx http://www.stangelas.nuigalway.ie/departments/course_details.php?id=LET30&ver=en http://www.spd.dcu.ie/site/prospective_students/mesen.shtml	Several staff members were currently taking a HETAC accredited SEN course or had recently graduated from such a course.

*The new Inclusion Support Service (ISS), was established in February 2015, under the NCSE and includes the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI).

Additional Information

JCSP <http://jcsp.slss.ie/>

The Junior Certificate School Programme is a way of working within the Junior Certificate. It is designed especially to help young people who have had a difficult experience of school and may be potential early leavers. Through a system of profiling a student's work in Junior Cycle classes, students are provided with opportunities to engage with the curriculum and to achieve success at school. They get an official certificate of their achievements, validated by the Department of Education and Science, in addition to their Junior Certificate Examination Certificate (statement from the website http://jcsp.slss.ie/about_general.html#general3 for more information see <http://jcsp.slss.ie/about.html>)

NBSS <http://www.nbss.ie/>

A selection of the most commonly referenced initiatives from the research:

Comprehension strategies resource: The CSI resource explicitly teaches before, during and after comprehension strategies that help students construct meaning during the reading-thinking process and provides teachers with the tools to model the effective use of comprehension strategies to increase understanding of subject-area texts. Features include: Whole-Group Strategy Lesson Plans, Interactive Digital Texts CD-ROM, Cooperative Learning Activities with Texts, Graphic Organisers, Audio CD, Student Reflection Journals and Teachers' Guide with implementation and assessment support.

Catch up Literacy: This is a structured one-to-one reading intervention, carried out in two 15-minute individual teaching sessions each week. It includes elements of word, sentence and text level work and, where appropriate, oral language skills – the balance depending on the assessed individual needs of the student. The intervention begins with diagnostic/formative assessments enabling the teacher to set literacy targets, establish individual strengths and identify a focus for effective teaching, centered on a book of an appropriate level of difficulty.

Academic language, literacy and study skills support: NBSS Level 1 school-wide academic literacy support aims to provide schools with research-validated practices in reading, vocabulary, writing and oral communication skills, as well as thinking, learning and study skills development. Embedding practices to acquire these skills into all subject areas not only facilitates deep learning and understanding of subject content but also enables students to become effective learners, learning how to learn and developing those skills and competencies necessary to achieve and succeed at second level and beyond.

DEIS (with links to SCP and NEWB through TUSLA)

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/> (<http://www.tusla.ie/>)

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). DEIS provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and an integrated School Support Programme (SSP).

849 schools are included in the programme. These comprise 657 primary schools (336 urban/town schools and 321 rural primary schools) and 192 second level schools. (Information from website- See more at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/#sthash.9ndjfhJn.dpuf>). As part of DEIS the Home School Community Liaison coordinators at primary and

post primary levels create home school links and encourage parent participation in education. They are members of the schools DEIS planning team, and prioritise literacy development through parental engagement. HSCL Coordinators also work closely with Education and Training Boards (ETB) (former VECs) in the area of Family Learning (adult literacy) in supporting parents in accessing literacy classes. They also link in with ETB and Community Education in order to offer many classes in areas such as cookery or woodwork, which include a literacy/ numeracy element.

PDST

The establishment of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) officially commenced in September 2010. PDST was established as a new, generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools. During the academic year 2012/2013, PDST underwent a process of restructuring to reflect emerging needs within the education system. PDST is a support service of Teacher Education Section, Department of Education and Skills. PDST is hosted by Dublin West Education Centre. PDST encompasses the supports previously supplied by other support services and programmes, including Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS), Second-Level Support Service (SLSS), Leadership Development Service (LDS), Junior Cycle Physical Education, (JCPE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Transition Year (TY), School Development Planning (SDP), Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, an tSeirbhís Tacaíochta Dara Leibhéal don Ghaeilge (STDG Gaeilge), the National Centre for Technology in Education (now known as PDST Technology in Education) and the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) support service. The literacy-link teacher initiative supports the promotion and development of literacy at whole school level. The initiative explores a range of methods to increase literacy capacity across the curriculum.





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