Report

of
Dormant Accounts funded scheme to enable DEIS Schools in Limerick City to Maximise Community Use of Premises and Facilities

By

Opening Schools for Life, Learning and Leisure

OSCAILT

(A network of Limerick City DEIS Schools, facilitated and supported by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) & the Department of Education & Skills (DES)).

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CAB	Criminal Assets Bureau
CLVEC	City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
FAI	Football Association of Ireland
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICT	Information and Computer Training
ISPCC	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
IT	Information Technology
LIT	Limerick Institute of Technology
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
PE	Physical Education
SCP	School Completion Programme
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TED	Transforming Education through Dialogue Project
UL	University of Limerick
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

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Executive Summary

The Dormant Accounts scheme, was designed to enable the twenty-two DEIS[1] primary and post-primary schools in Limerick City to maximise community use of premises and facilities. The scheme was initiated by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in response to the Fitzgerald report, which, due to the unique conditions profiled in the report, recommended that the DES 'should be requested to identify how local schools can be supported, not only in developing their facilities, but also in providing a comprehensive range of services to pupils both during and outside school hours' (Fitzgerald, 2007:11).

A total of €1.694m was made available through the Dormant Accounts scheme. Schools had the opportunity to apply for grants of up to €77,000 to cover capital expenditure and operating costs of after-school programmes and activities for children and adults in their local communities over two years. Schools used the capital fund to renovate buildings, buy equipment, develop facilities and install safety and security equipment. The operational fund was used to run programmes for children and adults. These programmes took place before and after school hours and during holiday times. The programmes were different in each school and included a wide range of activities including sports and fitness, music, information and communication technologies (ICT), languages, crafts, homework clubs, parenting classes and adult education.

The Department of Education and Skills led and administered the scheme. All twenty-two DEIS primary and post primary schools in Limerick City participated in the scheme. The Transforming Education through Dialogue Project (TED) in Mary Immaculate College worked closely with the DES and the schools to support the scheme. The schools, DES and TED formed a network – OSCAILT which provided a forum to share good practice and build cohesion and shared aims. OSCAILT continues after the scheme with a mission to open schools for 'Life, Learning and Leisure'.

The OSCAILT network decided it was very important to capture the learning from the scheme. This report is based on school-based reports submitted to the DES during the operation of the scheme and recognises each unique school context. It is also based on findings from focus groups with children, parents, adult learners and school based personnel (96 participants in total) who participated in the scheme. The full report is also available on line at http://www.limerick.ie/childrenservicescommittee/

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1   Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 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).

The benefits of the scheme were many and varied. The **benefits to children** included the development of positive attitudes to lifelong learning and the building of aspirations; the enhancement of positive relationships between children and school staff; the cultivation of positive inter-relationships between children; the contribution to the personal development of children in terms of social skills and personal responsibility; the provision of opportunities to engage in a wide variety of activities which enable children to have fun while at the same time facilitating the development of a range of skills and talents; the further development of a sense of belonging; the provision of opportunities for children to socialise in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment and the opportunities the scheme provided for participants to promote health and fitness. The **benefits to parents and adult learners** included academic and skill development, opportunities for personal development and developing friendships, opportunities for accreditation and building aspirations and confidence. The **benefits to the school** included improved school experience for children and staff. School cultures were enhanced and there was a positive development of relationships with the community. Schools benefited from improved facilities and equipment. They extended school opening hours and this provided opportunities for school personnel to build positive relationships with parents, adult learners and the broader community and provided opportunities for greater inter-agency and community collaboration. Schools also shared facilities and programmes and they had the financial resources to offer a rich menu of activities, including the promotion of Irish culture, to all children irrespective of family financial circumstances.

This report concludes that the scheme '*had a major positive impact on the quality of life and learning for children, parents and adult learners, positively influenced school culture and built community pride*' (p. 87).

In order to build on the positive experience of the scheme, the following recommendations are suggested:

- OSCAILT recommends the development of national policy to support strategic development of after-school services for children.

- The experience of the scheme should be considered as part of the planned review of the School Completion Programme (SCP) by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

- The existing opportunities to deliver after-school programmes in schools through the SCP, the use of DEIS funding, the work of volunteers, the Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme and the resources and programmes available through the local Vocational Educational Committee should be further developed and extended.

- The OSCAILT forum, as a model of good practice to nurture collaboration and support across key players in the education sector, should be noted as part of the evaluation of DEIS and should continue to operate as a support to Limerick DEIS school principals and teachers.

- Opportunities for greater collaboration between principals, HSCL Co-ordinators, SCP personnel in organising, administering and facilitating after school activities should be explored.

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Report of Dormant Accounts funded scheme to enable DEIS Schools in Limerick City to Maximise Community Use of Premises and Facilities

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1. Introduction

This report profiles the Dormant Accounts Scheme which enabled DEIS[2] schools in Limerick City to maximise community use of their premises and facilities from 2010 to 2012. The report has been prepared by a sub group of OSCAILT, which is a network of the principals of Limerick City DEIS primary and post primary schools, together with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED)[3] project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and the Department of Education & Skills (DES). This network was established on foot of the successful proposal by the DES under the fourth round of funding of Dormant Accounts projects to enable the Limerick City DEIS schools to maximise community use of their premises and facilities. The scheme, which was led by the DES, provided funding to enable twenty-two DEIS[4] primary and post primary schools in Limerick City to share their facilities with the wider community outside of school hours, including evenings, weekends and holiday periods. It also provided funding to enable these schools to provide additional after -school programmes and activities for children[5] and adults in their local communities.

The OSCAILT network agreed that it was important to provide a record of this Dormant Accounts Scheme as it represented a significant investment of funding, time and human resources from all the stakeholders involved, most especially the schools who invested significant amounts of energy and creativity. This report describes the background and details of the scheme, the extent to which it met its objectives and the impact of the scheme on the participating schools and on children and adults who engaged with the scheme.

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2   Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 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).

3   In October of 2012 the Targeting Educational Disadvantage (TED) Project, changed its name to the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project

4   St. Mary's Boys National School and St. Mary's Girls National School amalgamated in September 2012 and become St. Mary's National School. There were twenty–two schools in total at the commencement of the scheme and twenty-one at the completion of the scheme.

5   The term children refers to children attending both primary and post primary schools.

The specific objectives of the report are as follows:

- To describe the context in which this scheme evolved.
- To describe the design and development of this scheme with specific reference to the capital and operating elements.
- To chart the outcomes of this scheme for programme participants, adults and children, the school and the community.
- To provide an insight into the strengths and challenges of delivering this scheme.
- To share the findings in relation to the OSCAILT network.
- To provide recommendations for future developments.

1.2 Limerick Context

The need to address poverty, marginalisation and equity of outcome for all children in Limerick city has been highlighted as early as the 1960's (Ryan, 1966). In October 2006, due to serious concerns in relation to criminality and antisocial behaviour Mr. John Fitzgerald was commissioned by Government to prepare a report for the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. This led to the development of the Regeneration agencies, which is discussed in detail below.

A number of reports and publications emerged during the lifespan of this scheme which provide further evidence of the need to support the learning needs of children and adults living in communities suffering from poverty and marginalisation (Mc Cafferty, 2011, Mc Coy *et al.*, 2012, Hourigan, 2011, Humphreys *et al.*, 2012, Power and Barnes 2011,). These reports attest to the challenges that parents and teachers face in supporting children to learn and develop in these communities, and the need to prioritise investment in after school activities.

In the comparative study, *How Are Our Kids? Experiences and Needs of Children and Families in Limerick City with a Particular Emphasis on Limerick's Regeneration Areas* (HAOK), Humphreys *et al.* highlighted the stark realities of the lives of children in Limerick City. The study found that children from regeneration communities have 'a much poorer quality of life, poorer experiences of childhood and much worse outcomes across a wide range of indicators' (Humphreys, *et al.*, Summary report:38). The report showed 'that the gap between families now living in regeneration areas and mainstream society in Limerick is extremely wide and a major cause for concern in relatively affluent 21st century Ireland' (ibid:38). A number of specific factors which influence the quality of children's lives and impact on the educational landscape in which children grow and learn were identified. These include; neighbourhood quality and safety factors, family related factors such as levels of income, educational attainment levels of parents and factors relating to the nature and quality of services.

In terms of neighbourhood factors, HAOK found there were some positive factors identified by participants including support from neighbours, experiencing a sense of community, and positive engagement with services. There were, however, many negative factors which militate against children experiencing a healthy childhood. Indeed, one research participant claimed that children only get '*glimpses of childhood*'. The negative aspects of neighbourhoods included dangers from traffic (stolen cars, horses and quad bikes), the pervasive drug culture (dangers from discarded needles, negative role models, drug debt and intimidation), anti-social behaviour, and the physical environment which had burned out housing which operated as sites for anti-social behaviour. Participants also identified fear and intimidation as negative aspects of their environments. There is no doubt that children and young people living within these communities need opportunities to play, learn and develop skills and talents in a safe and nurturing environment. Importantly, after- school programmes[6] hold the potential to offer such opportunities.

In terms of family factors, the HAOK report documented a number of variables which impacted on children's ability to learn. The report found that 'in the most deprived areas of the city, parents on average have low levels of educational attainment, and mostly they are early school leavers' (ibid:39). The level of parental educational attainment has, according to this report and according to the wider literature, implications for children's educational outcomes. This is manifested through parents' capacity to help with homework as children progress through the educational system, low parental aspirations, and a 'lack of understanding of the support and conditions required in the home environment to lead to successful outcomes in education' (ibid :39).

In terms of services, the HAOK report found there was a need for high quality, accessible services that linked with family and community strengths, and that services need to be flexible and match the levels of need. Specifically, in relation to after school provision, the report identified a number of benefits accruing from after-school programmes. These included the provision of a 'safe environment in which children can meet with their peers' and also identified the value of homework support and safety (Humphreys, *et al*., main report:250). Additionally, when asked to describe what a 'good school' might look like, parent participants in the HAOK report included after-school provision as one of their criteria.

The *Feeling Safe in our Community'* (Power and Barnes, 2011) report explored the experiences and concerns of residents in the Limerick regeneration areas of Southill and Ballinacurra Weston in relation to community safety. This report found that 'despite

6   After-school programmes refers to programmes which take place after school hours and include programmes run directly after school finishes, weekend and holiday provision.

a significant reduction in crime rate, residents in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston continue to exhibit elevated fears of being a victim of crime and/or antisocial behaviour in their estates' (2011:vii). This study found that residents expressed 'most concern about the behaviour of children and teenagers' with 'low level anti-social behaviour and low-end criminal acts [are] causing a massive amount of distress and anxiety for residents' (ibid:vii). Residents also raised concerns around poor parenting, specifically around the 'growth in the numbers of young parents who are disengaged from the community, disengaged from work, and (who) are seen as either unable or unwilling to discipline and educate their children' (ibid:vii).

The challenges of living and learning in the communities served by this scheme are further contextualised by Hourigan (2011). In *Understanding Limerick, Social Exclusion and Change*, she chronicles the diametrically opposed experiences of Limerick citizens, stating that 'for the vast majority of Limerick citizens, the city remains a good place to live with reasonably priced property, good schools, third-level institutions and excellent sports facilities. For a small minority, however, life in Limerick can be fraught with difficulty as they struggle to provide for their families and survive in neighbourhoods which have serious problems with drugs and feud-related criminality' (Hourigan 2011:xi). McCafferty, writing in the same publication, notes that 'Limerick emerged from the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger periods as an urban area characterised by sharp spatial contrasts in levels of socio-economic well-being' (ibid:3). According to McCafferty, 'social segregation in Limerick is the result of a range of factors and processes that have operated over several decades' (ibid:12). He discuss the impact of 'area effects' whereby the well-being of residents is impacted upon by factors, above and beyond their own personal attributes, that are related to the social composition of the area in which they live' (ibid:14). McCafferty acknowledges that these effects can be either positive or negative and notes that 'where the local area is characterised by an accumulation of social problems such as unemployment, elevated rates of lone parenthood, and poverty, area effects are invariably negative' (ibid:14). He identified a number of problems that have been linked to area effect, which include: 'high rates of mental and physical ill-health, 'anomie' and alienation from mainstream society, deficiencies in childhood development, behavioural problems in children, lower levels of school attendance, increased exposure to crime and antisocial behaviour, and deficiencies in both the quality and quantity of public and private service' (ibid: 14). He concludes that 'evidence from Limerick suggests that neighbourhood effects contribute significantly to problems in local authority estates' (ibid:14). McCafferty notes that 'if the physical programme is delivered on the scale that is planned the benefits will be considerable'. However, he cautions that 'these benefits are unlikely to be sustained in the longer term if they are not supported by appropriate social measures in areas such as health, education and family support, and also economic improvements' (ibid:21). The quality of community life has been seen to impact on children's outcomes (Mc Coy *et al.*, 2012).

1.3 Background and Context to the Dormant Accounts Scheme

In March 2008, the Government approved funding measures under the fourth round of the Dormant Accounts Educational Disadvantage Programme. This included the approval of a proposal submitted by the former Mid Western Regional Office of the DES, hereafter the DES[7] to provide grant-aid of up to €1.694m for Limerick City DEIS schools to maximise community use of their premises and facilities. The scheme which was proposed by the DES as part of the response to the Limerick Regeneration Programme intended to support the then 16 primary and 6 post primary DEIS schools in Limerick City to share their facilities with their communities, to stay open after hours, at weekends and during holidays. It also provided schools with opportunities to deliver additional after school programmes and activities for their pupils and for children and adults in the wider community.

The Limerick Regeneration Programme was initiated in 2007 when the Limerick Regeneration Agencies were established for the purpose of improving the physical, social and economic environment of certain disadvantaged areas on the Northside and Southside of Limerick City[8]. These agencies were established following the recommendations of Mr John Fitzgerald, who was commissioned to prepare a report for the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion on serious criminality and anti-social behaviour in these areas. Specifically, Mr. Fitzgerald was asked to identify actions which could be implemented in co-operation with relevant agencies to help address identified problems and to propose steps to drive regeneration in these areas. Fitzgerald's report '*Addressing issues of Social Exclusion in Moyross and other disadvantaged areas of Limerick City: Report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion*' (2007) made the following recommendations:

- A coordinated effort to address criminality. Fitzgerald recommends a multi-dimensional approach to addressing criminality through additional policing with supporting management structures, targeting of criminals, action by the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB), support from Limerick City Council and strategic management of the problems. The aim was to restore the confidence of local communities and create conditions for other interventions to be successful (Fitzgerald, 2007: 8, 9).

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7   The Mid Western Regional Office was part of the Department of Education and Skills Regional Office Service which ceased to operate in 2010. The Limerick Office of DES is now part of the Department's Social Inclusion Unit.

8   Southside: Southill: O'Malley, Keyes, Carew & Kincora Parks. Ballinacurra Weston: Clarina, Crecora, Beachgrove, Lenihan Ave. & Byrne/Prospect Ave.
         Northside:- Moyross and St. Mary's Park. (Source: the Limerick Regeneration website)

- Establish structures for Regeneration. Fitzgerald recommends economic and infrastructural regeneration, in order to create employment, improve access, and create a better commercial and housing mix (Fitzgerald: 2007:9,10).

- Coordinated responses to address social and educational problems. Fitzgerald recommends an interdisciplinary, multi-agency response to addressing the social and family problems and educational disadvantage in order to break the cycle of disadvantage (Fitzgerald, 2007:10,11).

- Improvement of access and infrastructure. Fitzgerald recommends the development of infrastructure to promote mixed-use development in lands in, and adjacent to, Moyross, enhanced policing and the attraction of investment into the area. These recommendations were intended to 'facilitate greater linkage between the local community and other parts of the city' (Fitzgerald 2007:11).

- Attract inward investment and extend the city boundary so that the estates are within the remit of Limerick City boundary (Fitzgerald, 2007:11,12).

- Address the drug problem: Fitzgerald recommends addressing the drug problem through prevention and educational strategies (Fitzgerald, 2007:12).

- Regeneration of Housing Stock: Fitzgerald recommends regeneration of some of the housing stock across the estates (Fitzgerald, 2007:12).

Arising from the recommendations of the Fitzgerald Report (2007) which were accepted in full by Government, the Northside and Southside Limerick Regeneration Boards and Agencies were established under statutory instrument in June 2007 for a five year period. From June 2007 until June 2012, the Limerick Regeneration Agencies were charged with implementing the recommendations of the Fitzgerald Report. At the end of this five year term, responsibility for the Regeneration programme was assumed by Limerick City Council in June 2012.

In his report, Fitzgerald highlighted the scale and nature of problems in particular areas of Limerick City and the extremely poor quality of life in which many people live. In addition to issues of crime, disorder and deficits in infrastructure and investment, the report also identified educational issues, 'with educational attainments well below the national norm' (2007:5). Recognising the critical role of the school in addressing social exclusion, Fitzgerald recommended that: 'The Department of Education and Science should be requested to identify how local schools can be supported, not only in developing their facilities, but also in providing a comprehensive range of services to pupils both during and outside school hours' (ibid:11) in order to promote positive educational outcomes.

Whilst the regeneration programme focused on the areas of Southill, Moyross and St. Mary's Park, the DES recognised the need for a city–wide approach given the wider impact of the social difficulties across the City. Many children from regeneration areas attend primary and post primary schools outside of these areas. The DES decided adopt a city–wide approach in its response to the regeneration programme to maximise outcomes for children attending all DEIS schools.

The Dormant Accounts Scheme was a direct response to the recommendations of the Fitzgerald Report. The overarching aim of the scheme was to encourage and support all DEIS schools in Limerick city to share their facilities with local communities and to expand and develop opportunities for learning and social engagement within communities for children and adults.

As a matter of policy, the DES advocates the sharing of school facilities with communities and had previously suggested that all school Trustees and Boards of Management consider making their schools facilities available to local communities as a means of addressing the social, educational and recreational needs of parents and members of the broader community. Letters issued by the DES in 20059 highlighted the advantages in using the school as a resource to the community at large, noting that value can be created for both the school and the community by strengthening families and bringing vitality to communities. While many schools had previously made their premises and facilities available after school hours for the benefit of local communities, financial constraints such as costs associated with upgrading facilities, security and caretaking may have prevented some schools from doing so. This Dormant Accounts Scheme sought to address these practical barriers.

1.4 School Profile

Sixteen primary schools and six post primary schools were involved in this scheme, including infant and junior schools, senior schools (second to sixth), fully vertical schools (infants to sixth), Gaelscoileanna, single-sexed schools and co-educational schools. Principals believed they had a lot in common since they were '*meeting children at different stages of their lives'*, and that this scheme would enrich communities, since '*we are all working to enrich better communities'* and have a very positive impact on Limerick City.

The following table lists the schools that engaged in this initiative:

Table 1.1: List of Participating Schools.

Primary Schools	Address	
St. Mary's Boys' NS*	Island Road	Limerick
Our Lady of Lourdes National School	Rosbrien	Limerick
Presentation Primary School	Sexton Street	Limerick
Gaelscoil Sheoirse Clancy	An Cnoc Theas	Luimneach
St. John the Baptist B.N.S,	Pennywell	Limerick
St. John's Girls' and Infant Boys' School	Cathedral Place	Limerick
Our Lady Queen of Peace National School	Janesboro	Limerick
St. Michael's Infant School	Sexton Street	Limerick
Southill Junior School	Southill	Limerick
Scoil Íosagáin	Sexton Street	Limerick
St. Lelia's Infant School	Kileely	Limerick
Galvone National School	Galvone	Limerick
Corpus Christi Primary School	Moyross	Limerick
St. Munchin's Girls' and Infant Boys' School	Ballynanty	Limerick
St. Mary's Girls' NS*	Island Road	Limerick
St. Munchin's CBS	Shelbourne Road	Limerick
Post Primary Schools	**Address**	
Coláiste Mhichíl CBS	Sexton Street	Limerick
Presentation Secondary School	Sexton Street	Limerick
Salesian Secondary School	Fernbank	Limerick
Ardscoil Mhuire	Corbally	Limerick
St. Nessan's Community College	Moylish Park	Limerick
St. Enda's Community School	Kilmallock Rd	Limerick

*Schools amalgamated in Sept 2012

1.5 The Dormant Accounts Scheme

The scheme aimed to support DEIS schools in Limerick City to maximise use of premises and facilities and to provide opportunities to expand activities and programmes within the wider communities. Under the scheme, the twenty-two DEIS schools were eligible to apply for grants totalling €77,000 per school to finance capital works and additional operating costs over a two-year period. A once-off capital grant of up to €25,000 was available to each school to cover the additional costs incurred in making the premises suitable for use and/or to enable the school to purchase equipment to run after school activities. In addition, grants of up to €52,000 were available to cover operating costs including additional overheads and costs incurred in running activities or programmes over a period of two years. This scheme is described in detail in Chapter 2.

1.6 OSCAILT Network

Following approval of the proposal by Government, the DES organised meetings with eligible schools and other relevant agencies to provide information on the scheme. Meetings were held with principals of DEIS schools; Home School Community Liaison Officers (HSCL); the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College; School Completion Programme Co-ordinators; Limerick Diocesan Office; City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC); PAUL Partnership and Limerick City Sports Partnership. These meetings provided an opportunity for the DES to gain an insight into the challenges that might arise for schools and to identify the level of support schools might need in the process of implementing the scheme. As part of the application process schools were required to identify capital and operating costs involved in extending the school opening hours and to prepare a plan for the delivery of additional activities or programmes for the benefit of the wider community.

Following the submission of applications by schools to the DES, the principals of the participating schools, TED and the DES agreed that it would be useful to meet regularly over the course of the scheme to support the schools during the implementation phase. This network comprising principals from participating schools, the TED project, and the DES was established and came to be known as 'OSCAILT'. OSCAILT provided a mechanism for schools to share information and good practice, discuss and address challenges, as well as an opportunity for the DES and TED to provide practical supports to schools through facilitation of the network. OSCAILT has continued to meet since the scheme ceased in June 2012 with the aim of continuing to maximise community use of school facilities and to promote its mission "Opening Schools for Life, Learning, and Leisure".

As the funding for this scheme came to a close, OSCAILT felt that it was important to document this scheme, its development and its outcomes. It was agreed that a working group of OSCAILT made up of TED, a representative of school principals and the DES would undertake this task and prepare this report which describes the background and details of the scheme, its outcomes and its impact on the schools and communities that participated in the scheme.

1.7 Report Structure

Chapter 1 of this report sets out the background to the development of the scheme. Chapter 2 describes the design, development and implementation of the scheme. Chapter 3 presents the outcome of the scheme based on a detailed analysis of the documentation provided by the schools to the DES over the course of the scheme. It also includes the strengths of the scheme as well as the challenges in implementing an after-school programme as identified by the schools in their year-end reports to the DES. Chapter 3 also presents the findings from focus groups conducted with education personnel, children, their parents and adults who participated in activities and programmes provided under this scheme. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the report and a series of recommendations.

1.8 Report Methodology

The findings in this report are based on an analysis of documentation provided by schools to the DES over the course of the scheme and on findings from focus groups. Documentation included application forms, after school plans, interim and year end reports. Written permission was acquired from participating schools to access this data for inclusion in this report. In addition, the findings are based on focus group interviews with the key stakeholders involved. Focus groups were facilitated by the TED project and a school principal (representative of school principals).

Sixteen focus groups were conducted with school-based personnel from the education sector including principals from participating schools, Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators (HSCL) and School Completion Programme personnel (SCP) as well as with children, their parents, and adults who benefited from the extended use of school facilities and activities provided under the scheme. Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) in April 2011.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed and a draft report shared with participants for critical review. Subsequently, a revised report was circulated to principals, the DES and TED personnel for feedback.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants across all participant groups. The research subcommittee decided that two researchers would attend each focus group, one to act as moderator and one to take written notes, with the exception of the principals' focus groups; these were conducted by one researcher who had not been directly involved in the scheme. This strategy was used to avoid bias. Focus groups were conducted in the Limerick DES offices and in participating schools. Focus groups were conducted during and after school hours to suit participants' availability and to maximise participation. Each focus group lasted approx. 60 minutes.

Table 1.2: Focus Group Participants.

Number of focus groups	Participants	Number of participants	Location of interview
4	Children who participated in the after -school activities	26	Schools
2	Principals of participating schools	9	Limerick DES offices
1	School Completion Co-ordinators of participating schools	4	Limerick DES offices
2	Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators of participating schools	7	Limerick DES offices
4	Adults who participated in after-school activities[1]	30	Schools
3	Parents of children who participated in the after-school activities	20	Schools

2.1 Dormant Accounts

Dormant Accounts are accounts in financial institutions (banks, building societies and An Post) that have not been used, or insurance policies that have not been used, or have not been reclaimed by their owners for at least 15 years. Each year these funds are transferred to the Dormant Accounts Fund which is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency on the basis that the owner will have a guaranteed right to reclaim their property at any time in the future.

Dormant Accounts legislation (Dormant Accounts Act, 2001, the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act, 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2005), provides for the disbursement of funds that are unlikely to be reclaimed to projects that are designed to alleviate poverty and social deprivation. Under the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Plan[9], funds may be provided for the purposes of programmes or projects that assist the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged, the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged, and persons with a disability. Applications for projects approved for Dormant Account funding must satisfy a number of key principles as set out in the disbursement plan. That is, in so far as possible:

- They must be additional to and not a substitute for mainstream Government spending.

- They must be compatible with Government policy complementing and enriching existing expenditure sources to ensure the greatest impact at a local level.

- They must be able to make a demonstrable difference and achieve discernible impacts.

- They must be sustainable and ensure that good value for money is obtained, especially in relation to capital projects.

- They must display a clear and identified need for the funding and show that monies cannot be obtained through other sources.

- The promoting group or organisation must be capable of undertaking and managing the project to ensure its successful implementation.

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9   http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Community/DormantAccounts/

2.2 Proposal for Limerick City DEIS Schools.

Under the Educational Disadvantage Strand of Dormant Accounts Funding (2008), the Department of Education and Skills (DES) made a successful proposal for funding to support twenty–two Limerick City DEIS schools to maximise community use of their premises and facilities. The proposal for Dormant Account funding was made as part of the DES's response to the Limerick Regeneration programme. The overall objective of this proposal was to encourage and assist schools to extend the use of their premises and facilities to local communities and to enable these schools to provide a range of additional activities and programmes for the benefit of the school and the wider community. Specifically, the scheme was intended to support Limerick City DEIS schools to stay open after hours, at weekends and during holidays, so that children and communities would have access to additional programmes and activities, including homework clubs, youth clubs, parenting classes, summer camps, as well as having access to the school amenities.

In March 2008, the Government approved this proposal as one of the measures under the Educational Disadvantage Programme for 2008. All of the twenty-two eligible schools successfully applied for funding to the DES under the scheme which was launched in May 2008.

2.3 Description of Scheme.

A maximum fund of €1.694m was provided to enable the twenty-two DEIS schools avail of a capital grant and grants to cover operating costs of up to a maximum of €77,000 over the period of the scheme. An initial once-off capital grant €25,000 was available to cover the additional costs incurred in making the premises suitable for use out of school hours or for the purpose of acquiring equipment necessary to facilitate the provision of additional after-school activities. Under the capital element, schools could apply for funding to improve physical access to the school, install additional lighting, or security infrastructure, or purchase necessary furniture or equipment. The capital grant was payable in two instalments, 70% on commencement of the works and 30% or the final balance based on actual cost, on completion of the works or acquisition of equipment.

In addition, the schools could apply for grants to cover operating costs of up to €52,000 (€26,000 per annum) for a maximum period of two years from the date of commencement of their after-school programme. Costs eligible to be covered by this grant included additional overheads, such as heat, light, insurance, general maintenance, caretaking and publicising programmes. Personnel costs to facilitate additional programmes or activities were also eligible to be covered by the grant. The grant to cover operating and programme

costs for each of the two years was payable in three instalments in each year; 30% on commencement of the programme in each year, 30% six months later and 40% or the final balance based on actual cost at year end on production of relevant documentation.

The scheme could not be used to replace existing programmes or activities being delivered prior to commencement. Although, schools were not required to supplement grant aid or part fund capital works or operating costs, schools could supplement the funding from local resources, or could use the scheme to enhance or expand existing programmes.

2.4 Application Process

As part of the application process, schools were required to provide information on the existing use of school facilities and to identify the types and levels of after-school programmes and activities already in existence. In addition, each school was required to prepare an "After-School Hours Plan", setting out the proposed additional use of the school's facilities, along with its programme of proposed activities, including before-school, after-school, evenings, weekends and holiday periods. Individual school plans were to be prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, including Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators, who have a key role in linking with parents and the wider community, and with School Completion Programme Co-ordinators, who have a specialist remit for a range of after-school activities. While the scheme did not allow schools to replace existing programmes, schools were enabled to access this funding to expand existing effective programmes or activities. In designing their individual after-school plans, schools were requested to give priority to supporting communities in the schools own geographical area. As part of the application process, the school plan was required to:

- Provide details of proposed activities and programmes, including the times and duration of such activities.
- Identify the key stakeholders and target groups such as parents and others, and indicate how each proposed activity would benefit the target group.
- Ensure the plan included usage by the wider community.

2.5 Administration and Implementation

The scheme was proposed and administered at local level by the DES. To assist schools in the process, briefing sessions for the eligible schools were provided. A small advisory group was established by the DES to provide guidance and assistance to schools in completing the application where this was required. This advisory group was led by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and comprised the Limerick City Youth Officer, the co-ordinator of the Limerick

City Local Anti-Poverty Strategy, and a representative of PAUL Partnership. This advisory group supported schools during the application process through a series of school visits and advisory meetings which were held on the Northside and Southside of the city.

All of the twenty-two primary and post-primary DEIS schools in Limerick City made applications under this scheme by the closing date of 30th June 2008. The criteria employed to assess applications included evidence of a clear link between capital costs and proposed programmes, the strengths of the After School Hours Plan and inclusion of the wider community in the plan. The DES staff worked closely with schools to ensure criteria set out under the scheme were met and in autumn 2008, the DES submitted all twenty-two applications to the Dormant Accounts Educational Disadvantage Committee for approval. On the recommendations of the Dormant Accounts Educational Disadvantage Committee, Government approval was granted to all of the eligible applicant schools in December 2008. Applications for the first instalment of capital funding commenced in January 2009.

The engagement of the DES with schools throughout the application phase identified some practical issues to be addressed by schools in implementing the scheme. Discussions between principals, TED and the DES highlighted a need for ongoing support for the schools in implementing the scheme. This led to the establishment of a network of principals from participating schools, the TED project and the DES which came to be known as OSCAILT.

The objectives of OSCAILT for the duration of this scheme were to:

- Support schools by sharing information on the practicalities of delivering of the scheme.
- Support schools by creating a forum to share good practice, so schools might learn from each other and support each other.
- Provide practical supports where needed on issues identified through guest speakers or workshops.
- Receive updates in relation to reporting requirements from the DES.

2.6 Details of Grant–Aid: Expenditure on Capital and Operating Costs

The first phase of the scheme involved the disbursement of the capital grants for the enhancement of facilities and the provision of better access and security to enable schools to make their facilities more accessible to the community. Capital grants totalling €550,000 could also be utilised by the schools to provide funding for equipment for use in after-school activities. In total, capital grants of €549,071.82 were paid to the twenty-two schools over two instalments. Approximately 50% of the total capital funding was

used to improve and enhance the physical condition of the school premises and facilities. This included expenditure on refurbishments, storage, furniture, indoor sports facilities, outdoor play areas, etc. Improvements to access and security, including enhanced lighting accounted for approximately 21% of the capital grant while the balance of 29% of the capital grant was used to purchase equipment for activities, such as computer classes, music, sport and recreation.

Following completion of capital projects and acquisition of equipment for activities, schools applied for the first instalment of the operational grant to facilitate the commencement of their after-school programme. Schools identified their own commencement date based on their readiness to initiate after-school programmes. At the end of the first year, schools were required to submit a report to the DES to satisfy the DES that it had met the requirements of the scheme in the first year before proceeding to the second year of its plan. Over the course of the scheme, the DES facilitated schools to amend their plans provided prior approval was given, to ensure criteria for new or amended programmes or activities were met. This gave schools flexibility to discontinue or adjust elements of their plans to facilitate best use of funds.

Grant aid totalling €996,824.51 was paid to schools to cover operating costs over the course of the scheme; €526,128.59 for the first year and €470,695.92 for the second year. All twenty-two schools received grants to cover operating costs in the first year of their programme, while nineteen schools received funding to cover costs for the second year. Programmes offered by the schools under the scheme included new or enhanced activities such as music, drama, ICT, language classes, art and craft, sport and recreation, homework clubs, parenting courses and summer camps. In addition, local communities availed of the extended use of school facilities and many activities provided by schools were open to children and adults in the wider community.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the activities and programmes offered by schools over the period of the scheme based on the documentation provided to the DES. Chapter 3 also highlights the extent to which the objectives of the scheme were met by schools, including an analysis of the extent to which local communities were able to avail of school facilities as a result of the scheme.

Chapter 3: Outcomes of the Dormant Account Scheme

3.1 Introduction

The Dormant Account funding secured for this scheme allowed schools to put plans in place which would facilitate the school to open after school hours and maximise use of the school facilities by the wider community. Before this scheme was put in place a number of the DEIS schools, both primary and post primary, operated a variety of after school activities for adults and children through the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and School Completion Programme. It was envisaged that the Dormant Accounts funded scheme would enable schools to extend the use of their facilities to the wider community.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Firstly, we present the findings from the documentation submitted by principals to the DES over the duration of the scheme including initial application forms, grant application forms, after school plans, end of year reports and OSCAILT minutes. Secondly, the findings of the focus groups undertaken with children, parents, adult learners and education personnel are discussed.

3.2 Objectives of the Scheme

The Objectives of the scheme were as follows:
- To enable schools to enhance their physical infrastructure and acquire equipment needed to extend existing after-school activities and/or run new activities.
- To enable schools to extend the opening hours of their premises and facilities.
- To enable schools to provide a range of additional activities and opportunities for local communities.
- To enable schools to increase collaboration with local agencies and thus become a resource for the wider local community, including children and adults.

3.3 Outcomes of the Scheme as Documented in Schools' Reports to the DES

This section describes the outcomes of the scheme and the extent to which the scheme met its objectives. It highlights the strengths and challenges of the scheme as reported to the DES by schools. Furthermore, it presents the post funding position of the schools (funding ceased in June 2012), based on information provided by each school to the DES in November 2012.

An analysis of documentation submitted to the DES over the course of the scheme (including application forms, after-school plans, interim and year end reports) shows that the scheme generally met its objectives. The outcomes of the scheme, based on the documentation submitted, are presented under the following five headings:

1. Improved facilities and equipment.
2. Extension of school hours.
3. Additional activities.
4. Increased community collaboration.
5. OSCAILT network which was a significant and unanticipated outcome of the scheme.

Improved facilities and equipment

The capital grant was spent on refurbishments, storage, furniture, equipment, outdoor play areas, improved access to the school, security and lighting, musical instruments, sports equipment, sports infrastructure, IT equipment and software.

- Fifteen schools refurbished part of their school which gave them space suitable for use after school hours. Refurbishment entailed plumbing, painting, electrics or window repairs.
- Fourteen schools improved schools security. In order to do this schools purchased cameras, installed better lighting and secured both the school building and perimeter. Of these schools, some schools used the grant to secure the school internally so that after school activities were located in/ confined to one area of the school. By undertaking these improvements one school was able to make its school gym available to the community seven days of the week.
- Five schools improved their sports facilities or playing areas. This opened up the school facilities to be used by local clubs and groups.
- Three schools improved access to their school. By upgrading the access to the schools the facility became available to a wider community.
- Five schools purchased resources that would allow them to offer a wider variety of after-school activities to the community. Eleven schools purchased musical instruments and eight schools purchased sports equipment. This gave schools the opportunity to offer musical and sporting activities that they had not been in a position to offer before this funding became available.
- Nine schools purchased IT equipment or software. This allowed the schools to improve the ICT provision in their schools. One school set up a media lab which is open to the public and reported: "*The project we designed had a number of possibilities for before, during and after school. With no significant community living in the area we had to look at groups linked to the school. We believe the facility is an addition to the national 'SMART SCHOOL'* [10] *programme and will add to the skill level of pupils and teachers in IT. The facility is used every day before school, during school, during lunch break, after school and some evenings….*".

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10   www.ite.ie/download/smartschools.pdf

Principals reported that as a result of the funding provided by the scheme, they are better equipped to meet the needs of their own school and wider communities. One principal noted that the funding provided through the scheme enabled the school to *"enhance facilities particularly our refurnished halla and preschool which double as practice rooms and dressing room"*.

Extension of school hours

Before this scheme eighteen of the twenty-two DEIS primary and post primary schools in Limerick City had their school facilities open after school hours. Nine of these schools made their facilities available to the wider community. One school opened out of school hours for Easter and Summer camps. An analysis of opening hours, outside of normal school hours prior to the scheme indicates that the twenty two schools were open a total of approx. 165 hours per week.

The scheme enabled the schools to extend their opening hours as follows:

- During the first year operation across all schools, the scheme was used to open school facilities for an additional 145 hours approximately per week.
- In Year 2, schools opened for an additional 115 hours approximately per week.
- Eight schools used the funding to provide additional holiday provision. In Year 1, seven schools held additional Summer camps while one school provided an Easter camp. In Year 2, five additional camps were provided during holiday periods including four Summer camps and one Easter camp.
- Schools also made their facilities available to the wider community during school time.

This does not fully reflect the level of usage by communities as numerous activities ran concurrently across many schools, and also some schools were open for additional activities during school hours.

Additional activities

Schools offered a wide variety of activities during the lifespan of the scheme. These classes were availed of by children and adults. Sixteen schools provided music activities for adults and children which included: instrument tuition, band practice, choir or stage school, along with opportunities to take examinations in music and receive accreditation from the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Two schools provided parenting classes. Five schools provided cookery lessons or courses, and one school gave parents and children the opportunity to bake together. Ten schools provided a range of ICT classes, including computer classes and IT up skilling for adults and for children. Fifteen schools provided sports and fitness classes. These ranged from fitness classes and training in the use of a climbing wall, to clubs using school facilities for training purposes. Seven schools provided arts and crafts classes, which included copper embossing, jewellery making, make and do classes, silk painting and art classes. Finally four schools provided adult education classes, which gave participants the opportunity to sit State exams that they previously were not in a position to take.
(Please see Appendix A for a comprehensive listing of after school activities offered by schools.)

Increased use by community

Increased engagement with the wider community was a key objective of the scheme. Reports to the DES show that children and adults attended classes organised by the schools. Additionally, a variety of groups operating in the wider community availed of schools' facilities. The reports from schools indicate that the age profile of the people who took part in the Dormant Accounts funded activities ranges from 4 years of age to 80 years of age.

Schools also reported increased collaborations and partnerships with other statutory and non-statutory service providers.

Table 3.1: Profile of Collaborations between Schools and the Wider Community.

Category of service provider	Collaborating partnership organisations
School community	School Boards of Management Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) School Completion Programme (SCP) Pupils Parents/ Guardians/Grandparents Community members Local schools
Statutory agencies	Department of Education and Skills (DES) City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC) Limerick Regeneration Agencies PAUL Partnership Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)
Third Level and Further Education Sector	Mary Immaculate College (MIC) Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project University of Limerick (UL) Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) Irish Chamber Orchestra Limerick College of Further Education Limerick School of Music
Community Organisations	Dréimire Educational Theatre Company Limerick Sports Partnership Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Eireann Football Association of Ireland (FAI) Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Limerick Athletics Club Young Munster Rugby Club Southill Family Resource Centre Southill Community Development Project

OSCAILT network

The development and success of the OSCAILT network was an unanticipated but significant outcome of the scheme. The network, when formed initially was a partnership between the then twenty-two DEIS primary and post primary schools, the DES and the TED project (MIC) was formed at the initial stages to support schools for the lifespan of this scheme. OSCAILT met on a monthly basis during the academic year 2009-2010 and on a twice a term basis in the final phase of this scheme. In all, a total of 23 meetings were held in relation to the implementation of the scheme over the life-time of the Dormant Account Funding. Meetings were facilitated by the TED project and hosted by the DES. The agenda for meetings was set by members and included issues such as information on payment of grants, submission of reports required, sharing of good practice, exploration of challenges, workshops with guest speakers on agreed topics. Guest speakers included personnel from the Revenue Commissioners, an insurance company, Limerick Sports Partnership, Department of Social Protection, Health Service Executive (HSE), PAUL Partnership, Limerick Youth Service, Irish Society Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and the Limerick Volunteer Office.

OSCAILT provided an opportunity for principals of all DEIS schools, both primary and post primary, to meet, to share information and ideas, to discuss challenges, and share good practice. It also provided an opportunity for new principals appointed after the commencement of the programme to access support and information and get to know other DEIS principals, DES personnel, and TED personnel from MIC. Participation in the network by DES and TED personnel afforded them opportunities to understand some of the challenges in implementing the scheme and to respond appropriately where possible. OSCAILT has also proven to be a valuable forum for sharing information generally on issues and initiatives relevant to DEIS schools such as the Limerick Regeneration Programme and literacy.

End of year evaluations were conducted on the effectiveness of OSCAILT network in 2010 and 2011. Feedback from principals indicated that they valued the forum.   The effectiveness of OSCAILT has also been evidenced by the high attendance rates at meetings and the desire of principals to continue meeting when the scheme ceased in 2012. Members have agreed to maintain this network as a mechanism for networking, a support for principals in DEIS schools and an opportunity to further develop linkages with other educational institutions including the Third level sector. OSCAILT now comprises of twenty-one schools since the amalgamation in September 2012 of St. Mary's Girls' and St. Mary's Boys' schools.

3.3.1 Strengths of this scheme

Principals were asked to identify the strengths of this scheme in their end of year reports. They identified the strengths of this scheme in terms of the benefits it brought to the schools, children, parents, the wider community and the opportunity it afforded to develop partnerships across stakeholders.

Principals acknowledged the unique opportunity this scheme offered with one principal stating that, '*the idea of permitting the After-School Hours Plan to be devised and administered by each individual school with the support and assistance of the local DES & MIC staff has been an excellent one. In the past, when central funding has been provided it has sometimes been very diluted by high salary, administration and other costs before it reaches the intended target group'*. Another principal wholeheartedly endorsed this scheme stating '*this project has been a resounding success in providing facilities and activities for the young people of our school and for the community in the Southside of Limerick'*.

Benefits to the schools

The benefits highlighted by the schools included a more positive image of the school in the community, an enhanced climate/atmosphere within the school itself, greater collaboration with outside agencies, enhancement of linkages of school learning with outside school learning and extended use of the school by outside agencies and enhanced facilities.

In terms of a more positive image of the school in the community, one report stated that '*The opening of the school premises and facilities for after-hours activities has increased the profile of the school in the community on the one hand and benefited the community on the other'*. This was corroborated across reports, with another report stating that this scheme nurtured an enhanced image in the community: '*wonderful image created by children arriving and leaving school with guitar and violin cases etc.'*, '*the school is perceived as a comfortable, safe, accessible and welcoming venue'*, '*a sense of ownership and belonging by all members of the community. The school building has become a very special place for the local community'*, this scheme '*consolidates our links with the community'*.

The enhanced atmosphere of the school was acknowledged across reports with schools stating that the scheme had a '*very positive impact on the school atmosphere'* and another stating that the scheme improved '*staff / pupil relationships'*. While yet another acknowledged the benefit of '*teacher engagement in the after-school sector'*.

Reports also highlighted that this scheme enabled '*great opportunity to utilise the school facilities'*. Schools' reports indicate that there was an awareness of and confidence that the time had come to make school facilities available to community groups outside of school times. Schools highlighted that their facilities including PE halls, classrooms and playgrounds were used by the wider community.

Apart from providing programmes for children, schools also highlighted the importance of providing school-based learning opportunities for adults with one school stating that '*we are the only school between the Limerick Inner City Area and Clare that provide adult education courses for adults. This has strengthened our links with community and the school is perceived as an approachable and available resource in the area'*.

Reports also acknowledged the enhanced facilities and equipment which their schools enjoyed as a result of this scheme. For example, one school highlighted the extensive use made of their capital purchases, stating that the '*capital funding was used to purchase catering tables, chairs, cutlery and ware, so that we could facilitate functions such as tea dances and Irish Nights. In this way, other members of the community who are not directly involved with [music classes] can enjoy listening to those who are taking lessons, and it also provides a showcase for our music group members. These catering tables are also being used for other after-school activities such as our Homework Club, as well as Communion and Confirmation gatherings'*.

Greater collaboration and the development of positive links with outside agencies were also reported by schools. Table 3.1 profiles the range of collaborations which took place. The importance of these collaborations was acknowledged by all participants stating that this scheme facilitated '*linking with and working in cooperation with other agencies in the community'*. Schools highlighted the opportunity this scheme offered to nurture existing partnerships and promote new partnerships with organisations. One school noted that their '*partnership with the* (a music organisation) *was a primary one as evidenced by the large numbers which accessed this facility. It was an obvious need for the families of the Southside which is now being filled on their doorstep and at affordable prices. The same is true of* (a drama organisation) *which was previously not available to the young people of the Southside. I wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the other schools in the locality in advancing both these projects'*. Some schools were also in a position to acquire additional funding to augment the Dormant Accounts grants. One school reported that '*the Regeneration Board provided capital funding which allowed us to create facilities beyond the scope of the capital funding of this scheme'*. Another school noted that their enhanced facilities enabled outside organisations such as the City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC) to run courses in the school premises.

Benefits to the children

Schools identified a range of benefits to children who engaged in programmes supported by this scheme. These benefits included an enhanced in-school and after-school life and learning, personal benefits and skill development.

The reports submitted by the schools spoke of an *'enhanced school life'* and the *'opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities'* that some children otherwise would not be in a position to access. Reports highlighted that children's concentration skills had improved and that there was an increase in the academic outcomes for children including increased interest in subjects such as Science. The reports acknowledged that participation in this scheme offered children opportunities to engage in team work and to *'enjoy the time to work with teachers and other pupils in smaller group settings'*.

Significantly, schools identified personal development as a key outcome for children stating that engagement in programmes promoted the development of self-discipline and '*improved behaviour',* and also that '*it develops the children's social skills and can at times give them a sense of responsibility when helping other children in homework club ... improved social skills and camaraderie'.* Yet another report highlighted that *'the cookery class allowed the children to build up their confidence and develop a sense of achievement'.* Additionally, reports highlighted how participation in programmes funded through this scheme '*promoted confidence in public speaking and performance'* and enabled the children to experience success through *'Music and Speech activities'*.

Reports also highlighted the skill development aspect of engaging with programmes , for example, one report stated that *'the children became more accomplished in the areas of drawing and painting', 'development of appropriate language', 'children attending classes are improving motor skills, listening skills, and team building skills while also developing their self confidence in an enjoyable manner'*.

Finally, reports also noted the value of this scheme in terms of nutrition and promotion of school attendance, with one report specifically highlighting the benefits of the breakfast club as *'not only a means to ensure that the most deprived of our students can begin the day with a healthy breakfast, but is an excellent measure to ease these students into the school day'*. Reports also highlighted the high attendance rates at after-school programmes, for example one report commented that: '*This programme ran from the beginning of October '09 to the end of May 2010, four evenings per week. The attendance averaged at 90%. The children engaged with a great variety of activities which enhanced their skills and learning i.e. computer skills, pottery, sports, and literacy. A significant element of the project was SPHE related, particularly behaviour management, social and emotional skills. There was a very definite improvement evident in this area, shown by all pupils.*'

Benefits to the parents

The positive impact of the scheme in relation to parents was also acknowledged in school reports submitted to the DES. These benefits included pride in their children's achievements and enhanced relationships with schools.

Specifically, schools acknowledged parents' deep appreciation to the schools for running after-school activities and pride in their children's achievements through participation in programmes. Increased engagement with parents through activities and programmes was also seen to be beneficial to the development of home school relationships. Principals reported that *'parents are engaging with a whole new set of people – music teachers, drama teachers etc. and because these activities are after school hours they are now taking more responsibility for their children's movements in the evenings and weekends'*.

Benefits to the wider community

Analysis of reports submitted to the DES revealed a variety of benefits for communities, with the general consensus that the scheme '*has been very worthwhile to the community at large'*. Indeed, the benefits of this scheme were reported across community settings including, the school, the home and agencies working in the community. The benefits included extended use of school facilities such as media labs, physical education and sports facilities, parents' rooms, and kitchens, promotion of healthy

lifestyles, provision of 'accessible' opportunities for celebration, learning and leisure, opportunities for accreditation and social integration and promotion of a sense of pride in the community. Indeed, one report highlighted a cultural shift and acknowledged that '*precedent has now been set for making school facilities available for after school activities*'.

The reports to the DES found that significant numbers of participants across activities did not have a previous connection with the school. As one principal reported: '*it is important to point out that this scheme fits in well with this school's overall approach to involving all people in the community in educational endeavour through our school*'. Another principal highlighted that the school '*proved a popular venue especially with the elderly*'. Another report highlighted how this scheme promoted engagement of adults from outside the community and from past pupils in the school, with the report stating that the school is '*very pleased with the interest shown in our music group, particularly among adults who are not affiliated to the school. People are travelling in from County Limerick to attend classes, as we seem to be the only music group in the area providing adult beginner classes. We are also delighted that past pupils of our school are availing of the opportunity to continue learning traditional music*.

There was also evidence of collaboration across schools, thus extending the community of learners, as one report noted, '*we have encouraged the local primary schools to use the facilities which have resulted in 5th/6th class using the PE Hall some afternoons to run class leagues. They have also attended woodwork and metalwork classes*'.

The community benefited from this scheme as it offered many children and adults opportunities to participate in activities that, for a host of reasons, they otherwise would not be in a position to avail of. The availability of school facilities was seen to promote leisure activities, and in some instances to do so through the medium of Irish thus enhancing both leisure activities and conversational Irish.

Reports also acknowledged that through this scheme, children and adults were supported to access opportunities for accreditation, including the Royal Academy of Music grade examinations and State Examinations for adult learners.

This scheme also offered communities very positive and enjoyable opportunities to celebrate their achievements and talents. For example, reports listed additional performance opportunities, including an Irish Night when community members were invited in for traditional music performances, Féile Luimní and school concerts.

Reports highlighted the value of this scheme also in terms of offering opportunities for 'social integration'. They also reported that community engagement through e.g. attendance at matches which were 'supported by the whole community' brought 'life to the area'.

3.3.2 Challenges

Principals were also asked to identify challenges that they encountered in relation to participation of their schools in this scheme. The challenges identified included difficulty in recruiting and retaining adult and child learners, difficulties in recruiting appropriate personnel, increased workload for principals, insurance and sustainability of programmes.

Some schools reported difficulty in getting their activities started because of limited interest and uptake. One school reported that 'in spite of advertising and promotion, outsiders have not availed of this facility'. Challenges listed by schools in implementing their plans included:

- Lack of numbers for some after-school clubs.
- Lack of enthusiasm for some activities.
- Some courses offered had very little or no interest from children.
- Difficulties attracting adults.

Recruitment of suitable qualified personnel to run activities was reported as a difficulty for some schools. Some principals also identified the increased workload in implementing activities and/or in keeping school facilities open for extended hours.

Sustainability was identified as a challenge by most of the schools. Principals highlighted the need for future funding to provide personnel to staff programmes and provide caretaking and also to meet the costs of repairing or replacing equipment.

3.4 Findings from Focus Groups

This section identifies outcomes of the Dormant Accounts funded scheme to, 'maximise the use of school premises and facilities' on participants, schools, and the broader community. The findings from the focus groups are overwhelmingly positive, and speak of the quality of life and learning gained for children, their parents, community members and school personnel through participation in this scheme. This report demonstrates how this scheme, through the provision of a menu of after-school activities, made learning opportunities available and accessible to children and adults within their communities.

Firstly, we present an overview of findings from the various stakeholder groups. We then present the strengths of the scheme and subsequently present the challenges.

3.4.1 Overview of strengths and challenges from focus group meetings.

This section gives a general overview of the scheme from the perspective of children[11], adults[12], school-based personnel[13] who participated in focus groups.

Overview of children's experiences

Children were asked to comment on a variety of issues relating to their involvement in this scheme. They were overwhelmingly positive and some even described their schools as a '*second home*' where they felt at ease and safe, due not only to their experiences with formal schooling, but their extended engagement in the school site through after-school programmes.

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11   The term 'children' refers to focus group participants from primary and post primary schools.

12   The term 'adults' refers to parents of children participating in after-school programmes and to adult learners attending programmes.

13   The term 'school-based personnel' refers to principals, Home School Liaison Co-ordinators and School Completion Programme personnel who participated in focus groups.

Children were asked to identify the benefits of attending after-school programmes. The immediate benefits identified by the children included enhanced academic outcomes, increased motivation to attend school, development of positive relationships, increased aspirations, nurturing of talents and participation in a variety of opportunities to learn and socialise in a safe nurturing environment. They highlighted long-term benefits in terms of career and employment opportunities, an interest in life-long learning and the development of a sense of belonging to their communities.

Children strongly acknowledged that delivering programmes in the school made them accessible and affordable, with a number of children clearly stating that their parents would not be in a position to fund them to attend similar programmes at full cost in other venues.

Children highlighted the fun aspect stating that *'it is not all academic'* that you can socialise and have fun, stating that they enjoyed meeting and making friends in the after-school setting because they mixed with different age groups from across the school. Fundamentally, they reconceptualised the traditional role of the school. One child noted that having the opportunity to engage in programmes '*brings a different colour to the grey days'*. They also noted that they developed skills they could share with their friends who were not attending programmes.

Children were asked why they thought their principals set up after-school programmes in their schools, in other words, they were asked to develop a rationale for the development of after-school programmes. They were very positive about the role their principal played in making these opportunities available to them.

They identified the following rationale for the development of after-school services:

- Academic support.

- Children could have fun and make more friends and mix with different age groups.

- Supports learning for state exams.

- Builds self-esteem and confidence.

- Provides opportunities to develop talents and skills.

- After-school settings were seen as 'safe places' and offered children opportunities to *'stay off the road', 'not get into trouble',* and attendance was deemed to prevent anti-social behaviour.

- Children said that principals want them to enjoy themselves and act as role models and encourage other children to attend.

- Offers children a chance to escape from the traumas of real life and to build resilience – they acknowledged that the positive experiences of after-school activities helped them to cope with stresses in their lives.

- Attendance at after-school programmes keep them physically active and engaged in learning.

- Attendance in after-school programmes builds relationships between teachers and children.

- Attendance at after-school programmes provides access to extra-curricular subjects and activities.

- The provision of after-school programmes builds a sense of community within the school.

- Having after-school programmes in the school gives the school a good reputation.

- The provision of after-school programmes creates a better environment for learning within the school.

In terms of challenges a small number of children raised some issues around scheduling and variety of programmes. The children noted that on some occasions there may be more than one choice of after-school programmes on a particular day and it was difficult to choose between them. They also noted a preference for Saturday programmes to be run in the afternoons. They also noted that on very rare occasions there could be negative behaviour in the after school programme but said that it was dealt with effectively by the teacher.

Overview of adults' experiences

Parents and adult learners identified academic, social, personal and career benefits accruing to their children and saw after-school programmes as a mechanism to provide support for their children so they could reach their potential. Parents saw the school building as *'the heart of the community'* with resources and facilities that could be gainfully used by the extended community. They appreciated the opportunities the school offered their children, and highlighted a number of barriers which they experienced in supporting their children including financial barriers and their own limited educational attainment.

Parents spoke passionately of the enjoyment their children got from participation in the different programmes. They contrasted their own school experiences when they '*couldn't wait to get out of school*' because they were '*afraid*' with their children's experiences, where their children just '*love, absolutely love*' their after-school programmes. They were very aware of the variety of programmes including science, drama, crafts, cookery, reading, music and sports. Some schools rotated after-school programmes so that all children were offered opportunities to attend programmes, a factor very much valued by parents. Parents also believed that their children's aspirations were being nurtured and expanded through engagement in after-school programmes, as one parent reminisced *'when you asked a child* [what they wanted to be when they grew up], *they wanted to be a postman or a fireman, now they want to be musicians'*. Furthermore, they felt that participating in after-school programmes at primary level would aid transition to second level as it would *'get them used to staying the extra hours for secondary school',* and introduce them to subjects they could follow up on at second level. They also acknowledged the dedication and talents of the staff who worked in after-school programmes. Parents believed that engagement in after-school programmes helped to build positive relationships between the children and their teachers and encouraged engagement in school. They also noted that offering afterschool programmes was very important during the winter months when children can be more isolated in their homes after school hours.

Parents spoke of their own engagement in a rich array of programmes provided to them both through this scheme and through the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme. Parents noted that supporting parents was an indirect mechanism for supporting children. They also highlighted that they had formed friendships with teachers and other parents through their engagement with the school.

Focus groups were held with adults who participated in a variety of learning programmes including academic subjects for State exams, music classes and sports. Adult learners deeply appreciated the opportunity to use school facilities and engage in learning, stating that it offered them '*something to reach for'*. As one participant said '*one day I changed my life'* (through deciding to enrol in adult learning programmes). They highlighted a number of factors that contributed to the accessibility of programmes. These included physical accessibility and comfort (lighting and heat), teaching approaches; self-paced learning, safety and timing. Adult learners believed that having the '*right tutor'* was key to the success of adult programmes, and stated that it is paramount for tutors to build relationships with the adult learners and start from '*where people are at'*. They felt very much at ease in the school setting stating that '*it's like our own kitchen at home'*. They spoke of schools being within walking distance of their homes, and therefore easily accessible.

In a number of instances, programmes were attended by both adult learners and children. These programmes were deemed to be very successful by all attendees, with adult learners stating that the presence of younger learners motivated and challenged them.

Adult learners' motivation to get involved in programmes were varied and ranged from acquiring the skills to support their children's learning; seeking a social outlet; personal development; embracing the opportunity and challenge to gain academic accreditation; the joy of learning new skills; and the opportunity to develop a healthy lifestyle. They noted that attending programmes offered opportunities to socialise in a safe environment. They highlighted a broad range of benefits of being involved in programmes. These included skill development that directly impacted on their lives and on their children's lives. It also provided a social outlet, and resulted in positive physical and mental health outcomes.

The welcoming climate of the school played an important part in encouraging adults to participate in programmes. Adult learners and parents spoke about how inviting and amenable the principal and staffs were. They felt the principal related well to them, and he/she encouraged them to identify their learning needs. One adult who was part of a music programme noted the openness of the principal to extending the range of programmes.

Participants were conscious of the impact of the capital programme on school facilities. They acknowledged that this initiative had funded catering equipment that allowed them to run fundraising events in the school hall.

Adult learners indicated that they would like to explore opportunities for developing links between children in the school and adult learners, possibly with adults offering academic support to children. In terms of challenges, the overriding concern raised by adults was in relation to sustainability and the desire for children and adult programmes to continue. Parents noted that summer provision could be improved if there was at least a one week break between the end of school and the beginning of the summer programme. Parents also noted that in some instances, due to resource constraints, not all children had the opportunity to attend after-school programmes on an on-going basis, and had limited access to programmes.

Overview of school-based personnel's experiences

Participation in the Dormant Account scheme placed extra workload on the participating schools. This workload included managing accounting for the finances, recruiting staff for programmes, monitoring of programmes and reporting to the DES. In spite of this additional workload, principals felt that they were well placed to roll out this initiative as they had positive relationships with children and their parents and were in a position to nurture engagement. They also believed they had the diversity of skills needed to successfully roll out the scheme, and were in a position to recruit appropriate staff for programmes and to work with community agencies. Principals felt that this initiative also built on the existing work of the HSCL scheme. They acknowledged the key role played by school secretaries and caretakers throughout the lifespan of this scheme. They also acknowledged the positive links they built and consolidated with other agencies and educational providers through this scheme.

Principals valued the opportunities this scheme brought to their schools, both in terms of the capital dimension which enabled them to upgrade their facilities and buy materials (such as enhanced security, storage, musical instruments, media lab, playground markings, fire alarms, catering equipment and computers) and the operational element which enabled a wide variety of programmes to take place within the school. Principals highlighted that caretaking was key to extending the use of school buildings.

Principals were very cognisant of the financial constraints on families, and saw this scheme affording *'an opportunity for equality with the person from a higher* [socio economic] *background'*. They also noted that '*it was great to be able to cut the price of Irish dancing in half or music cut the price of that by a third'*. It meant that programmes could be run *'at a price the children could afford'*.

Principals believed this scheme enabled schools to support children to develop the skills and talents that would nurture their achievement and engagement in the educational system.

Principals identified a variety of benefits accruing to the children including academic, social, personal development, aspiration raising, motivation and support for school attendance. They stated that *'the benefit to the children is really the single biggest thing'*. They described the programmes as *'life enhancing for the children and the community ... the finest thing possible is that the lives of children are enriched'*. They believed that participation in this scheme has *'enriched the education'* of children.

Principals noted the high participation rates in programmes with one school declaring that over fifty-three children were doing music, with over fifty percent of children from that cohort taking formal exams with the Associated Board of the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Principals believed that having a comprehensive programme of after-school activities enabled them to offer a more holistic service *'it's not just academics, you're actually providing a bigger service ... school is not just seen as a focus on learning. They have a broader picture of school'*, indicating the social and cultural dimension of education and a school's contribution at local level.

A number of principals highlighted the inclusive nature of this scheme. Traditionally, after-school programmes were organised to benefit target groups of children. In

contrast, this scheme enabled schools to make these programmes available to all children within their school community and to extend it to children from outside their traditional school communities. The opportunity to offer an inclusive programme was deemed to be a very positive aspect of this scheme as it enabled children and adults to make new friends.

Principals felt that this scheme offered children the opportunity to try out different kinds of programmes which they would not otherwise be in a position to offer them. Basically, it offered schools opportunities to experiment, to be creative, and afforded them a measure of flexibility. Principals spoke of accessibility not only in terms of how this scheme removed the financial constraints for children but also physical accessibility and convenience.

Principals noted a number of benefits to families. They observed that parental and child engagement in programmes improved communication within families. They were keenly aware of how this scheme addressed the aspirations of parents, with one principal recalling how a parent *'took time off work to wait for a phone call to see if their child had gotten a place in the band'*. Principals acknowledged that some parents and grandparents had negative school experiences as children. They saw that the scheme offered the opportunity to redress these negative experiences and instead create positive attitudes which in turn acted as a vehicle to support their own children's learning and engagement with school and education. Engaging parents and adult learners was seen as an opportunity for schools to show *'the way schools have changed. That they are much more open, and I suppose more inviting places and the whole approach to education has changed dramatically'*.

Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators (HSCL) reported that they promoted the programmes funded through this scheme. They identified benefits both in terms of capital expenditure and also the operational element of this scheme. They acknowledged the importance of investing in education and noted that the school was *'an incredible resource'* and it was great to see that facility available to the community and it was '*a great boost to the school*' to have enhanced funding and facilities. They also noted how the programmes funded through this scheme built on activities already in place and brought an added value, strengthening *'the community aspect of HSCL'*. Adult programmes not only attracted parents but also '*grannies or friends*'. This scheme extended educational opportunities to a very broad community which HSCL Co-ordinators felt expanded the child and adult population who engaged with the school.

HSCL Co-ordinators acknowledged the value of obtaining support from a wide variety of both educational and non-educational agencies.

HSCL Co-ordinators were also very proud of the achievements of the adult learners who sat state exams and undertook FETAC accredited courses, and other programmes through participation in this scheme. They highlighted specific benefits to adults including accreditation, enhancement of skills, and positive engagement with the school environment. They highlighted the need for programmes to run at a variety of times to suit adult learners, with some adults only available late in the evening. HSCL Co-ordinators agreed with principals in the belief that caretakers were essential to the extension of school facilities beyond the traditional school day. They also highlighted the capacity of these programmes to build and nurture local leadership as some adult participants went on to take up responsibilities in relation to running programmes.

HSCL Co-ordinators also identified a variety of benefits accruing to children and families as a result of participation in this scheme. HSCL Co-ordinators noted the success of parent and child programmes where attendance vastly outstripped expectations at primary school level. They also noted that parents had a new appreciation of facilities and resources that existed, stating that, when parents see e.g. *'the climbing wall, they are actually amazed that their children are going to have this experience'*. HSCL Co-ordinators also highlighted benefits specific to the parents themselves, stating that adult programmes offer parents an opportunity to meet '*parents in the wider community in a different setting. They're coming in to do something else. They're not coming in because there's a problem. You're passing them* [passing parents in the corridor in school] *and they are in* [school] *for something else* [for a positive reason]'.

School Completion Programme (SCP) personnel identified a number of benefits accruing from this scheme, and acknowledged the importance of additional homework clubs but also noted the value of having other types of activities to nurture broader social engagement, as one SCP person stated: '*you have to find novel ways of keeping the guys that don't want to do the homework clubs*'. SCP personnel were aware of the diversity of programmes across different schools and believed that these programmes enhanced children's learning. They cited examples of good practice across schools, and examples where school facilities were used extensively by the broad communities of learners. They noted that this funding enabled schools to reach out to a wide population of children, enabling them in turn to concentrate and target their efforts on a specific group of children. SCP noted that after-school provision was timetabled so there was no overlap between the programme of the SCP and the programmes funded by this scheme. They noted that while they were consulted at different stages of the scheme that further communication opportunities could be explored.
School-based personnel identified a number of challenges to this scheme. Again their concerns were largely in terms of the challenges posed when the Dormant Accounts

funding ceased, given the changed current economic climate and the difficulties in raising funds. School based personnel also raised the challenge of providing a well-balanced programme to meet the diverse needs of children.

3.4.2 Outcomes for children

In this section we profile specific outcomes for children. The outcomes for children are discussed under the sub-headings of academic and skill development, attendance, relationships, personal development, safety and prevention and finally holiday provision.

Focus group responses are categorised under 'what children had to say', 'what adults had to say' and 'what school-based personnel had to say'.

3.4.2.1 Academic and skill development

This study found that all focus group participants believed that attending after-school programmes supported academic engagement and skill development.

What children had to say

After-school programmes offered children opportunities to access academic support in the form of homework clubs and other programmes which enhanced their academic skills. They were aware of the value of these opportunities with one child noting that '*I have four brothers and they are all noisy at home. I can't get work done. So it was a lot easier just to stay for an hour or an hour and a half and get it done while it was nice and quiet*'. They were aware that some parents had '*left school early*' and were not always in a position to help them with homework. This is not to be confused with lack of parental aspirations for their children, as the children gave examples of how their parents motivated and encouraged them to achieve with one student stating: '*my mam left school before she did her Junior Cert so she really wanted me to involve myself more in school*'.

While children valued homework support they also valued the opportunity to develop other skills and talents that enhanced their overall learning and personal development. These included programmes which increased their music proficiency, science knowledge, drama, IT and sporting skills. They also expressed satisfaction at being able to bake and to make things '*you make dolls and you do the dolls clothes, and you knit the blankets and stuff*'. Some were involved in programmes where they are '*doing grades*' and they were proud of their achievements. They stated that these programmes raised their

aspirations noting that *'you wouldn't think of learning it … you get interested when you hear it'* and *'it makes you want to find out more'*. Fundamentally, children valued the opportunity to develop their skills across all facets of their lives.

There was evidence that children developed positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. Some primary school children spoke about their intentions to access after- school programmes in their primary schools after they had transitioned to second level and to continue to engage in learning into adulthood. One student said *'… and plus when we're older we'll be able to use them* [schools] *if we want to'*. They also linked skill development through participation in after-school programmes with developing new hobbies and career paths.

They were also aware of the broader benefits to the community, particularly adults in the community who attended programmes within their schools and highlighted that many parents *'dropped out of school at the age of twelve … probably forgot loads, the words for Irish, or how to do maths and for the elderly people the computers to show them how they work so they can use them'*.

The after-school environment provided an extended site for learning and for building links between the school and home environments. Children spoke of *'practising'* their skills in their home environments. There was evidence to suggest that these three sites of learning, the home, school and after-school setting, were all connected as children had a *'taster'* of a specific skill in school which they engaged in further in the after-school setting and at home.

What adults had to say

Parents valued the positive academic support their children accrued from attending after -school programmes, and reported they could see the improvement in their children's school academic performance, as one parent indicated, *'I think it is very good* [homework club] *and you can see a big difference in their marks and all …'*. Parents believed that involvement in after-school programmes promoted engagement in formal schooling stating that when their children had their homework done, *'they're positive about getting back into school the following day because they know their work is done correctly rather than being at home and not doing it properly'*. They also believed that children valued and benefited from their increased attainment.

While noting their responsibility to ensure their children's homework was completed, some parents were very conscious of their own lack of academic ability in helping their children with homework stating that their children *'need'* the support in order to fulfil their potential. One parent profoundly stated in relation to her child: *'he was falling behind in the class. He was coming home and if I didn't know what he was doing, there'd be murder in the house. He was falling behind in everything and now that he is in the homework club he is coming on in leaps and bounds'*. In one of the parent feedback focus groups a parent noted that she had the skills to support her child to complete her homework while her child was attending primary school but may need help when the child progressed to post primary. Another parent added: *'the teachers are able to explain what we don't know at home, what we don't understand … they're bringing home the maths and I don't have a clue'*. Parents also valued the extra time their children spend *'with the teacher'* and noted that when the homework is done, children *'can do other activities'* in the after-school programme.

What school-based personnel had to say

All education providers agreed that after-school programmes enhanced academic outcomes and skill development for children. Some schools targeted specific children to participate in homework clubs and they felt this was a great advantage to the children involved, particularly those who might not have access to homework support. Principals noted that homework clubs offered the opportunity for skill development in terms of time management and study skills.
Principals related that through this scheme some children took formal exams in areas such as music, and undertook Irish language summer camps which offered practical academic support, and built motivation and skills. As one principal remarked *'our students have gained great skills'*. While the importance of academic skills was acknowledged, so also was the opportunity afforded to children who might struggle in school academically to have the opportunity to *'do something nice'* in the school

building after school hours further enhancing the broad nature of education. Principals noted that in some activities such as IT there were small groups that enabled children to *'thrive'*.

HSCL personnel noted that *'homework club is great support for the children'*. They acknowledged *'it was brilliant for the kids'* to be involved and especially for children who were able to work in small groups. They believed that attending after-school programmes build children's skills and confidence.

3.4.2.2 Attitude to attendance

This scheme did not track school attendance. Nonetheless, this study sought to establish whether or not focus group participants believed that participation in after-school programmes impacted on children's attitude to attendance. There was unanimous agreement across focus groups that participation in after-school programmes promoted attendance at school.

What the children had to say

Children were asked to identify whether attending after-school programmes had any impact on their attitude to attending school. They all agreed that having the opportunity to participate in an after-school programme encouraged school attendance as after-school programmes can be very exciting, for example, the science club. They noted that attending after-school programmes *'helps you to enjoy school, because when you're at school you're working and then you're looking forward to doing more activities after school'*. They said that going to the after -school programmes sometimes acted as a motivation to attend school stating that *'it helps you to go to school, cause you're like 'I don't want to go to school today' and then you're like, you know handball is on today* (after school) *and I have to go to handball'*.

What the adults had to say

Parents believed that having the opportunity to engage in after-school programmes *'definitely'* promoted attendance, as one parent stated *'my child didn't miss one day at school this year and he is eleven'*. In some schools, attendance at after-school programmes is linked to school attendance and parents felt that this boosted school attendance. Parents acknowledged that having after-school programmes *'entices kids to go to school'* and makes their overall school experience *'an awful lot better'*. Parents noted that having particular programmes such as sports is a motivational factor for attendance.

Adult learners believed that when children see their parents achieving it motivates them to stay engaged in education, and they become more aware of the importance of regular attendance.

What the school-based personnel had to say

Principals were asked if they thought this scheme had an impact on attendance. As schools have an attendance strand under their DEIS plans and have strategies in place to promote attendance they felt they could not directly link attendance patterns to this scheme. However, they felt that there was a holistic relationship between this scheme and school attendance, for instance one principal stated, *'if there was something after school it may encourage children to come to school on the day'*.

HSCL Co-ordinators agreed that this scheme could help to promote attendance. In relation to homework support, they noted that *'when the homework club did run, and children who were poor doing homework got homework done that it led them to not staying out of school pretending they were sick if they hadn't the homework done'*.

3.4.2.3 Relationships

This study found that after school programmes helped to build and extend positive relationships with after-school staff, teachers, their fellow students and their parents.

What children had to say

Children indicated that involvement in after-school programmes enabled them to nurture positive relationships with fellow students and teachers. They stated that they had great fun and developed friendships in a relaxed and safe atmosphere. They highlighted that children from other schools and areas sometimes attended after-school programmes in their schools and that this provided opportunities to develop friendships networks.

They also noted it offered them opportunities to develop friendships with children some of whom were either younger or older than themselves. Indeed, one child said *'And as well, it helps a lot with friends like because I've friends in I'm in transition year, and I've friends in third year, and friends in sixth year, or whatever but like I don't think without the after school activities that I would really get to know them as well'*.

Children greatly valued *'being part of a group'* and said that it promoted a sense of belonging and engagement. They also felt that the after-school context afforded the possibility to know people better and resolve differences *'there might be someone that you don't really like and you go along and you get to know them'*. They also related that some of the children in their schools *'don't live around you they live somewhere else and it's good to stay with them for a while'*. This phenomenon is due in large part to the resettlement of families as part of the regeneration process whereby families are relocated outside the community but continue to send their children to their original local school.

Children acknowledged the positive relationships they had with their teachers[14] in the after-school clubs noting that they are *'nicer than they are at school'* and they are *'fun to be with'* as *'they have to be stricter in school'* culminating in the declaration that *'they're more like your friends'* in the after-school setting and *'you kind of see their fun side and stuff'*. Children also viewed their teachers as *'role models to you because they are so good at stuff you want to be exactly like them'*. They highlighted the positive impact of this relationship stating that they worked harder in school as a result. They also valued the time their teachers took to speak with them and listen to them. One child noted, *'Like it's not just when you go in, it's straight down to work; you have a conversation beforehand and stuff. If you have got any problems like you can tell them d'you know'*.

14   Schools employed staff to run the after school programmes. Staff were recruited from the school (teachers and special needs assistants) and from outside the school, teachers with expertise in specific areas, and staff from the School Completion Programme.

Attending after-school programmes offered children opportunities for social engagement during school time, as children shared common experiences out of school hours which provided them with a topic for conversation when they met in school: *'you get to talk about it* [the after-school programme] *with your friends during school time'*.

Children identified the importance of developing strong supportive friendships not only as a protective factor but also as part of a mechanism to make a successful transition into second level school.

In a number of schools, parents were involved in after -school programmes, in one instance as a teacher, but most often to support sports teams or to attend performances or to provide practical support like props for performances. Children appreciated and enjoyed this support. Some schools ran joint programmes for parents and children e.g. cookery and music, the children were positive about this experience stating that it was enjoyable to *'spend more time'* with their parents.

What adults had to say

Parents acknowledged the positive relationships their children developed with fellow students, and after-school personnel. They noted that their children felt *'comfortable in the school'* and they were *'not frightened'*. Parents identified family stresses that had occurred and felt that the children gained support in dealing with these issues from friendships nurtured through these positive relationships. They contended that involvement in after-school activities boosted positive behaviour as it *'stops bullying'* and promotes the development of friendships.

Parents contended that participating in after-school programmes had an impact on their children's formal schooling in that it enabled their children to develop *'better relationships with the teachers'*. They believed that because children attended after-school programmes they had the opportunity to form positive relationships with the school and this in turn impacted on their behaviour in formal schooling. This is demonstrated by one parent who noted that if *'the kids have a better relationship with the school; they are going to be less disruptive. Maybe because they have a better relationship in the school and they enjoy being in the school'*.

Participation in after-school programmes was also found to enhance relationships between children, teachers and parents

What school-based personnel had to say

Education sector personnel valued the positive relationships that were nurtured with children and between children and their teachers. One principal stated that *'we found that sometimes when their teacher was doing a fun activity – like IT – a lovely relationship was forged that wasn't a pupil teacher relationship but it had a knock-on effect back in the classroom where discipline was concerned you know – they were less inclined to be cheeky with the teacher who was doing enjoyable things with them in the afternoon'*. Another principal noted that when school staff were involved in after- school activities *'it helped teachers and pupils mix from different classes'*. Principals claimed that children had opportunities to engage with a wide variety of children from the broader community through participation in programmes and this helped to build their life experiences and social skills. One principal observed that the programmes running in his/her school attracted a broad social mix of participants that was seen as very positive dimension of this scheme. HSCL Co-ordinators and SCP personnel believed that involvement in after -school programmes promoted positive relationships.

3.4.2.4 Personal development for children

There was a strong consensus among all parties that involvement in after-school programmes afforded opportunities for personal development for children and adult learners.

What children had to say

Children highlighted the personal benefits of being engaged in after-school activities which they contended promoted self-discipline, increased self-confidence, nurtured new skills (academic and non-academic), developed their awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles, engendered a sense of pride in their schools and a sense of solidarity with their fellow students.

Children reflected that being part of a group, whether on a sports team, as a member of a music group or as part of a cast for a show had responsibilities. They knew they had to turn up and not let their peers down. Children remarked that their behaviour was *'better because you're not messing'*, highlighting the impact of programmes on behaviour choices. They felt proud of their achievements and the achievements of others in their school. One child said *'if the football team has a match or whatever, everyone's interested to know how they got on and it's like it's a way the whole school talk….'* Another child said, *'there's a buzz around the school'*.

Children believed that being involved in activities such as speech and drama, sport and music helped build their self-confidence, as one child profoundly noted *'it helps us build up our confidence'* and *'you are not so shy and you have more friends'*. They cited instances of showcasing what they had learned in their after-school programmes during school time, music performances or drama and they said they really enjoyed this very much and it offered them a chance to perform. They indicated that being involved in the after-school activities was *'good for you'*, and gave you a *'chance to shine', 'to build confidence'* and to nurture community spirit. Children also identified health benefits, and believed that programmes promoted a healthy lifestyle since being involved in after-school activities *'gets you active'*.

What adults had to say

Parents believed that a lot of personal development took place in after-school settings and built on the skills they had learned at home and in school. They said that their children were afforded opportunities which *'boosted their self-confidence'*, and helped them to *'feel good about themselves' and 'gave them something to look forward to'*. Parents believed that their children got a lot of praise and kindness from the staff in the after-school programmes. They noted that their children's self-confidence was developed through engagement in a variety of programmes including the arts, as one parent indicated, 'in *the drama before Christmas she was bursting with confidence'*.

Parents also observed that children were *'socialising better'* as a result of being involved in after-school programmes. They believed that children's communication skills were enhanced which also helped them to relate in a positive manner with adults*: 'they* [children] *can relate to adults. They wouldn't be afraid to ask for help or to speak to confront or talk to them about something'*.

Adult learners believed that attending after-school programmes had a very positive impact on children's personal development and provided them with a set of *'life skills'*. Adults who attended programmes where children were also attending noted that children had a positive impact on the adult learners as they were very quick to learn and confident in asking questions and that this in turn motivated the adult learners.

What school-based personnel had to say

Principals believed these programmes brought *'opportunities for personal development'* as they built children's social skills, and gave them opportunities to be involve in group work and helped motivate them to learn, with one principal stating that he/she thought that children *'mixed better'* as result of engaging in programmes. They acknowledged their sheer satisfaction of *'seeing the joy that it gave children because some of them wouldn't have that much joy or music in their lives'* and another principal noted the *'positive feedback from the children who are obviously delighted to have extra activities after school'*. One noted that *'in terms of self-confidence for the children and self-esteem and actually learning skills I think it is absolutely brilliant'*.

Principals believed that engagement in programmes such as music engendered a sense of self-discipline for children. One principal indicated *'it* [involvement in programmes] *gave life skills of commitment that you have to come if you sign up and you buy your instrument and you're paying for it every week that you need to come every week. Like that's not something that some of our families and children find easy, you know they try one thing and then move on to another and you know the discipline of practicing and there was taking responsibility for your instrument and that passes on to the school and being part of the school band and that I think has been an important offshoot of it'*.

Some schools ran programmes with mixed age groups and principals felt this gave the older children an appreciation of interacting with younger children and challenged them to behave respectfully and develop leadership skills. In some after-school programmes, children sat and ate together and principals felt that this offered a natural environment for the development of social skills and for building relationships. Principals felt that engagement in this scheme fostered a sense of belonging.

Principals highlighted the importance of developing positive role models stating that children can sometimes disengage after trying out an activity for a short period of time. However, as a strong cohort of children have continued to engage, principals felt that *'there are now role models in their communities and they see ... Gosh some have access to all this and are seeing it through. So it is giving a sense of role models to them in their own community that have actually followed through on things'*. Basically principals said that children who had engaged and achieved were *'modelling achievement and possibilities' for the most at risk. It gives it* [programmes] *a cool factor'*.

Principals discussed the mind shift in school culture and also the mind shift in children's perception of school as a result of this scheme. One principal noted that *'children were in school voluntarily outside school hours, and again a little kind of a cultural shift I've*

noticed now, one of the teachers is doing an ICT programme voluntarily with some of the children and they stay after school to do it ... whereas they would have seen that as a big deal before, there's a little shift in their thinking about being in school when they don't have to be'. Other principals spoke of recruiting children to participate in programmes and getting '*buy-in*' for the ten week duration of the programme from the start. They felt that presenting them with an opportunity to commit to the after-school programmes helped them to develop their resilience, their sense of belonging and commitment to their school and peers.

HSCL Co-ordinators and SCP personnel noted that there were a lot of benefits for children who engaged in after-school programmes stating *'they love it they really enjoy it ... and really benefit from it ... their school day is extended',* and they benefit *'socially and emotionally'.* SCP personnel spoke of the value of '*social interaction'*, the opportunities to build '*self-esteem'*, and the opportunity to develop a variety of skills through team work.

3.4.2.5 Safety and prevention

The issue of safety within the community was commented upon by all participant groups. The school was seen as a safe location which provided opportunities to children and adults to engage in a variety of programmes.

What the children had to say

Children were aware that involvement in after-school programmes provided a preventative element in that programmes *'gets you off the road'*, and *'keeps you out of trouble'* by ensuring that you *'won't get involved with breaking windows and throwing stones'*. They acknowledged that they also offered them opportunities to *'get a break, 'cause you know when you go home you just do your homework if it was raining, you're stuck at home with nothing to do'*. Children related that they were given a chance to escape from problems and to express themselves freely. One student said *'…when I play the* [musical instrument] *it feels like I am escaping from all the problems. I am in a whole different world. I can express my feelings even more'*. They also highlighted that they felt safe in their school buildings as they *'know the place and won't get lost'*. They also said they felt secure because the teachers knew them and would know if they were missing.

What adults had to say

Parents across all focus groups identified the security aspect of after-school programmes. They felt their children were secure in the school environment, as they knew who the teachers were and with whom their children were mixing with (other

after-school participants). They felt it was very important to have clear communication between school personnel and after-school personnel. They specifically highlighted the safety aspect of the school environment, stating that involvement in after-school programmes *'keeps them* [children] *off the streets ... there is too much going on in the streets around here'*. They were conscious of keeping their children safe and engaged, stating that *'by the time they come home* [from the after school club] *it's time for dinner then they sit down and watch a bit of telly and then it's bedtime'*. In another focus group, parents spoke of the value of *'keeping the kids off the road after school, there is nothing for them to do so if they are in her*e [the school] *doing their dancing or their arts and crafts. It's keeping them occupied'*. Other parents spoke of the need for children to be able to go out and play. They noted that some areas are not safe to allow children to play freely outside, and consequently providing safe spaces for children to play was extremely important.

Parents were concerned about the availability of a wide range of drugs in the community and how this engendered feelings of fear in their children. They believed that offering after-school programmes in secure environments staffed by personnel known to and trusted by children and parents was a very positive reason to host programmes within the school environment.

Parents also highlighted the safety aspect of summer camps for children, and stated again that the school environment provided a very safe venue as *'the children have the security of the environment they are used to. They feel safe. There's nobody going to come in on bikes or horses or cars or anything like that.... '*.

Parents deeply appreciated the level of supervision and safety in the after-school programmes stating that they have no fears of their children wandering off when the after-school programmes were finished as teachers ensured that each child was collected.

Adult learners believed that engagement in programmes served to keep kids safe and *'off the road'*. Moreover, they believed that learning a life skill such as the ability to play music offered children an opportunity to *'get lost'* in their music for a while and gave them *'a gift for life'*. They believed the programmes offered a safe social outlet, where children could *'interact with'* people from the community.

What school-based personnel had to say

Principals were also conscious of the safety aspect of this scheme and posited that it gave children positive alternatives, *'something to do'* and *'kept them* [children] *off the streets'*. Principals spoke of the very high degree of engagement, *'I think they absolutely love the activities some of them would be involved a few times a week and wouldn't miss it'*. The HSCL Co-ordinators also noted the safety aspect stating that after-school programmes provided a positive alternative to *'hanging around the streets'*, and believed that *'it was brilliant for the kids'* to have such opportunities.

3.4.2.6 Holiday provision

This scheme enabled schools to provide activities during holiday periods including Easter and summer.

What the children had to say

Children in the focus groups listed the following summer camp programmes that they had been involved in; Irish language, egg hunt, Irish dancing, sports, piano, music, singing, art, computers and cookery. Echoing their experiences of term-time programmes, children valued the opportunities afforded to them to make new friends, mix with children from other schools, socialise, have fun, positing that engagement in summer camps is an alternative to boredom and an opportunity to be active, healthy, socialise and learn in a safe environment. One school had an Irish summer camp, and children in the focus groups acknowledged the benefits it had for them when they sat their State exam in Irish. One child noted that *'It was like really good for the oral'*. Children also enjoyed the trips associated with summer camps. They felt running summer camps in the schools was a good use of school facilities and equipment.

What adults had to say

Parents said that their children *'loved the summer camps'*, as they got the opportunity to be involved in many different kinds of activities. They said their children had great fun in well-structured summer camps. They also noted that summer camps are often staffed by personnel known to the children and that this helps them feel secure and also puts parents' minds at ease. Parents valued the social aspect for their children engaging in summer camps stating that attending summer camps offered their children a safe environment to meet their friends during summer break. They said that their children can be bored during the summer holidays and they need activities to keep them engaged. Parents also acknowledged that some summer camps are run in August in the week prior to school commencing; they valued this greatly stating that it gets the children ready to return to school in September.

What school-based personnel had to say

Principals, HSCL Co-ordinators and SCP personnel all agreed that there were great benefits for the children who engaged in holiday provision. These included academic, social, personal and preventative outcomes.

3.4.3 Outcomes for adult learners

The outcomes for adult learners are discussed under the sub headings of academic and skill development and personal development.

3.4.3.1 Academic and skill development

What adult learners had to say

According to adult learners engagement in this scheme enabled them to address their own academic learning needs and to support their own children's learning which they valued greatly, with one participant stating that he/she got involved in the programme '*because my daughter is doing her Junior Cert*' and another stating that '*you would be embarrassed at not being able to help your son*'. One adult learner related that when his/her child was unable to complete their maths homework they could help him and '*it felt great*'. Similarly, another graphically captured their sense of satisfaction at being engaged in the formal State exams stating; '*I remember above doing the test. Smiling at myself. I was smiling at the fact that I was sitting in an exam centre waiting for the exam to start. It was like someone giving me money from the lottery*'. Adult learners also believed that as they sat State exams within a school environment, they were acting as role models for their own children and other children. They felt that this was a very practical and visible way of encouraging children '*to stay in school*'. Parents who were also adult learners highlighted the positive impact of their engagement in learning on their children with one parent stating that '*when you are involved in doing things in the school, your children tend to get more involved in school as well*'.

3.4.3.2 Personal development for adult learners

What adult learners had to say

Adult learners highlighted the sense of personal satisfaction they gained from the additional programmes offered through this scheme. As one participant profoundly noted '*I did it because I owed it to myself*'. They proudly shared their aspirations and achievements stating that this programme provided them with a personal challenge stating that as they had '*left school I think it was nine ten so it would have been forty years since I've done any sort of maths and I got an honour in maths and I was absolutely thrilled with it*'. Another participant noted that having the opportunity to engage in learning builds your confidence and leaves you with '*a feeling that you are not stupid*'. Yet another acknowledged the value of learning to play an instrument stating that '*there is no better company than music*'.

Adult learners noted that being involved in programmes provided them with great satisfaction, personal challenges and opportunities to learn new skills, as well as opportunities to address gaps in their learning and extend their social engagement. The challenges faced by adult learners were diverse ranging from sitting State exams to learning to scale a climbing wall. Adults appreciated the opportunity for self-improvement and advancement.

Adult learners noted that participation in programmes fulfilled a personal and social need which enabled them to *'get out and meet people'*. One adult learner stated *'when I first saw it advertised* [adult learning programme] *in the parish I was delighted, I came up to have a look and it was exactly what I was looking for a long time and I'm very glad to be part of it'*. They highlighted the importance for adults to engage in learning programmes which would stimulate them and motivate them and shared how they enjoyed the collegiality and noted that *'people help one another'* in the various programmes. Adult learners were of the view that it *'opened up a whole new world, I think, actually of friendship'*. Participants also noted that attending programmes offered friends an opportunity to engage in an activity together and also an opportunity to make new friends and develop a *'sense of belonging'*. Another adult learner highlighted the positive impact on community contending that this scheme is '*bringing the people of the community a little bit closer'*.

Adult learners also said that they felt *'more confident'* as a result of engaging in programmes and contended that they had a greater understanding of what was going on in the world. Adult learners enjoyed having fun, mixing with other adults and also the opportunity to engage in programmes that helped them to get exercise and *'promote a healthy lifestyle'*. They enjoyed doing activities that were *'out of the ordinary'*, like scaling the climbing wall.

In one programme, learners comprised of both adults and children who were learning a variety of musical instruments. One adult learner explained *'some children have parents and grandparents coming to the classes and I find that really encouraging'*. Having such a mix of learners builds cohesion within families and within the community. This group also linked with the senior citizen groups in the community, inviting them to seisiúns and on bus trips; thus facilitating sense of community spirit.

One focus group commented on the benefits of having children and adults learning together. They observed that this created a natural safe learning environment where boundaries were clear, and where adults and children could engage with each other in a very positive way. One adult learner said *'It* [music class] *runs very well and they just come and go from classes. There is no messing'*. Another adult learner said '…*look at*

the way things are going, now the economy, I mean kids hanging around the streets at least they are guaranteed they can come here on a Tuesday night… and their parents will come along and say it's great at least there is some place to go'. They also noted that the presence of children who were very enthusiastic about learning served as a motivator for the adult learners.

Adult learners highlighted how the ethos of the programme helped them to engage, noting that it can be *'a big thing to take a first step'* into adult learning. They highlighted how they were supported to achieve. Programmes were self-paced, teachers were very supportive, with some participants giving examples of teachers offering additional supports to learners outside of the formal contact times. Participants spoke of the relationships they built with school staff as a result of participating in programmes delivered within the school environment, with one participant noting that *'A few of the teachers took me under their belt'* and offered both moral and practical support. Some participants also reflected on how they believed schools had changed over the years noting that schools are no longer '*a strict place'* and *'the schools are more friendly and the teachers are more approachable'*. They highlighted how, if they needed to, they could speak with the HSCL co-ordinator in confidence. The HSCL Co-ordinator was seen as a person who motivated and encouraged learners and who '*is always there helping and pushing you that step further'*.

What school-based personnel had to say

Principals, HSCL Co-ordinators and SCP personnel highlighted a number of personal benefits for adult learners who had engaged in programmes. They highlighted academic achievements, the realising and confirming of aspirations and the growth in confidence and self-esteem.

3.4.4 Outcomes for the school

Focus group participants identified a number of benefits to schools involved in this scheme. These benefits included enhanced overall school experiences for children; enhancement of school culture; the development of a sense of community, belonging and pride for all; the promotion of the school as a place of learning for the extended community; the nurturing of interagency collaboration; and the promotion of Irish culture. Furthermore there was evidence that this scheme enhanced existing initiatives.

What children had to say

Children identified a number of benefits that accrued to the school as a result of being involved in this scheme. It was evident that involvement in after-school programmes gave children a different experience and perspective of the school environment. One such benefit pertained to how they viewed the school. They said that extending the use of the school for after-school programmes built a positive attitude and sense of ownership and belonging towards the school. They also noted that they *'loved the school'* and were delighted to have the opportunity to use it after school hours. The school was seen by them as a place where children belong, a safe place where an ethos of inclusion is top of the agenda where opportunities are available to all children, *'cause like everyone's welcome, you know cause there is enough discrimination already like you don't need any more'*. Children also said that extending the use of the school to the broader community challenged negative perceptions and *'prejudices'* people might have against the school, and would serve to *'make the school a more important place within the community'*.

What adults had to say

Parents said that having after-school programmes in the school promoted the image of the school within the community. Some parents were conscious that in choosing a school to send their children to they were no longer just looking at the school itself but at the *'package on offer'* for their children. They also stated that the children were happy to use the school facilities in this way as '*they know the environment; they know where they are going. They are relaxed'*. Parents observed that extending the use of the school created a sense of ownership for their children as *'it's their environment. It's their school'*.

Adult learners believed that *'the school is part of the community and it is great to have the school resources used by the community'*. They claimed that the school benefited from maximising the use of its facilities and resources by opening their doors to the community. Specifically, they stated that when children observed adults engaged in learning programmes within the school environment it offered positive role models and built their aspirations. They felt that this scheme brought a new dimension to existing programmes. One adult learner said of the after-school music group that *'it was keeping our culture alive'*. Adult learners observed that the positive image of the school was nurtured by its extended use.

Adult learners felt more engaged with their school as a result of participating in programmes. They felt that as a result of being on-site during a school day they knew more about how schools function, and had a greater appreciation of the challenges of running schools. Engagement in after-school programmes fostered a sense of ownership, pride and respect for the school. They said they felt more engaged and willing to support the school. The adult learners were protective of their programmes, stating that *'X's is a very good community…and we want to keep as many people coming as possible',* portraying a real sense of belonging and pride in their school and community.

What the school-based personnel had to say

Principals were extremely positive about the impact accruing to the school and spoke of the enhanced image of the school in the community as a result of this scheme: *'the image of the school is definitely enhanced …. It's a positive association'.* Indeed, the impact is summed up by one principal who observed *'I think you can't understate the value of the warm fuzzy feeling factor … the fact that children are happy to be in school and that has to have a knock on effect … school is a good place … going to school that's a good thing … stay in school'.* Fundamentally, principals contended that this scheme built strategically on HSCL practices and existing programmes and fostered engagement in education for children and adult learners. They believed that this scheme could have a long-term impact on the culture of schools and on the lives of children and their families.

Principals acknowledged that schools can sometimes have a negative image within communities, as parents may believe that the negative behaviour they observe on the streets is transferred into schools. Principals, however, felt adults attending programmes in the schools were presented with a concrete opportunity to counteract this stereotype. One principal noted: *'I think it has given children and parents the chance to see the school as a supportive open nurturing place that values them and their interests'.* Another principal captured the vibrancy that this scheme had injected into the school stating *'I think it breathes new life into the community and the school, through opportunities, success stories and achievement and the sense that things can happen in communities'.*

Principals shared their experiences of how their school cultures had been enhanced, stating that this scheme enabled the development of a greater openness and pride in the school across all school staff including caretakers, cleaners and teachers. As one principal noted *'the school belongs to the community rather than to us. Of course there are practical things. Things get broken'.* Principals felt that this scheme brought a *'new*

dimension' to the school. It gave staff an opportunity to invest and show good will by supporting it. One principal noted how having the scheme in the school created a *'feel good factor'* to be able to run *'programmes we believe in and see the value in'*.

Principals identified personal benefits to themselves as a result of investing their time and energy in this scheme. They noted that children and parents offered plaudits and were deeply appreciative to them for facilitating and developing these programmes. One principal noted how it gave her '*a sense of community'* as *'there were lots of people who came in to use the school, there were grannies and aunties as well as the children in the school. So it was great to see and it was affirming … and it was good for me personally to get to know people'*. They also acknowledged that the funding enabled them employ caretakers to look after locking up the school which meant that principals did not have to be on-site all the time and this was hailed as a very positive practical help to principals which '*took some of the pressure off'*, and enabled them to feel confident about extending the use of the school after school hours.

Principals felt that these programmes promoted parental engagement with their schools. One principal noted that *'my parents might not have come to parent teacher meeting or other things that we would have had before* [prior to this scheme]. *Because we were having cookery lessons or music lessons it showed them another side to the school'*. Principals highlighted an *'intergenerational aspect'* sharing that *'grannies came with their grandchildren and it was something for families to do together'*. Principals also observed that the adult classes created *'great links for us* [schools] *with parents'*. Principals believed that *'it is attractive for parents to know that the school is open and they're welcome. I think that's something parents look for'*.

During the focus group discussions a number of principals shared the far reaching effects of this scheme in their school stating that *'there are night classes organised through home school* [HSCL] *we wouldn't have been able to organise at night normally because we hadn't a caretaker'*.

Principals related how in some instances they worked with other providers in the community so that children had a comprehensive range of activities. They worked with organisations such as *'youth clubs and Garda Diversion projects'* to ensure there was no overlap and made school premises available to these organisations to run their programmes. Please see Table 3.1 for a comprehensive list of organisations schools worked with to maximise the impact of this scheme.

HSCL Co-ordinators identified a variety of benefits to the school from the scheme. They said it built a sense of community within the school. On a very practical level they

believed this scheme helped the three-year DEIS plan and has built an infrastructure that will benefit the school in the long term.

HSCL Co-ordinators believed that this scheme enhanced the HSCL scheme and vice versa. HSCL Co-ordinators were in a position to promote the programmes associated with this scheme through their on-going work with families. HSCL Co-ordinators highlighted the unique position of the school within the community as a point of access for adults, children and families. HSCL Co-ordinators felt that through their contact with families, they were uniquely placed to nurture adult engagement in programmes but that this can be seriously curtailed by the lack of a dedicated space to run programmes.

SCP personnel believed that there were a number of benefits accruing to the school including enhanced facilities and equipment which the SCP had access to.

3.4.5 Outcomes in relation to OSCAILT

As part of this report, principals were asked to share their insights and experiences on the OSCAILT network, to identify the strengths and challenges of OSCAILT and to reflect on whether the OSCAILT forum should continue after the Dormant Accounts funded scheme had ceased. This section is also informed by secondary data through reference to minutes of OSCAILT meetings and end of year surveys.

3.4.5.1 Principals' experience of the OSCAILT forum

Principals felt that OSCAILT had been *'a huge positive'* experience in a number of ways. They noted that the initial OSCAILT meetings facilitated them to '*tease out'* various aspects of the scheme, with one principal stating that *'we didn't see all the possibilities at the beginning and they came to light through the discussions and through the introductions, so I think there was excellent preparatory work.'* Another principal noted that '*the fact that we realised the dream is testament to the beginning'*.

Principals summarised the strengths of the OSCAILT network as follows:

- OSCAILT built trust and solidarity between key agents working for children in Limerick City, '*meeting face-to-face with staff from the DES, and working together and also from Mary I ... working together and each understanding where the other is coming from ... it was a kind of a team'*. They highlighted that they had become accustomed to sharing successes and challenges openly in the OSCAILT forum which had a spin off effect into other fora.

- OSCAILT enhanced access to personnel from the Department of Education and Skills in Limerick. They felt they *'got to know them on a first name basis,* [that DES personnel were] *very approachable, they gave every support possible, personally, on the phone, school visits'*.

- OSCAILT offered direct access to MIC personnel who '*were fabulous as well'*.

- The OSCAILT meetings were efficient which encouraged participation and attendance, as captured by this principal *'it makes it easy to come along when you know the business will get done'*. They highlighted that there was very effective communication noting that e-mails were circulated after meetings with details of decisions made, next meeting date, and information sharing so that principals who may not have been able to attend were kept informed. This was additional to circulation of minutes prior to meetings.

- Principals noted that OSCAILT brought people together with common experiences in a spirit of collegiality – *'we can learn from each other and what other people are doing and you get stimulated with ideas too'*. This in turn enabled the '*sharing* [of ideas, challenges, good practice] *with one another'* it was noted that *'you'll often come away with a little kind of nugget thinking am... that's a kind of good idea, you know, that's very valuable'*.

- The formation of OSCAILT promoted collegiality. Principals recognised the isolation they can sometimes experience and noted that *'the nature of the way we operate* [as principals] *we're very insular in our own schools and predominantly our school is our concern twenty-four hours a day, but to come out then and have the opportunity to share with people and to put an identity on other schools and different situations, it's been very educational from my point of view'*.

- OSCAILT was very much valued by principals who were appointed after the commencement of the programme as it offered a mechanism to access support and get to know other principals along with getting to know DES and MIC personnel.

- Principals felt there was a 'great value in DEIS principals having a forum'.

- Principals acknowledged the 'very high attendance' at meetings, stating 'I have noticed as well, it is the first time I have seen all principals come to meetings and that is very positive as well. Sometimes there would be a low attendance at [other] meetings but this brought everyone together'.

- Principals identified and valued a 'pastoral element' and a 'continuous professional development' aspect to OSCAILT.

Future of OSCAILT forum

Principals who attended the focus groups were asked if they believed there was a value in continuing the OSCAILT forum after this scheme had ceased. They identified a strong rationale for the continuation of OSCAILT, which included recognition of the value of schools working closely with the Limerick offices of the DES and with MIC; working closely with each other on behalf of children attending their schools; recognition of the positive energy and solidarity that exists within OSCAILT which allows opportunities to learn from each other and foster hope. There was recognition that OSCAILT offered a forum for addressing the challenges within the current climate of regeneration in Limerick City.

Principals valued meeting each other through this forum, stating 'there isn't any other occasion where principals get to meet around any activities - you know - anything that is going on in school – we can learn from each other and what other people are doing and you get stimulated with ideas too'. Principals felt that having a working partnership between the Limerick offices of the DES, schools and MIC was very valuable. One principal indicated that 'the links with the DES and Mary I are vital. They [DES and MIC] give it a kind of gravitas that it needs because principals are like everybody else, are so busy that you are picking and choosing what meetings you'll go to so I think I'd be very reluctant to see the Department and Mary I pull back from it'.

Principals recognised the diversity of schools involved, (infant schools, junior schools and senior schools (from second to sixth), fully vertical schools, Gaelscoileanna, single-sexed schools, co-educational schools and primary and post-primary schools). Consequently, they were 'meeting children at different stages in their lives', and they declared the common aspiration that 'we are all working to enrich a better community'. They believed that the impact of this scheme, should it continue to be sustained, would in fact enrich communities and have a very positive impact on Limerick City.

The rationale for the continuation of the OSCAILT forum also included the experiences of involvement in OSCAILT meetings where there is a *'positive energy'* and where there is a *'focus on the positive and moving forward, and that might be the only place we get that, with the budgetary constraints'*. Principals felt that being involved in OSCAILT offered them an opportunity to *'support sustainability and learn from each other'*. There was consensus that OSCAILT could play a key role in sustaining energy and building vision and empowerment, and nurturing hope and solidarity. Principals also raised the issue of declining enrolments and the *'common challenges'* they faced and believed that OSCAILT could offer a support mechanism in dealing with challenges schools will face in the future. They felt that there would be strength in *'a united voice'* which may help them to *'lobby for funding'*.

3.4.6 Challenges

There was uniform agreement across all focus groups that this scheme brought significant benefits to children, families, adult learners, the school environment and the community at large. However, participants also raised a number of challenges and these are outlined below under the following headings; funding and sustainability, scheduling/balancing of programmes, staffing issues, communication and additional challenges. Finally, we highlight challenges in relation to OSCAILT.

3.4.6.1 Funding and sustainability

Sustainability has a strong financial aspect and this presents formidable challenges for the schools as the funding terminates. However, successful interventions need more than money to succeed, and we wish to acknowledge other factors which contribute to sustainability and which were found to be present in this study. These factors included school leadership, creating an inclusive culture, raising expectations from early years onwards, building capacity, and building home-school and community links. These factors form an infrastructure which ultimately maximise outcomes. There is no doubt that this infrastructure which has been built over the timeframe of this scheme will be threatened by lack of funding. The main costs identified in order to sustain programmes were staffing and caretaking.

What adults had to say

During the focus groups parents were informed that the Dormant Accounts funding which enabled schools to run this scheme would terminate at the end of the two-year funding timespan. They were very conscious of the benefits their children gained from involvement in this scheme, and wanted these benefits to continue not only for their own children but for future generations. Some parents indicated that they were already contributing financially to the cost of after-school programmes and would continue to do so, while at the same time they were aware that their contributions were being substantially subsidised by the Dormant Accounts Scheme. Parents were very conscious of the current economic climate and the challenges of fundraising, despite these constraints they said they would like the activities to continue.

Adult learners strongly expressed the need for the programmes supported by this scheme to continue. It was imperative to the adult learners that the programmes would be sustainable not just in terms of finance but sustainable in terms of dynamic services. They suggested many ways of ensuring sustainability of the after-school activities such as fundraising, sponsorship, grants, running events, collecting a small fee, busking, more advertising (proposal to make a DVD of the scheme), and even begging. They were also very conscious of the difficulties of raising funds in the current economic climate. Interestingly, one focus group planned to fundraise themselves by organising a Céilí in the school hall. Some suggested that the programmes organised through this scheme might benefit from promotion at school enrolment and open days. In some instances, adult learners had established a sustainability fund at the beginning of this scheme but they were apprehensive whether it was enough to sustain their programmes into the future. One participant indicated, ' *It* [sustainability fund] *will go fairly fast and as well as that if you wanted to keep the classes affordable so that people can just you know feel that they can afford to send their children'.*

What school-based personnel had to say.

Principals' main concerns centred around finance. They emphasised that the lack of funding would present a formidable barrier to the maintenance and development of this scheme, as one principal noted '*I will be depending on the good will of people to keep the show on the road. It didn't yield the funds and we didn't want to stop the children from coming to the activities based on the fact they couldn't present a euro or two'.* Principals were conscious of the current financial climate in which it is very difficult to raise money. They were concerned that expectations had been raised around the types of programmes schools could provide and were consequently concerned that parents and children would be very disappointed when this was no longer possible.

Principals identified staffing, caretaking and the costs of heating schools as the major costs in terms of sustaining this scheme. They were very conscious of practical financial implications of extending the school day with one principal noting that it is not possible to heat an individual room in their school due to the design of the heating system. Principals noted that fundraising is not necessarily part of their job '*I don't think as principals it is in our brief'.*

Some principals felt that if they had the same amount of money over a longer timeframe they may have been able to stretch the money a bit more as they found the timeframe a challenge.

Schools employed a number of strategies to address sustainability, including charging a minimal fee, recruiting volunteers, forging links with other agencies, building the expectation from the early years in primary school that school can offer a variety of learning opportunities which include after-school provision. Even though some parents did contribute towards the cost, it was difficult to collect a fee in some instances, as one principal noted '*ours wouldn't be consistent'* [in paying fees]. On a practical note, schools that charged fees and had built up a small financial reserve were acutely aware that this reserve could only support the continuation of programmes for a very limited timescale when the Dormant Accounts ceased. While principals noted that they have had some positive experience of recruiting volunteers they were also conscious that it is not possible to run programmes by relying on volunteers alone as they may have skill shortages, can move into employment or indeed may take time out from volunteering to go on holidays etc.

In order to maximise the benefits of programmes, some principals noted that in the final phase of this scheme they scaled back on activities, and '*picked the activities that engaged the most adults and the activities which engaged the most children'.* One

principal identified how his/her staff had contributed to the sustainability of the scheme by agreeing to take turns to lock up the school building late in the evenings. Principals also reported that as the funding ran out the teachers *'agreed that they will provide the service without any payment which is very good of them ... so it is definitely part of the school now, but I really don't know what is going to happen next September'*.

Principals discussed working with other educational partners to build services for children. They spoke of positive working relationships with the City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC) through which they were able to access adult education teaching hours. Principals also spoke of linking with the SCP and discussed examples organising timetables so that activities did not clash. Principals mentioned linking with the Limerick Sports Partnership to run sports activities in the school premises after school hours. Some primary schools also linked with transition year children in secondary school who worked with children in the junior end of the school after school hours playing games and reading stories. However, principals noted that working with other partners in theory can be great, but in practice can bring some challenges. In order for schools to work more effectively with other organisations, it would be important for schools and other providers to develop a shared set of expectations around goals, behaviour management, timetabling etc.

HSCL Co-ordinators felt that after the Dormant Accounts funding has finished, the enhanced facilities will continue to be used by various groups within and outside of school time, but that not having funding for staff would have an impact on the capacity to maximise use of enhanced facilities. One participant from a school whose funding timeframe had ceased reported that since the funding terminated and children had to pay to attend the homework club, the enrolment had decreased from 25 to 8. It was evident that programmes which could attract funding such as the adult programmes supported by CLVEC were more likely to continue post Dormant Accounts funding. However, specific programmes which accrue salary costs were seen to be in jeopardy, and might be ameliorated through staffing from other sources for example through the SCP and by charging a fee. However, they were very conscious of the financial constraints this may place on families. They highlighted that sustainability of programmes might also be addressed through using the DEIS grant. Participants were very conscious of the facilities and resources within their schools stating *'the equipment is there now, it's just a matter of maximising the way it is used'*.

SCP personnel were aware of the challenges of sustaining programmes funded through this scheme once the Dormant Accounts funding had ceased, and suggested it would have been preferable to have the scheme over a longer period of time. They were aware

of the limitations of their own funding but were open to suggestions on how the SCP could help to sustain programmes that had worked well. Indeed one SCP programme member stated that '*I would like to think we would be able to carry something on, we've all signed up to be flexible and adaptable. At the end of the day we're SCP and we have to provide the service and if a service is working and seen to work, I think we have to pull out all the stops to ensure that it works to a high degree and a successful degree'*. They were aware of the challenges of staffing programmes and SCP personnel spoke of recruitment of volunteers, noting that while it was possible to get volunteers for general club activities it was very difficult to get volunteers for homework clubs. SCP staff noted the contribution of Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) students in supporting SCP activities.

3.4.6.2 Planning of programmes

What children had to say

Overall there was agreement among children that the scheduling of programmes met their needs. However, a small number of children noted that on some occasions there may be more than one choice of after-school programmes running on the same day and that it was difficult to choose between them. They relished the opportunity to be engaged in and to '*try out'* a variety of different activities. Some children were involved in Saturday morning programmes and expressed the wish to change the programme to Saturday afternoon as *'all week we've to get up early'*. In another focus group, children highlighted they would like to extend the duration of programme sessions, with one child stating that *'for music and my piano, I would like to have a full one hour or forty-five minutes* [lesson] *that would be great'*. On the other hand, some children expressed the desire to have more variety in the after-school programmes, for example develop a sports club or extend the variety of musical instrument tuition, develop science and computer clubs[15]. Some after-school programmes were homework clubs, while others had a specific time period for homework support and others did not offer homework support. In the case of the latter, children felt that sometimes it was hard to face doing homework when the after- school programmes had finished.

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15   Each school ran a variety of activities under this scheme. Children here are identifying their desire to extend the variety of activities in their own schools.

What adults had to say

Parents were very appreciative and very aware of the variety of after-school programmes on offer. In one focus group, parents proposed that children who were involved in homework clubs might like to have *'down time'* to socialise with their peers as part of after-school provision, for example, they proposed that children might have the opportunity to get involved in games. Parents were aware that the schools were trying to make after-school programmes available to all children, so for example, first class may have the option of attending for a term and second class the following term. Parents felt it was a pity that the opportunities had to be rotated and there was not always the opportunity for children to be involved in programmes on an on-going basis throughout the year. They also identified the need for *'life skill'* programmes such as cookery, drugs awareness and dealing with bullying.

Parents reported that summer camp provision could be improved if there was a break of at least one week between the end of school term and the commencement of summer camps. They said that they would also like their children to have the opportunity to attend summer camps over longer periods of time.
Adult learners highlighted that programmes need to be scheduled to meet the needs of adults who may be free to attend at different times of the day and evening.

What school-based personnel had to say

Principals, conscious of wanting to offer the best possible range of options to meet children's needs, raised the challenge of providing a well-balanced menu of programme options for children. They noted that it can be a challenge to balance programmes, as children like to get their homework done but also want other types of learning opportunities. Consequently, a programme that allowed homework to be incorporated as part of a programme was seen by some to be important. One school used a timer to allocate the length of time to each homework activity (prescribed by the class teacher) in order to ensure that homework activities are kept in balance within the overall after-school programme. Principals highlighted the on-going challenge of providing homework support while at the same time balancing issues of parental responsibility for homework support. Principals raised the very practical issue of child collection and noted that '*some students were not always collected on time*' and this meant that parents had to be contacted.

In relation to organising adult activities, principals noted that it was difficult to get some parents to stick with a programme; principals related how some parents might on occasions start a programme but would not continue with it. In relation to engaging parents, principals observed that not all parents actively supported their children's

participation albeit they were a very small cohort, and that there was a need to further engage with these parents.

The issue of the need for enhanced communication was raised by some HSCL Co-ordinators. HSCL Co-ordinators' experiences of consultation varied across schools with some feeling more consulted in the process than others. The HSCL Co-ordinators interviewed acknowledged that in many cases there was very good consultation with HSCL Co-ordinators at the start of the scheme and some consultation at staff meetings throughout the scheme. However, some HSCL Co-ordinators noted that they would like to have had more consultation both within the school and between the school and the wider community. They felt that this scheme offered opportunities for consultation and collaboration with the SCP and that while in many cases this work had begun it could be further explored and expanded.

Some SCP staff felt that they were consulted at the start of the initiative and would have liked more consultation during the lifespan of the initiative. They were very conscious, however, of the time constraints that schools were operating under. They said they knew how the monies were being spent for the most part, but would have appreciated the opportunity to be more involved in decision making and to have had the opportunity to share their expertise. SCP staff also said that there might have been more consultation with the wider community, which would have been helped through a longer planning period.
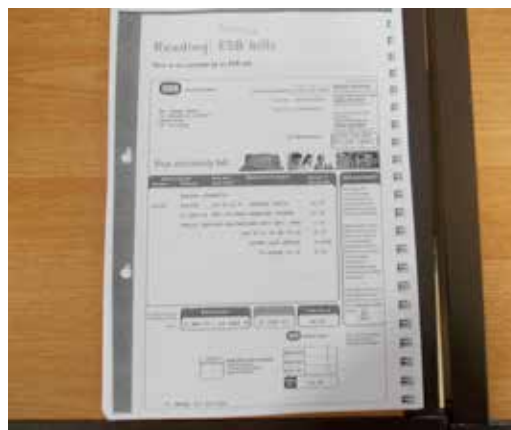
3.4.6.3 Staffing issues

What children had to say

Children noted that on very rare occasions staff might not turn up and the programme was then cancelled. They found this very disappointing. They also noted that there should be a number of staff present in all programmes so that they could get individual attention if required.

What adults had to say

Some parents thought that they would like to volunteer to help out in the after school programmes. Other parents felt that they would be happy if parents volunteered to help with once-off fun activities like a barbeque but they wanted appropriately trained and Garda vetted personnel to work with their children. They felt parent engagement needs to be monitored and supported properly. Parents liked the idea of school personnel with whom the children were familiar running the after-school programmes and acknowledged their expertise and understanding.

What school-based personnel had to say

The challenge of staffing after-school programmes after the scheme terminated was raised, with some schools drawing on volunteers to support their programmes. One school had trained parents through the ASSET[16] programme and they were very aware of the need to keep recruiting and training parents, who often move on when their children leave the local schools.

3.4.6.4 Additional issues

There were a number of additional challenges raised by the focus group participants which we have included below.

What children had to say

Children noted that there could be some negative behaviour in the after-school programmes which they disliked but said it was a rare occurrence and was dealt with by the teacher. They also noted that mixing different age groups did not always work well as younger children can *make a lot of noise* when the older children were trying to concentrate, but this was rare. Children acknowledged the negative impact of behaviour in that it would stop a student from '*showing their talent*'. The solution proposed was to provide opportunities for friendships to be formed so that confidence might grow.

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16   After School Support Educational Training (ASSET) an after school training programme run by the Transforming Education through Dialogue Project (TED) in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

What adults had to say

Participants were aware of the variety of facilities that schools have and in a small number of cases wondered if this scheme could be extended to include use of additional school facilities such as computer rooms and gyms. In one setting, participants noted the need to provide accessible toilet facilities.

What school-based personnel had to say

Not all schools have dedicated Parent's rooms and HSCL Co-ordinators noted there is a need to invest in facilities to ensure all schools have suitable facilities for parental engagement. They believed that in doing so, consideration should be given to the physical location of the parent's room. It should afford easy physical access and allow parents to drop in easily. They were conscious that some parents *'don't want to be coming in to the school because of their experiences in the past. They're fearful of school'*.

Challenges in relation to the OSCAILT forum

Principals highlighted the difficulty of leaving the school to attend meetings and noted that '*the business of running a school means that it can be difficult to get time to attend the meeting if something unforeseen occurs on the morning of a meeting'*. Principals acknowledged that there had been '*a lot of change'*, namely, a big turnover of principals during the lifespan of this scheme and that it can be difficult for new principals coming on board as there is so much information to process.

3.5 Post-funding

After-school activities were in operation in some of the DEIS schools before the Dormant Accounts scheme was established. During the scheme, the documentation shows that there was a substantial increase in the amount and variety of after-school activities offered by schools, as discussed previously. The number of schools offering activities increased also from eighteen before the implementation of the scheme to twenty-two in year one.

In November 2012, the OSCAILT network tracked the level of after school activities in participating schools. We found that since the scheme finished in June 2012, the capacity of schools to offer after-school activities has varied across settings. Reports show that many schools continue to extend the use of their facilities post funding. Based on returns made by the schools a total of one hundred and twenty-two activities were taking place in schools post funding, thirty-two of these were in situ prior to this Scheme, ninety were not in situ prior to the implementation of this scheme and were in situ after the funding period

4.1 Introduction

This report set out to describe the background and outcomes of the Dormant Accounts funded scheme designed to 'Maximise Community Use of Premises and Facilities'. The scheme came about as a Department of Education and Skills (DES) response to recommendations in the Fitzgerald report, which, due to the unique conditions profiled in the report, recommended that the DES 'should be requested to identify how local schools can be supported, not only in developing their facilities, but also in providing a comprehensive range of services to pupils both during and outside school hours' (Fitzgerald, 2007:p11).

The Dormant Accounts Scheme was administered by the DES. The scheme, subject to conditions, was available to the sixteen primary and six post primary DEIS schools in Limerick City. All schools opted to participate in the scheme. The participating schools, the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, in Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and the DES formed a network, namely OSCAILT, to support schools for the duration of the scheme. OSCAILT decided that it was important to capture the learning from this scheme and thus undertook to write this report. An OSCAILT sub group was formed comprising representation from the principals, TED project and the DES.

This section revisits the aims and objectives of this scheme and summarises the strengths and challenges encountered by the schools in implementing this scheme. Finally, with reference to the current context, this report proposes a number of recommendations arising out of the findings of this report.

4.2 Aims and Objectives of the Report

The specific aims and objectives of this report are:
- To describe the context in which this initiative evolved.
- To describe the design and development of this initiative with specific reference to the capital and operational elements.
- To chart the outcomes of this initiative for programme participants, adults and children, the school and the community.
- To provide an insight into the strengths and challenges of delivering this initiative.
- To share the findings in relation to the OSCAILT network.
- To provide recommendations for future developments.

4.3 Summary of Findings

This section summarises the outcomes, emphasising the strengths and challenges of the scheme in terms of both the capital and programmatic elements. It does so by drawing on the findings from Chapter 3 based on the documentation submitted to the DES by participating schools during the lifespan of the scheme and on the findings from the focus groups.

4.3.1 Strengths of the scheme

The strengths of this scheme were found to be multifaceted. The findings indicate that this scheme had a major positive impact on the quality of life and learning for children, parents and adult learners, positively influenced school culture and built community pride. It also found that the school was a suitable venue for the development of programmes for adults and children. Principals had the expertise, commitment and contacts necessary to implement comprehensive programmes and the schools were perceived as safe accessible locations by children and adults. There was immense goodwill, enthusiasm and positive energy from the principals during the lifetime of the scheme. An additional strength, though unanticipated at the outset, was the successful formation and development of the OSCAILT network which proved to be an effective mechanism to support schools and to maximise outcomes from this scheme. OSCAILT nurtured a strong partnership between the participating schools, DES and TED project in MIC. Many of the initial challenges of sourcing tutors, planning suitable activities and nurturing engagement were addressed through this forum.

The strengths of this scheme are conceptualised in terms of the positive impact it had on the school, the children, the adults and the wider community.

Impact of the capital grant

A maximum of €25,000 was available to each school under this aspect of the scheme. Reports submitted to the DES by the schools and the findings of the focus groups were unanimous in their recognition of the positive impact of the capital grant. Not only did this grant significantly contribute to the success of the scheme by enabling schools to upgrade their facilities and purchase equipment to facilitate the roll out of programmes, but it also contributed to the long term sustainability for schools. The capital grant was spent on refurbishments, improved security, improvements in sports facilities, improved access, procurement of musical instruments, sports equipment and IT equipment, all of which made a significant contribution to enabling the schools to maximise the use of their facilities for the community.

Grants for operating costs

A maximum of €52,000 was available to each participating school to cover overheads and operating costs during the lifetime of the scheme. The impact of the operational grant is discussed under impact on the school, impact on children, impact on adult learners and impact on the wider community.

Impact on the school

Fundamentally, this scheme built on pre-existing good practice by the Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) and extended the role of the school to act as a safe, nurturing, accessible, familiar, and comfortable learning centre for the community, both inside and outside of traditional school opening hours. Enormous good will was generated across all stakeholders involved. This scheme became embedded into the culture of the schools and raised aspirations.

Specifically this report found that the scheme:

- Enhanced the image of the school in the community.
- Built relationships between the school and the extended community.
- Fostered and developed links between schools and outside agencies.
- Significantly extended the use of school opening hours.
- Extended the use of the school to new communities of learners.
- Enhanced facilities.
- Encouraged diverse learners, eg Media Lab and climbing wall.
- Enjoyed the upgraded facilities and equipment during schools hours and outside of school hours.

- Generated a positive school atmosphere.
- Nurtured a positive happy environment in Homework club.
- Improved staff/pupil relationships.
- Raised expectations (some schools managed to sustain programmes post funding).

Impact on children

This scheme was found to have a significant positive impact on the quality of life and learning for the children who engaged in programmes. The findings, summarised below, are informed by reports from principals and by the voices of children, parents, adult learners and school-based personnel captured during the focus groups.

Specifically this report found that the scheme:

- Offered opportunities to learn and socialise in a safe nurturing environment.
- Enhanced children's quality of life.
- Developed creative and artistic skills.
- Promoted personal development, communication and social skills.
- Enabled skill development.
- Provided nutrition.
- Promoted a sense of safety and belonging.
- Enhanced academic outcomes.
- Increased motivation to attend school.
- Promoted the development of positive relationships between peers and between children and adults.
- Raised aspirations.
- Nurtured talents.
- Provided inclusive opportunities as programmes were accessible and affordable.
- Provide safe spaces and acted as a preventative mechanism.
- Increased confidence.
- Nurtured talents.
- Provided a safe environment to learn and socialise.
- Provided opportunities for accreditation to children and adults.
- Provided access to programmes children would otherwise not be in a position to access.
- Had a positive impact on behaviour.
- Nurtured an interest in lifelong learning.
- Increased children's interest in specific subjects such as Science and Music.

- Improved discipline and time keeping through participation in the Breakfast club.

Impact on adults

This scheme had a very positive impact on adults who participated in programmes. Outcomes for adult learners were identified by adult learners who participated in focus groups and by education personnel through the focus groups.

Specifically this report found that the scheme:

- Offered opportunities for social interaction and engagement.
- Built personal skills.
- Engendered a sense of pride and belonging in their schools and communities.
- Promoted academic achievement.
- Offered opportunities for accreditation.
- Recognised adult learners' prior learning and life experiences and offered opportunities for self-paced learning.

Additionally, this report listened to the voices of parents whose children attended programmes and found that parents experienced a sense of pride and enhanced relationships with schools as a result of this scheme.

Impact on the Community

This scheme had a positive impact on the communities in which the participating schools are located and beyond, since in some instances participants came from communities outside the immediate environment of the school. Reports and focus groups recognised the impact of the scheme on the community.

Specifically this report found that the scheme:
- Engaged parents and community members in a wide variety of learning and leisure activities.
- Extended school facilities and made them available to the school community and the wider community.
- Offered opportunities for celebration.
- Supported adults to access accreditation.
- Provided opportunities for social integration.
- Fostered the development of a sense of pride.
- Offered opportunities for positive PR for communities.

OSCAILT

The OSCAILT network comprised the participating schools, the TED project in MIC and the DES and was developed to provide support to schools for the duration of this scheme. OSCAILT was facilitated by TED. The network was reviewed by survey at the end of year 1 and year 2 and by interview as part of the focus groups attended by Principals.

Specifically this report found that OSCAILT:

- Facilitated development of links between schools, the DES and TED.
- Built trust and solidarity among members.
- Was well run and very well attended.
- Nurtured a spirit of collegiality.
- Embraced a pastoral element.
- Provided an effective mechanism for sharing of information and good practice.

4.3.2 Challenges of this initiative

There was genuine appreciation of the benefits of this initiative from all participants but they also identified a number of challenges. Challenges relate to the implementation of the scheme and to sustainability post funding.

- A notable increase in administration for principals, including recruitment, reporting, accounting and networking.
- The conclusion of this initiative after its two year life span meant that the funding ceased and this constituted a very significant challenge for schools.
- The ongoing cost to repair and/or replace equipment for the various activities.
- In a small number of instances the timetabling and scheduling of activities was a challenge.
- In a very small number of instances children reported that there was negative behaviour during the afterschool activities.
- On rare occasions, classes were cancelled.
- Some activities were not well-attended.
- There was a lack of enthusiasm for some activities.
- At times, there was difficulty finding suitably qualified personnel and volunteers.
- The lack of a dedicated parents' room in some schools limited activity provision.
- Consultation between the school, HSCL co-ordinators and SCP personnel was not always at its optimum.

4.3 Recommendations

At the cessation of Dormant Accounts funding there is a unique opportunity to build on achievements to date and maximise the initial investment. These achievements are substantial as the scheme brought tangible benefits to the schools, the children, adult learners and the community. It built on existing initiatives and brought added value, and established the school as a community learning centre. It offered opportunities for accreditation, socialisation and the promotion of a positive image for communities.

This Scheme offered an effective mechanism to support learning and to address equity of outcomes across the social divide. By extending the remit of the school beyond traditional school hours, and by offering opportunities for learning and social enrichment, the school has the potential to make a substantial difference in the lives of children, young people and adult learners.

The following, therefore, are the recommendations of OSCAILT:

- OSCAILT recommends the development of national policy to support strategic development of after-school services for children.
- The experience of the scheme should be considered as part of the planned review of the SCP by the DCYA.
- The existing opportunities to deliver after-school programmes in schools through the SCP, the use of DEIS funding, the work of volunteers, the Home School Community Liaison scheme and the resources and programmes available through the local Vocational Educational Committees should be further developed and extended.
- The OSCAILT forum as a model of good practice to nurture collaboration and support across key players in the education sector should be noted as part of the evaluation of DEIS and should continue to operate as a support to Limerick DEIS school principals and teachers.
- Opportunities for greater collaboration between principals, HSCL Co-ordinators, SCP personnel in organising, administering and facilitating after-school activities should be explored.

4.4 Conclusion.

The Dormant Account Funded scheme to 'Maximise Community use of Premises and Facilities' was a success story within the City of Limerick. It changed the perspectives and perceptions of the use of schools within the community. The potential of the school to provide an effective venue for learning and development beyond traditional school hours was realised through this scheme. Schools were now better equipped to open to the community and provide a positive focal point for children and adults in the local area. For children and adults, it positively enhanced their attitudes towards school, leading to a positive outlook and insight into education. This scheme is an example of good practice, and represents an effective and practical response to the needs of learners living in communities served by DEIS schools in Limerick City.

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Report of Dormant Accounts funded scheme to enable DEIS Schools in Limerick City to Maximise Community Use of Premises and Facilities

School	Period open	Days Open	Activities held in the schools under Dormant Account Scheme
1	Daytime & after school	Mon	Senior Citizens, After-school activities club, Homework club
		Tue	Womens Group, After-school activities club & Music Lessons, Homework club, Gymnastics
		Wed	After-school activities club, disability group, Target support club, FETAC Courses, Speech & Drama, Homework Club
		Thu	Womens Group, After-school activities club, Speech & Drama, Homework club
2	Evenings & nights	Mon	Rugby, Soccer
		Tue	Soccer, Basketball, Palates & Yoga
		Wed	Soccer, Basketball & Yoga
		Thurs	Variety of Sports
		Fri	Rugby, Soccer
3	After school &	Mon	Keyboard Lessons
	2 nights	Tue	Keyboard Lessons, Silk Painting
		Wed	Computer Classes, Parents classes
		Variety	Homework club, Drama, Pottery & Sports, Dads & Lads
		1 night	45 Card Drive
4	After school	Mon	Sports Club, After-school Play Club
		Tue	Drama/Art Club, After-school Play Club
		Wed	Spanish Club, After-school Play Club
		Thu	Computer Club, After-school Play Club
		Fri	Athletics Club, After-school Play Club
	Easter	Mon - Fri	Camp
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
5	Day time, after	Mon	Sport, Club na Gaeilge
	school & evenings	Tue	Irish Dancing, Music Tuition, Club na Gaeilge
		Wed	Sport, Music Tuition, Club na Gaeilge
		Thu	Irish Traditional Music Classes, Music Tuition, Club na Gaeilge, Parent/Child baking
		Fri	Club na Gaeilge
	Sat 11am-1pm	Sat	Stage School
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
6	After school	Mon	Homework Club, Music
		Tue	Homework Club, Music, Computer Club, Irish Dancing
		Wed	Homework Club, Club Ghaelach, Science Club
		Thur	Homework Club, Music

7	After school & 1	Mon	Golf Classes, Computer Classes, Pilate Classes
	evening & 1 night	Tue	Drama, Computer Classes, Cookery Classes
		Wed	Keyboard Lessons, Computer Classes, Tin Whistle
		Thur	Drama, Computer Classes, Mini games
		Fri	Computer Classes, Basketball
		Variety	Art & Craft, Fun fit for Adults
8	Daytime, after	Mon	Dance Classes, Adult Ed Classes, After-school Club, Computer Classes, Homework Club
	school & evenings & Nights	Tue	Dance Classes, Adult Ed Classes, Tai Chi, Traditional Irish music classes, After-school Club, Homework Club
		Wed	Adult Ed Classes, Dance Classes, Art Classes, After-school Club, Computer Classes, Homework Club
		Thur	Dance Classes, After-school Club, Homework Club, Adult Education Classes
		Fri	Fun Day Club, Dance Classes, Adult Education Classes, After-school Club
		Sat	Dance Classes
		Variety	Social Events
9	After school	Mon	Homework Club, Irish Dancing, Cookery, Tin Whistle, Hand Ball, Hip hop dancing
		Tue	Soccer/Karate, Homework Club, Cookery, Tin Whistle, Crafts, Knitting
		Wed	Activities Club, Homework Club, Conditioning Classes, Knitting, Tin Whistle, Music
		Thur	Conditioning Classes, Activities Club, Homework Club, Cookery, Hand Ball
10	Before, during	Mon	After-school Polish Club, Am Club IT, Computer club
	& after school	Tue	Am Club IT, After-school Polish Club, Computer club, Drama
	plus 1 night	Wed	After-school Polish Club, Am Club IT, Computer club
		Thur	Adult Computer Course, Am Club IT, After-school Polish Club, Computer club
		Fri	After School Polish Club, Am Club IT, Computer club
		Variety	Guitar
11	After school,	Mon	Music Academy, Brass & Reed Band, Night Study, Cookery Demonstration
	evenings & nights	Tue	Adult Education, Night Study, Music Academy
		Wed	Drama/Dance, Music Academy, Night Study, Ambition School of Dance, Unislim
		Thur	Choir, Night Study, Music Academy, Ambition School of Dance
		Fri	Music Academy, Night Study, Ambition School of Dance
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
12	Daytime, after	Sun	Rugby matches and training
	school	Mon	Homework Club, ICT Classes
		Tue	FAI FAS Soccerskills, Homework Club
		Wed	Cookery, Homework Club, FAI FAS Soccerskills, Woodwork classes
		Thur	Homework Club, FAI FAS Soccer skills
		Fri	FAI FAS Soccer skills

13	One night	Mon	Pottery or knitting
14	Daytime, after	Mon	Junior Cert Maths for adults, Homework Club, Pipe Band, Parent Facilitation Training
	school & nights	Tue	Fly Tying, Junior Cert English for adults, Homework Club, Student Council
		Wed	Homework Club, ESOL Courses, Parent Facilitation Training
		Thur	Pipe Band, Homework Club
		Fri	Parent Facilitation Training
15	After school &	Mon	Homework Club
	evenings	Tue	Keep fit/Line Dancing, Homework Club, After- school Music
		Wed	Homework Club
		Thur	Sports Club, GAA skills, Irish Dancing, Boat build
16	Before & after	Mon	Breakfast club, Homework Club, Digital Media, Art, Guitar Lessons, Make & Do
	school	Tue	Breakfast club, Camogie, Homework Club, Art, Christmas Flower arranging, Digital Media, Basketball
		Wed	Breakfast club, Cookery, Homework Club, Violin, Dancing, Digital Media
		Thur	Breakfast club, Homework Club, Badminton, Speech & Drama
		Fri	Breakfast club
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
17	After school	Mon	Drama, Copper Embossing, Rounders
		Tue	Choir, Irish & Set Dancing, Boys Club, Art & Craft Club
		Wed	Art & Craft Club, Science & Engineering After-school Club, Board Games
		Thur	Irish & Set Dancing, Drama, Drawing, Jewellery Making, Copper Embossing, Cookery, Music & Tin whistle
18	After school	Mon	After-school Club, Basketball Club
		Tue	After-school Club, Recorder, Tuesday Club, Cookery
		Wed	After-school Club, Recorder, Active Mothers, Elf Couture
		Thur	After-school Club
		Sat	Web Weavers
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
19	After school	Tue	After-school Computer Club
		Thur	After-school Social Club, After School Computer Club
		Fri	After-school Social Club
	Summer	Mon - Fri	Camp
20	Daytime & after	Mon	Homework Club, Sports academy, Computer Lessons, Self-Defence Classes
	school	Tue	Computer Lessons, Homework Club, Sports academy
		Wed	Homework Club, Tin Whistle, Cookery, Guitar Lessons
		Thur	Homework Club
		Fri	Tin Whistle
21	Daytime	Mon - Fri	Climbing Activity
22	After school	Mon - Thur	Music

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