



Addressing the Participation, Attendance and Retention of Children in Education

A Review of Best Practice

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SQW



An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige
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Executive Summary

1. The issues faced by Ireland, in terms of promoting better school attendance, participation and retention, are not unique. The European Union (EU) has recognised the social and financial costs of early school leaving, for instance,¹ and has set a target for every member state to reduce the current rate of 'drop-out' by 10% by 2020.² Ireland plans to reduce early school leaving to 8% by 2020, the aim of which will be supported through the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). Since 2011, the functions of the NEWB transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), which provides NEWB with an opportunity to build linkages between the new Department and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), particularly in the implementation of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan. The DCYA brings together a range of agencies responsible for the delivery of services to children in areas such as early childhood care, education and participation, youth justice, child welfare and protection and facilitates closer liaisons with other departments including the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Justice and Equality.
2. The NEWB was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. The NEWB's statutory role is to ensure that all children, whatever their needs, home circumstances or cultural backgrounds, receive a certain minimum education. Its focus is on providing the policy environment in which schools, boards of management and families will be able to implement strategies and practices that promote school attendance and participation. For NEWB, therefore, it is essential that the policies it develops, the programmes it supports and the guidelines it issues are firmly grounded in empirical evidence of what works, in which communities and with which children and families, and in what circumstances.

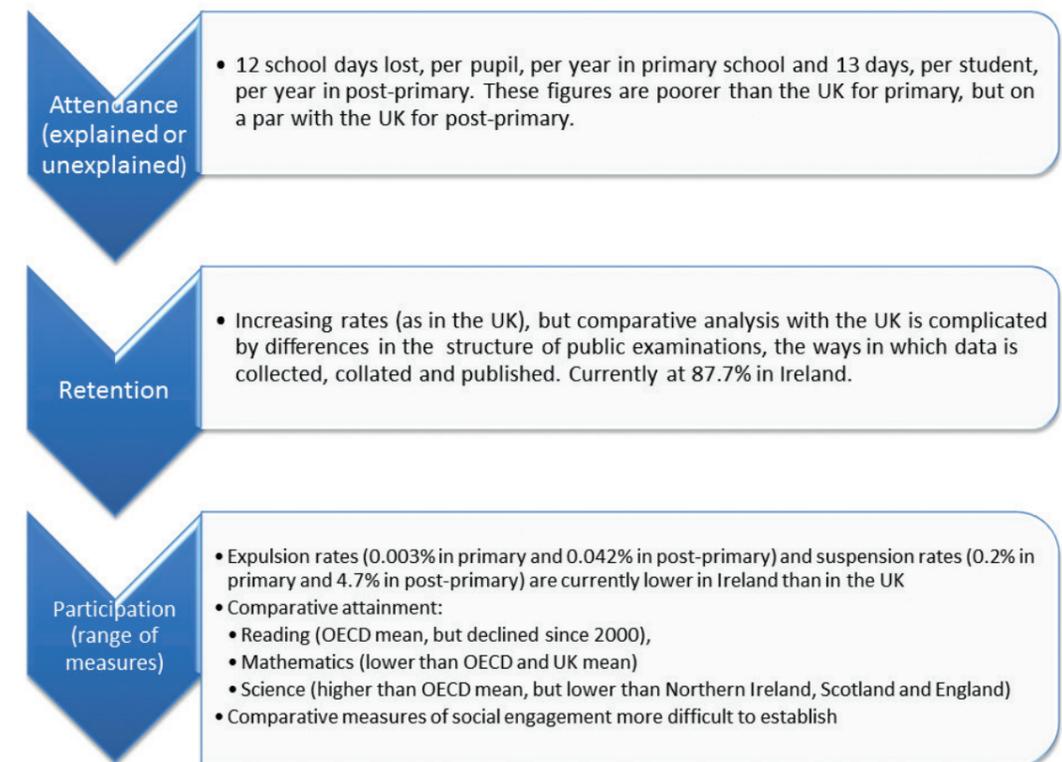
The issue

3. The NEWB is committed to enhancing attendance, increasing engagement and participation and improving retention in both primary and post-primary schools in Ireland, with the delivery of quality educational and welfare services through all the services of the Board including the Educational Welfare Service, the Home/School/Community/Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. Comparatively speaking, attendance rates in primary schools in Ireland are lower than in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, though they are more on a par for post-primary education. Retention rates appear higher and expulsion rates appear lower than in the UK, though international data suggest that improvements could still be made in these and in comparative attainment and social engagement.

1. In its report, *Written Out, Written Off*, published in 2009, the children's charity Barnardos estimated the amount paid to unemployed early school leavers in Jobseekers Allowance as €19m per week in Ireland. <http://www.barnardos.ie/media-centre/news/latest-news/cuts-in-education-will-cost-vulnerable-children-their-futures-barnardos.html>

2. The mean rate of early school leaving in Europe in 2009 was 14.4%. In Ireland, mean figures for that year (according to Eurostat survey data) were 11% overall (though higher for males at 14% than for females at 8%) http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/stat_retention_rates_second_level_1991_2004.pdf?language=EN Early school leavers, as defined by the Eurostat survey are 'persons aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of education attained is lower secondary or below and who have not received education (either formal or non-formal) in the four weeks prior to the survey'.

Figure 1: Comparative outcomes (attendance 2010, retention 2009 and participation 2009/2010)



Source: SQW

The study aims

4. This literature review, commissioned by NEWB and carried out by SQW (drawing on the search skills of the Centre for Reviews at the National Foundation for Educational Research – NFER) sought to inform the development of such policies. The aim was to:
 - review and synthesise the *best available international evidence and literature* relating to interventions and processes to address the participation, attendance and retention of children in education
 - provide an understanding of the *policy and legislative frameworks* from which the interventions and processes derived.
5. In setting out the parameters of the study, NEWB was particularly interested in finding out more about:
 - effective, promising and ineffective interventions and processes in relation to the participation, attendance and retention of children in formal education
 - the policies and/or supporting legislative frameworks in other countries or jurisdictions that enable such interventions
 - the scale and/or size of the improvement in proven effective interventions and processes in formal education
 - the relative impact of the interventions and processes on outcomes for specific sub-groups considered at risk of poor participation, poor school attendance or who are at risk of early school leaving

- the costs and benefits of effective or promising interventions and processes
- the most effective time to make an intervention in relation to the different levels of prevention and early intervention programmes, early intervention initiatives and intensive interventions with individual children
- the combination(s) of interventions that yield the best outcomes for the child.

The evidence base

6. We adopted a systematic approach to searching, screening and selecting documents for this review, refining an initial long list of some 850 documents to a final list of **39 documents** that provided enough evidence to contribute to at least one aspect of the review. The studies we identified included a number of previous literature reviews, including a meta-analysis of impact evaluations conducted between 1994 and 2004 (Railsback, 2004) and a more recent US systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions to increase student attendance between 1990 and 2009 (Maynard, 2010). While these reviews identified some experimental research (whether randomised control trials, quasi-experimental designs or single group pre-post studies), they concluded that little rigorous, systematic and objective research on participation in education was available.
7. Indeed, most of the research we identified in Europe and elsewhere tended to adopt mixed method approaches, with a clear dominance of qualitative research designs such as case studies and interviews. While many of these were well-conducted and internally robust, there was a lack of common conceptualisation of attendance, participation and retention; the assumptions behind the interventions were not always clear (why should they work?) and the interventions that were being evaluated were not always implemented with fidelity. Combined with the lack of experimental impact studies, this means that it is not possible to provide a clear indication of the scale and/or size of the improvement in proven effective interventions and processes in formal education, as requested in one of the research questions for the study.
8. The decision to designate an intervention, or, more accurately, a combination of interventions, as effective, therefore, has been made as the result of an informed assessment of their *likely* impact based on the fact that they had been identified as successful strategies:
 - in previous international literature reviews
 - in high-level practice and policy reviews, or
 - through rigorous research from more than one source and using more than one form of analysis.
9. Some of those interventions currently designated as ‘promising practice’ may, in the long term, be equally effective. At this stage, however, there is insufficient research evidence to enable us to put them in that category. That said, there was some clear commonality in the interventions that were found to be either effective or promising, with an emphasis on:
 - early and swift identification of risk or need (and the implications that this has for ensuring the availability of monitoring data)
 - appropriate targeting of interventions (and the implications that this has for diagnosis of need and the sharing of information and data across a range of agencies)
 - ensuring that the child (and, where necessary the family) is at the centre of the interventions (which might need to be multiple rather than singular in order to meet identified needs)

- ongoing support for those who are targeted, whether in school or out of school (and the implications that this has for the development and embedding of strategies that enable agencies to work together effectively)
- ensuring that provision is made to enable young people to stay on track (and the implications that this has both for flexibility within – or personalisation of – the curriculum, and for tracking of individuals).

Summary of main findings

10. The main findings from the study point to the fact that NEWB can **best address issues related to poor attendance, poor participation or poor retention through working with a range of other agencies focused on the child and the family**. The review found that **no strategy worked** unilaterally in addressing the participation, attendance and retention of children in education. Instead, there is a need for combination of strategies, with the child (or the whole family) at the centre. In particular, the review highlighted:
 - the importance of identifying the needs of the individual child
 - the need to put in place the appropriate strategies and combination of strategies that will address the needs that have been identified
 - the importance of intervening early, offering personalised support and engagement with families and their children, both at transition points and when children are at risk of disengaging from education
 - the need to develop supportive and positive school environments
 - the importance of community interventions that maintain connectedness with the school, the student, the family and the community, addressing both personal (including parent-child conflicts) and practical issues (such as access to health and mental health care) around disengagement
 - the efficacy of an intensive case management approach, working with families and children to address emerging problems of poor attendance or behaviour.
11. The implications of these findings are that there is a need to:
 - obtain **reliable evidence** on pupil attendance, participation and retention and make better use of the data already gathered
 - develop a range of strategies to address the **different needs** so identified, adopting a multi-agency approach to meeting individual needs
 - establish effective **whole-school policies** to provide an overarching support framework within which teachers, pupils, parents and external agencies can work efficiently.
12. In particular there is a need for NEWB to work closely **in liaison** with policy teams at the DCYA and other relevant departments, and to participate, where appropriate, in Children’s Services Committees, for example, in order to promote and support inter-agency working and explore the ways in which inter-agency work with schools can be best supported and integrated.

Implications for NEWB

- 13.** The NEWB's current approach of strengthening prevention, promoting early intervention and teamwork with individual children and developing strong inter-agency support is largely affirmed in the review, which highlights the need to retain a strong focus on school attendance, in the light of the strong association between attendance, participation and retention. It highlights the need for a 'whole child' approach and recognises the significance of strong pupil-teacher relationships in schools. The recent integration of the Home-School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) within NEWB offers the possibility, in conjunction with the existing Education Welfare Service, for providing a continuum of intervention from early years, involving children and their families. As such, therefore, the findings indicate the potential for NEWB to influence policy and practice at all levels – at national level, at school level, and in the wider community.

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1: Study purpose and context

Study purpose and context

- 1.1.** The issues faced by Ireland, in terms of promoting better school attendance and retention, are not unique. The European Union (EU) has recognised the social and financial costs of early school leaving, for instance,³ and has set a target for every member state to reduce the current rate of ‘drop-out’ by 10% by 2020.⁴ While this target is regarded as theoretically achievable, the lack of comprehensive and evidence-based policies in Europe to support it is seen as one of the biggest challenges to a successful outcome (Pokorny, 2010). The EU has therefore adopted a three-fold strategy to promoting it, focusing on **prevention** (including early child education and care), **intervention** (emphasising student-focused measures with schools as learning communities and the use of non-curricular, non-academic activities) and **compensation** (with second-chance strategies and the chance to re-enter mainstream education).
- 1.2.** The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) work plan links closely into all three elements of this European approach. In addition to its core work in promoting school attendance and implementing the ‘Every Child Counts’ strategy, NEWB, in 2009, acquired responsibility for two other programmes and services – the Home-School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP).⁵ Combining the various services is consistent with the previous government’s action plan for educational inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), which envisaged a closer amalgamation of the Department of Education and Skill’s services. Since 2011, the functions of the NEWB transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), which provides NEWB with an opportunity to build linkages between the new Department and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), particularly in the implementation of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan. The DCYA brings together a range of agencies responsible for the delivery of services to children in areas such as early childhood care, education and participation, youth justice, child welfare and protection and facilitates closer liaisons with other departments including the DES, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Justice and Equality.
- 1.3.** The NEWB was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. The NEWB’s statutory role is to ensure that all children, whatever their needs, home circumstances or cultural backgrounds, receive a certain minimum education. Its focus is on providing the policy environment in which schools, boards of management and families will be able to implement strategies and practices that promote school attendance and participation. For NEWB, therefore, it is essential that the policies it develops, the programmes it supports and the guidelines it issues are firmly grounded in empirical evidence of what works, in which communities and with which children and families, and in what circumstances. Its focus is on providing the policy environment in which schools, boards of management and families will be able to implement strategies and practices that promote school attendance and participation.

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5. Previously, it also included the work of the Visiting Teachers’ Service for Travellers (now disbanded).

Study aims

- 1.4.** This study was designed to inform the development of such policies. It sought to:
- review and synthesise the *best available international evidence and literature* relating to interventions and processes to address the participation, attendance and retention of children in education
 - provide an understanding of the *policy and legislative frameworks* from which the interventions and processes derived.
- 1.5.** In setting out the parameters of the study, NEWB was particularly interested in finding out more about:
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 - the costs and benefits of effective or promising interventions and processes
 - the most effective time to make an intervention in relation to the different levels of prevention and early intervention programmes, early intervention initiatives and intensive interventions with individual children
 - the combination(s) of interventions that yield the best outcomes for the child.

Study challenges

- 1.6.** The seven questions outlined by NEWB raised a number of challenges for the review. Many of these challenges related to the quality of evidence and the types of studies that have been conducted in the past. Few studies of interventions in this area, for example, used an experimental or quasi-experimental approach to test the impact of the activities under scrutiny and so assessing the scale and/or size of the improvement, or the costs and benefits of effective interventions, was not straightforward.⁶ Equally, interventions under scrutiny were not always implemented with fidelity. While some research studies made that clear (e.g., Hallam *et al.*, 2006, in a review of the primary behaviour and support pilot in England), the extent to which one could confidently assess the potential effectiveness of an intervention, or the stage at which it should be implemented (and with whom), was not always apparent from the published research.
- 1.7.** Other challenges related to the different ways in which countries conceptualised young people’s participation in education and the extent to which they saw failure to attend school as a failure of the child (and/or their family) to conform or a failure of the education system to provide the schooling that a young person needs. Research studies were often context specific, but rarely set out their underlying assumptions, whether about the focus of policy or the meaning of engagement. Similarly,

6. A number of reviews, however, including Lehr (2004), Railsback (2004) and Maynard *et al.* (2009) identified earlier such studies, mainly in the US, and we include their conclusions in this review. Not all of the studies they identified could be included in a meta-analysis, partly because of the heterogeneity of interventions and of the approaches to experimental design used.

measures of school engagement (whether behavioural, emotional or cognitive) were not always clearly defined or conceptualised, a point raised by Fredricks *et al.* (2004) in a US-based review. This lack of conceptualisation means that behavioural disengagement (lack of participation in school, lack of work in school and poor conduct) is often to the fore in research, with few studies exploring the relationship between emotional and cognitive disengagement and early school leaving. Establishing effective support within an education system requires an understanding of each of these elements and few studies explored all of these dimensions.

Study strategy

1.8. Recognising the range of challenges that the review presented, therefore, we sought to:

- adopt a systematic, comprehensive review process that enabled us to make evidence-based judgements about the quality of the research and the extent to which it could address the research questions raised by the NEWB
- be clear about the definitions of participation, attendance and retention we were exploring. We focused on those set out by the NEWB, which are:
 - **Participation**, which includes both academic and social participation in school life, and which incorporates the concept of engagement
 - **Attendance** to mean school attendance, with an absence rate of more than 20 days in a school year regarded as poor
 - **Retention**, to reflect early school leavers (including those who do not engage in any education, training or employment opportunities), those who fail to complete formal qualifications, those who fail to transfer into formal education settings at an appropriate age or those who do not make the transfer between primary and post-primary.
- establish clear study parameters and search terms to ensure that evidence was broad-based, covering interventions that may take place outside the field of education alone, or which may include a multi-agency or integrated approach
- develop an understanding of the policies and legislative frameworks that underpinned the attendance practice and interventions we identified, by exploring information on Eurybase⁷ and by sending a question around the Eurydice network of European Member States.⁸

1.9. A summary of the search process is provided below, while full details on the search strategy and methods that were used, along with keyword searches and an annotated bibliography, can be found in Annexes A, B and C. The questions asked of the European Member States and their responses are summarised in Annex D.

The scope of the review

1.10. In undertaking this review, we had, of necessity, to impose clear parameters on the literature and the concepts we could explore within the resources available. Some of these were simply related to the

time-frame (largely between 2004 and 2011)⁹ and the language of publication (English).¹⁰ Others, however, were related to scope, and it is important to be clear about what the review does and does not do, particularly given NEWB's remit. It does not:

- Seek to offer a definitive analysis of all of the factors surrounding lack of participation in school – ameliorating many of the contributory factors to poor attendance (such as poverty, socio-economic disadvantage, mental and physical health issues) are largely out with the scope of the actions that NEWB can implement
- Explore the extensive body of literature on teaching and learning preferences and strategies and their relationship with young people's engagement in the classroom – while the study identifies curriculum approaches that have proved to be (or appear to be) effective, it does not seek to provide detailed insight into classroom organisation or pedagogical approaches; again, these are not central to NEWB's remit
- Seek to explore in detail all of the factors that promote ongoing student participation, partly because research to date has focused largely on how to reduce or turn around disengagement.

1.11. The study, therefore, focuses on providing insights into legislative, school-based and multi-agency-based practices that appear to contribute to participation, attendance and retention. It focuses mainly on those interventions that appear to encourage participation amongst those young people who have disengaged or who are in danger of disengaging and primarily on effective interventions that NEWB could support or propose to other departments or agencies within the Irish Government.

1.12. Finally, while the study adopted a systematic approach to identifying and screening the research literature and carried out a critical review of the shortlisted material, this was not a full systematic review. Specifically, while we have followed a detailed protocol for the search strategy, exploring a very wide range of sources of evidence with clear acceptance/rejection criteria, the requirements of the study meant that we could not prioritise experimental designs (thus the reviewed research was of variable quality and comprehensiveness). The resources available to the study meant that the appraisal process could not follow some of the common practices in systematic reviewing (such as involving two reviewers in the critique of each research paper). The lack of randomised control trials in the research dataset (and the predominance of qualitative evidence) meant that it was not possible to use statistical meta-analysis to establish the impact of interventions (thus enabling them to be judged 'effective', 'promising' or 'ineffective'). Instead, therefore, we have adopted a narrative form of synthesis, identifying common themes across the various pieces of research and linking them, where possible, to an overarching framework (see Figure 3-1).

Understanding the issues

1.13. There is a significant body of literature on the factors associated with poor engagement relating to demography (with boys thought to be more at risk than girls), structural factors (including transition and curriculum elements) and pedagogy (particularly around the teaching and learning strategies used in the classroom). Previous research has also identified the role played by pupil motivation, resilience and support mechanisms. A detailed exploration of these contributory factors' elements was outside the remit of this study, but, in identifying effective strategies to re-engage young people, it has been essential to consider:

9. The initial time frame extended back to 1995, but we found that much of the research published prior to 2004 had already been picked up in a series of literature reviews. This study, however, also contains some older documents that were either seminal or provided information not available from the literature reviews or the post 2004 research.

10. This did not preclude research from non-English-speaking countries, as the language of publication for much of the research in this field is English. The budget available to this study would not have covered translation costs.

7. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurybase_en.php

8. www.nfer.ac.uk/eurydice and http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

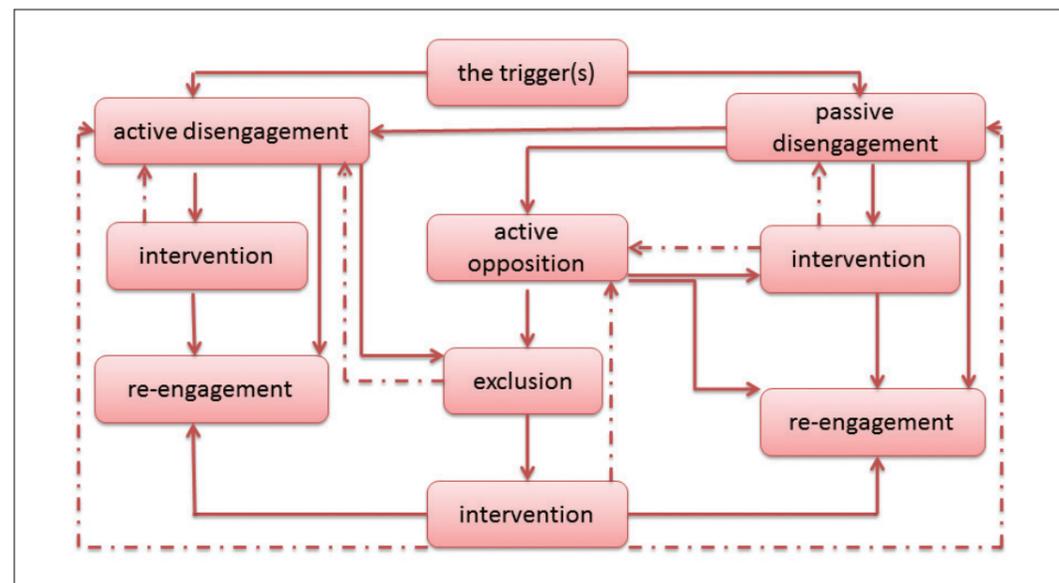
- why some may be at risk of poor participation, poor school attendance or early school leaving
- for whom the strategies will be most effective.

1.14. There is a danger that, in defining policy, the symptoms of disengagement or lack of participation (demonstrated as poor attendance or early school leaving/drop-out) can be conflated with the causes (which may vary from bullying, to boredom with the curriculum, to lack of parental support or to becoming a carer). Interventions that are then designed to insist on attendance (perhaps through parental prosecution) rather than to address the problem are in danger of being ineffective, since they do not remove the barrier to attendance that exists for the child.

1.15. This means, therefore, that there is a need to understand the processes that lead to poor attendance, drop-out or early school leaving. Smith *et al.* (2006), in a study of what motivated young people, differentiated between disaffection (young people no longer seeing the purpose of school) and disengagement (young people losing connection with the learning process). Interventions designed to address disaffection and to enable young people to see the relevance of learning in their lives may still not work for young people who have disengaged because of problems faced in the school. Similarly strategies to reduce bullying or to improve resilience (and so help young people engage with school) will not work for those who believe they can earn a living without any specific qualifications.

1.16. In a study of disengagement and re-engagement in learning for young people aged 13 and 14 (a time identified by Bhabra *et al.*, 2006, as the most risky, *'prior to which interventions are most needed'*), Morris and Pullen (2007) modelled potential relationships between disengagement, re-engagement and exclusion, in order to differentiate between those young people who actively disengage or drop out from learning (for whom active intervention to enable re-engagement may be necessary) and those who are physically present, but have disengaged passively from the learning process (Chaplain's 'strategic withdrawal', for example).¹¹

Figure 1-1: Potential relationships between disengagement, re-engagement and exclusion (dotted lines indicate failure of the intervention)



Source: Morris and Pullen, 2007

11. Chaplain R (1996)

1.17. This model suggests that interventions that are incorrectly targeted or focused may turn passive disengagement into active opposition (and, potentially, exclusion), or lead to active disengagement. For policy makers and practitioners, therefore, it is important to be clear about the type of behaviour that is of concern and, more critically, the reason for that behaviour. Interventions to improve participation may need to be related to changing school actions and ethos, to enhancing the relevance of the curriculum or to the pedagogies with which it is delivered, to addressing the social and/or economic problems outside the school or to ameliorating the emotional, physical or mental health problems of young people.

The scope of the challenge

1.18. In looking at the need to support and promote higher levels of attendance, retention and participation, it is worth establishing the current situation in Ireland, in comparison to the position in the UK and, where evidence is available, the US. While we could have referred simply to comparative information using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) for levels and fields, our concern is that the comparative levels that were last approved in 1997 are now insufficiently nuanced to allow appropriate comparisons. The new classifications (ISCED-2011) have just been approved by the UNESCO General Conference and will inform all future data collections. In the absence of these up-to-date international comparators, we have sought, therefore, to adopt a more bespoke approach for this study.

Attendance

1.19. A comparative analysis of school-level absence data in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, produced for the NEWB in 2010,¹² showed that overall absence rates in primary schools (a mean of 6.5%) was *'over one percentage point higher in Irish primary schools than schools in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland, and about the same as for Wales'*. While the comparative rates for post-primary absence were better than in most of the UK, rates in Ireland (7.7%) were 0.4 percentage points higher than in England (7.3%).

1.20. These rates translate into 12 school days, per student, per year in primary school and 13 days per year in post-primary. One specific challenge for the NEWB is that the lack of data at the level of the individual child and the lack of a comprehensive definition of absence means that it is difficult to translate this information into insights into patterns of non-attendance amongst particular groups. At present, for example, absence is recorded as *explained or unexplained*. While unexplained absence is clearly problematic, absence that is explained could nonetheless be unacceptable or problematic from an educational perspective (extended family holidays, child acting as carer, child withdrawn temporarily from school for other reasons). As the authors of a comprehensive analysis of existing data on attendance concluded: *'relatively little is known in the Irish context about the nature of poor attendance and the factors shaping patterns of non-attendance among different groups of students'* (ESRI report, 2009).

12. Millar D (2010).

Retention

1.21. Data from the Department of Education and Skills shows that retention rates have been rising in Ireland, with the largest-ever annual increase (of 2.3 percentage points) recorded for the 2004 cohort (those who would have taken their Leaving Certificate in 2010). However, conducting comparative analyses of retention rates with the UK countries presents a number of challenges (challenges recognised in the proposed revisions of ISCED 97). There are differences in:

- **comparative pupil age:** post-primary education in Ireland begins at age 12 and is compulsory for three years (up to age 16, or three years post-primary education, whichever is the later), while in England, Wales and Northern Ireland secondary education begins at age 10/11 and is compulsory for five years (up to age 15/16). In Scotland, secondary education begins at age 11/12 and is compulsory for four years, up to age 16.
- the **structure of public examinations:** pupils in Ireland complete nine to 12 subject-based examinations for the Junior Certificate at the end of compulsory education (ages 14 to 16) before taking two or three years¹³ to complete studies in a minimum of six subjects for the Leaving Certificate Established (at ages 16-19), five Leaving Certificate subjects plus two Link Modules (one of which must be Irish) for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), or studies for the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA).¹⁴
 - Pupils in **England, Wales, and Northern Ireland**, at age 15/16, take an average of eight subject-specific General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations (GCSEs) or equivalent examinations, before moving on to a one-year (AS) or two-year (A2) General Certificate of Education (GCE) course (generally in between two and four subjects) or one of a range of other post-16 qualifications (ages 16/17 and 18/19).
 - Pupils in **Scotland** take an average of eight subject-specific Standard Grade or Intermediate exams at the age of 15/16. Subsequently, pupils may stay on to study Higher (age 16/17) and/or Advanced Higher examinations (age 17/18), although some schools offer GCE or the International Baccalaureate.
- the ways in which **data is collected, collated and published.** In Ireland, the data is collated by the DES, using data from the Post-Primary Pupils' Database. Data is tracked only for those staying in State-aided schools; pupils transferring to other educational pathways (such as apprenticeships) are not included. Across the UK, data is collected:
 - in Wales, via information from Careers Wales¹⁵
 - in Scotland, based on follow-up survey data collected via Skills Development Scotland; data is matched to data from the annual pupil census to produce information on destinations by pupil characteristics¹⁶
 - in England, via data from post-16 providers (i.e., via individual pupil level data on the Annual School Census and via Individual Learner Records for further education and other post-compulsory colleges)¹⁷

13. Some pupils will go through the Transition Year Programme, before entering the first year of the Senior Cycle.

14. The LCA is a distinct, self-contained two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. According to the State Examinations Commission, it is 'designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes or who choose not to opt for those programmes'.

15. See <http://careerswales.com/prof/server.php?show=nav.3850>

16. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Datasets>

17. <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001011/index.shtml>

- in Northern Ireland, via individual-level data on pupils in schools from the annual census (Department of Education). Data on students in FE colleges and Jobskills/Training for Success trainees are sourced from the Department for Employment and Learning and are derived from the Further Education Statistical Record (FESR) on the NI Colleges Information System (NICIS). Published destinations data at 16 now *includes* vocational training outside further education, so is not directly comparable to figures for other UK countries and Ireland, which separate education and non-Further Education vocational training figures.¹⁸

1.22. This means that, when we look at retention rates from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate, we are making comparisons between different age groups, between those following different progression routes and between datasets constructed in different ways. Bearing these caveats in mind, Table 1-1 provides a comparative overview of retention rates from 2009.

Table 1-1: Comparative retention rates (2009) for Ireland and the UK countries

	Retention rates for post-compulsory education at age 16+ (2009)	Retention rates for post-compulsory education and training at age 16+ (2009)	Notes
Ireland	87.7%	Data not available	This is an increase of 2.3 percentage points over the previous cohort
Scotland	78%	Data not available	No change since 2006, but figures increased to 81% 2009/10 and 83% 2010/2011
Wales	82%	89.8% (includes part-time education)	Increased to 83% in 2010
Northern Ireland	N/A	91%	Includes vocational training outside the FE system.
England	85.9%	95.2%	Provisional figures for 2010 suggest that this has increased to 88.3%.

Source: SQW, based on a range of national statistics from the DES, DJE, DENI, NICIS, Careers Wales and the Scottish Government.

Participation

1.23. Identifying comparative metrics for participation is more challenging. Proxy measures of engagement are available for some elements of **academic participation**, specifically attendance and retention (discussed above), expulsion and attainment and so could include measures such as:

- **expulsions** from school. The latest publicly available data for Ireland is for 2008/09 and numerical comparisons are possible with much of the UK (apart from Northern Ireland). The Irish data comes from an annual survey of schools (90% response rate from post-primary and 93.4% response from primary). The Welsh, Scottish and English data are based on annual individual pupil level census returns. Data are also published in different ways; Scotland provided a single numerical figure for combined numbers of primary and post-primary exclusion in 2008/09, whilst the Welsh data for that year does not provide a figure for the percentage of the school population that were excluded. Overall, the indications are that levels of both expulsion and suspension are currently lower in Ireland than in the UK countries, though all have indicated a decrease in recent years.

18. Data on pupils in schools are sourced from the Department of Education. Data on students in FE colleges and Jobskills/Training for Success trainees are sourced from the Department for Employment and Learning NI Colleges Information System (NICIS). They are derived from the Further Education Statistical Record (FESR) http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_on_education_participationrates_pg.htm

1.28. Instead, this suggests that attendance data may be collected more for monitoring purposes, either because persistent non-attendance is deemed illegal (as in the Czech Republic or Cyprus, for example), or to look at school-level patterns of attendance and so identify schools in need of support or intervention, or to enable schools to contact parents (or inform welfare officers) in cases of non-attendance, in order to enlist parental support, to obtain information to promote better attendance, or to institute other actions such as parenting orders.

1.29. While countries may identify groups of children or young people with poor attendance, these are often related to instituting interventions for ethnic groups (such as the Roma community), children from migrant families (as in Germany) or non-nationals (as in Belgium), children in disadvantaged areas (as in Finland), children in rural areas (as in Lithuania) or by gender (with interventions for boys evident in Lithuania and other countries).²³ Interventions based on a more detailed understanding of the cohorts of children and young people with poor attendance is rare, since, as discussed, these depend on the detailed collection and analysis of individual pupil-level data.

1.30. As a result, therefore, policy-related activities (and so policy-related research) in much of Europe has focused less on attendance and more on interventions to prevent early school leaving. Actions have included strategies such as refusing to issue work permits to those under the age of 16 (as in Cyprus), increasing the number of years of compulsory education (as in Italy and Poland), adjusting the curriculum (as in Spain and Greece) or using financial incentives (Poland). These strategies sometimes reflect political and social imperatives, rather than a wish to identify the most effective intervention and so, while they are sometimes evaluated,²⁴ they have not provided a significant body of evidence related to participation in school.

1.31. In contrast, attendance issues (as much as the prevention of school leaving) have long been a focus of policy – hence policy-related research – in the UK. It is only since individual-level data was collected in Scotland (since 2004) and England, Wales and Northern Ireland (since 2007), however, that the UK has been able to identify, effectively, the groups for whom they need to target interventions, and this has led to a large and growing body of research on strategies to promote attendance.

1.32. In the US, the federal nature of education means that states have different school-leaving ages and that states may adopt different approaches to promoting school attendance and/or retention. The policy of grade retention (that is, a student who fails a required course must repeat the course) means that comparative analyses around retention rates are complicated. The establishment of the What Works Clearing House and the scientific approach to research funding (culminating in a preference for experimental designs), however, means that they have collected a significant body of research on the factors that promote school attendance and retention.

1.33. As a result, most of the studies that we have been able to identify are dominated by studies from the US and the UK, with a smaller number of studies from Europe (see Figure 2-3). In evaluating these studies, therefore, it has been essential to consider the extent to which any effective strategies (whether from Europe, the US, Canada, South America or Australasia) could be implemented in Ireland and the extent to which they are focused on the specific issues of non-attendance (particularly in primary education) in the Republic of Ireland.

23. Information collected via Eurybase and Eurydice.

24. System evaluation is less common in Europe than in the US and is also more evident in some European countries than in others.

The structure of the report

1.34. In the remaining chapters of the report, we provide more detail of the strategy used to identify relevant materials and the criteria by which studies were accepted or rejected for inclusion in the study (**Chapter 2**). We also describe the call for evidence to other European countries that took place through the Eurydice Network. In **Chapter 3**, we provide an overview of the initial synthesis of these studies, differentiating between approaches and policies that appear to be effective, promising or ineffective in promoting attendance and retention and reducing drop-out or early school leaving. In **Chapter 4**, we take this synthesis further, adopting a narrative synthesis to the critical interpretation of the findings. These narratives are expanded in **Chapters 5, 6 and 7**, which look at effective, promising or ineffective interventions in the national policy, school and out-of-school community environment. These findings are summarised in **Chapter 8**, while **Chapter 9** looks at the implications of the findings for policy and practice in the Irish context.

2: Study Method

2.1. The research study included two discrete elements:

- a literature review
- a call for evidence on policy, legislation and practice in Europe on participation, attendance and retention.

2.2. The methods used for each element are set out in this Chapter.

Literature Review

2.3. During the initial stages of the study, the review team set out and agreed with the NEWB the overall parameters and strategies for searching, selecting and retrieving international literature for review. The search strategy (devised by the National Foundation for Educational Research – NFER, in collaboration with NEWB and SQW) comprised a series of search terms and sources, derived by matching the study research questions to database keywords of relevance. The keywords (agreed with NEWB) contained composite sets that were devised to cover the concepts for each facet of the review: participation, attendance, retention and disengagement within education; interventions and processes; and the characteristics of the various populations that NEWB wished the review to examine.

2.4. The search utilised two main sources of literature: a range of bibliographic databases (mainly educational, but also including sociological and economic databases) and websites of key organisations and institutions.

2.5. **An initial screening** was used to reject literature that was outside the scope of the review and included:

- an older population set such as adult education, adults, adult students, higher education, universities, professional education, teacher education
- the time-frame for the study – initial searches generated a volume of reports so high that it was agreed with NEWB that the start date for studies for consideration ought to be 2004, and not 2000 as suggested in the invitation to tender.

2.6. A long list of approximately 850 documents was then taken through a series of **exclusion and inclusion** criteria to arrive at a shortlist for review and synthesis. These criteria were mainly to do with **study purpose and study methodology**. Any article that did not mention or discuss the method for arriving at its findings was excluded, since no judgement could be made about the quality of the research. Similarly, if an article or document bore no direct relevance to any of the outcomes of interest in the study, it was excluded. We also undertook further filtering of articles that subsequently proved to have been published prior to 2004 (other than for the Irish literature), or where we had insufficient information about the year of publication.

2.7. We excluded some articles on the basis of their availability and ease of access. Whilst we sourced and bought the most pertinent articles, we had to prioritise and exclude those that were price prohibitive or could not be acquired within the time-frame of the study.

2.8. Our first shortlist comprised a list of over **80 documents**. All of these were taken through a partial review using a review template designed to collate the most relevant aspects of the evidence from a document. This step was necessary because, in many cases, it was only when reading the full article that we were able to ascertain whether it was relevant to the study and therefore should be taken to a full review.

2.9. The review template allowed the recording of key descriptive fields, as well as a reviewer's own assessment of the methodological quality of the study and the most pertinent findings.

Table 2-1: Review Template fields

Document accessible to reviewer (and where)?
Type of research
Geographical coverage
Independent research?
Pupil ages covered
Research focus and themes
Method statement included? (If a research study and method not clear, consider excluding at this stage)
Type and scale of intervention
Sub-groups covered
Method details and characteristics
Method quality
Summary of findings
Reviewer's judgement on the effectiveness of the intervention based on study approach and findings
Gaps in evidence base

Source: SQW

2.10. The **55 documents** that came through this third filtering process were taken through a full and complete review and form the basis of this report. **Five** of the 55 were Irish in their research focus or origin solely, and **one** featured Northern Ireland, and was included as part of a UK study.²⁵ In addition to these 55 documents, a further **23** reports, articles and books were used to provide the basis for the conceptual, political and analytical framework within which the review was undertaken. The full bibliography of **78** documents can be found in Annex C, which includes lists of background and contextual research, a list of those documents cited in the review and a list of other research that went through the full review process, but which did not contribute significantly to the final report.

2.11. Not all of these documents contributed equally to the final review; some proved to have less robust methodologies, or to add little to an understanding of the questions under review. In total, **39 documents** provided enough evidence to contribute to at least one aspect of the review.

2.12. The final step of the review was to identify the various themes (prevention or re-engagement, for example), intervention types (school-based, legislation-based, multi-agency based and so on) and intervention foci (behaviour support, curriculum or pedagogical changes, mentoring or family support, for instance) that emerged from the research and explore these in relation to their effectiveness, with whom and in what circumstances.

25. Note that we narrowed a long list of 850 documents to a final shortlist of 39 articles and reports. We shortlisted five Irish articles from a long list of 43, after taking eight through the initial review template. We applied the same screening and exclusion criteria on articles of Irish origin or focus and those that were selected were best placed to contribute to the final review of the evidence.

The evidence base

2.13. The studies we identified for this review included a number of literature reviews, one of which set out to be a meta-analysis of impact evaluations conducted between 1994 and 2004, though the author acknowledged that little rigorous, systematic and objective research existed of the kind envisaged by the US No Child Left Behind Act (Railsback, 2004). A more recent US report (Maynard, 2010) identified more such studies, including nine randomised control trial (RCT) studies, 11 quasi-experimental design studies and 13 single group pre-post studies in a systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions to increase student attendance between 1990 and 2009. These more scientific studies were drawn primarily from the US, with only one such study from the UK, one from Canada and three from Australia.

Research methods

2.14. Reflecting this balance, the research we identified in Europe and elsewhere tended to adopt mixed method approaches, with a clear dominance of qualitative research designs such as case studies and interviews; only two of the research studies we identified had employed an experimental design, although a number had used some form of comparison group (seven), quantitative techniques designed to control for both pupil and school characteristics (one), or quantitative techniques to facilitate comparative outcomes within an intervention (six – see Figure 2-1). The lack of experimental impact studies, however, means that it is not possible to provide a clear indication of the scale and/or size of the improvement in proven effective interventions and processes in formal education (one of the study aims). Where possible, we have provided indications of effect size, but it should be noted that these references are limited.

Figure 2-1: Research methods used in identified research studies



Source: SQW – Based on the 55 reports and articles that came through the third filtering process – studies could adopt more than one approach.

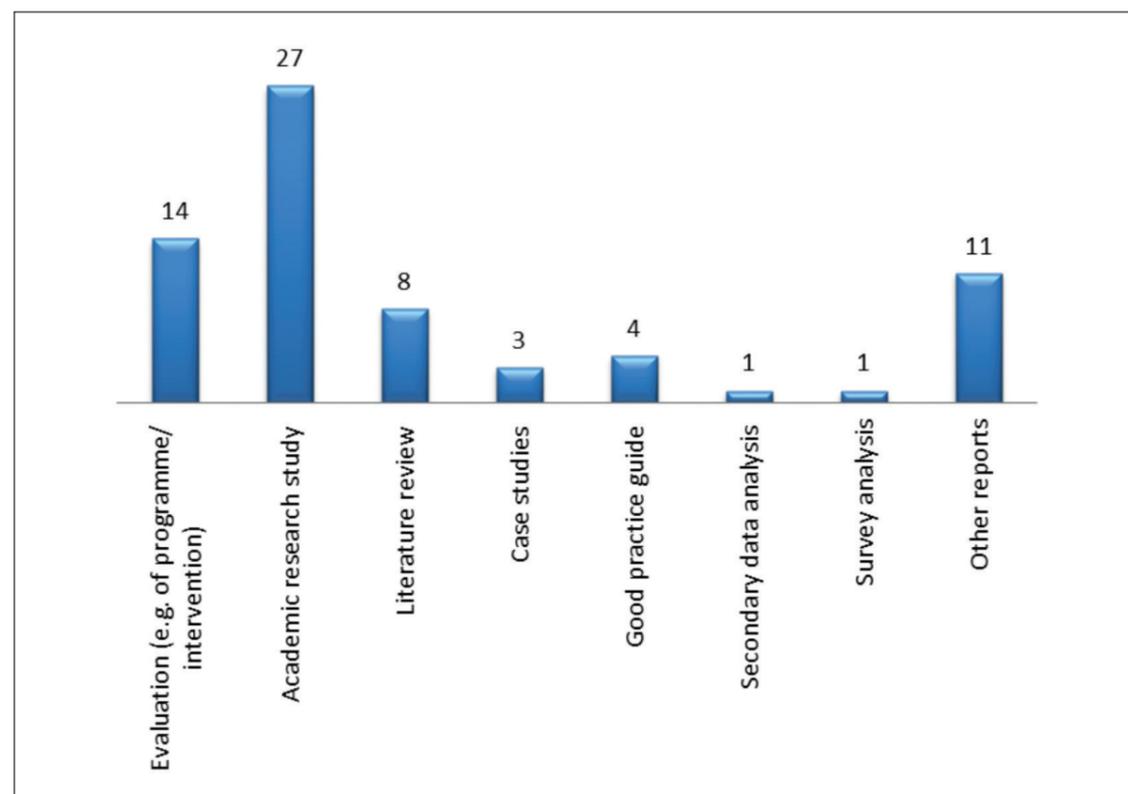
2.15. The judgements that have been made in this study about the effectiveness of the interventions, therefore, are based primarily on other quantitative and qualitative studies that have not necessarily been able to measure, unequivocally, the extent of impact, but can nonetheless point in the direction of improvement.

Research Type

2.16. As suggested above, many of the studies we reviewed (18) used a literature review as a precursor to designing primary data tools and/or deriving their hypotheses for research. The methods that have been recorded as ‘other approaches’ included narratives of action research projects, ethnographic research studies, expert meetings or consultations. Similarly, the ‘other’ quantitative design category included the analysis of secondary or administrative data and the use of statistical methods (such as correlation and analysis of variance) that were not part of a randomised control trial, quasi-experimental design or modelling approach.

2.17. Most of the studies we reviewed were primarily academic research projects (27), with 14 set up specifically as evaluations of particular interventions (some of these studies overlapped). A number were published as case studies (three), as evidence-based good practice guides (four), or as technical reports of survey analyses or analyses of secondary data (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2: Research type

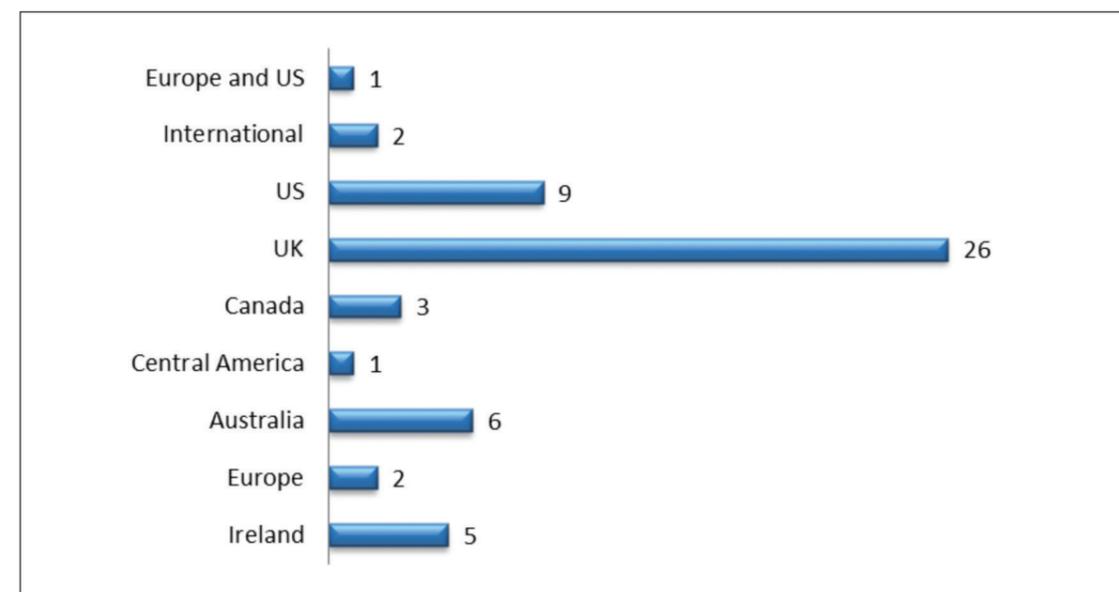


Source: SQW – based on 55 studies from the third filtering process. Studies could be categorised under more than one heading.

Research source

2.18. Reflecting the policy emphases of the different countries (as outlined in paragraphs 1.18 to 1.33), the research that we found was predominantly from the UK, with the remainder of the reports largely focusing on the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland.

Figure 2-3: Country focus of research



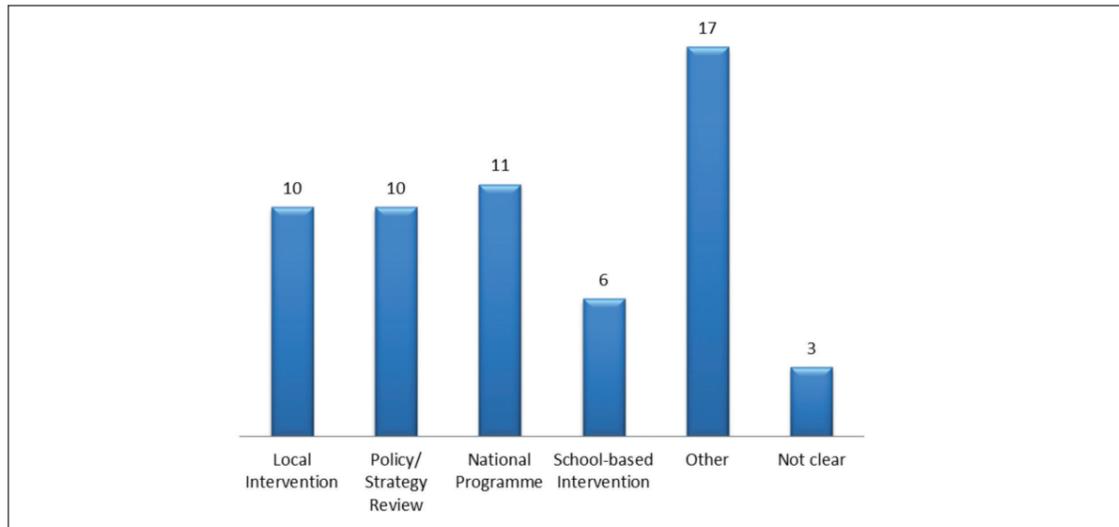
Source: SQW

Age groups and research foci

2.19. More of the studies focused specifically on interventions to improve the attendance and participation of young people in post-primary (24) rather than in primary education (3), although 23 further studies covered both age groups. Six studies included interventions with young people in tertiary (post-16) education, although five of these were linked with studies of post-primary education and one was part of an all-age academic study, using a phenomenographic (qualitative) approach. In total, 47 studies explored strategies for post-primary pupils, 26 explored strategies for primary pupils and six included a focus on older young people. This balance may reflect the policy and practice concern that tends to be more prevalent, across all countries, about preventing early school leaving amongst older pupils. Few studies focused on early intervention (though many identified a need for earlier intervention) so identifying the most effective time to make an intervention (one of the study aims) is problematic. Nonetheless, we have sought to draw out information on this wherever possible.

2.20. Studies ranged in their focus from national policy reviews to studies of local or school-based interventions. A number could not be easily categorised, either because they were literature reviews (hence covered research with different foci) or because they covered multiple interventions (such as school-based programmes linked to external multi-agency support). Some focused on specific groups of pupils (such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils) rather than on interventions, or provided a general discussion of intervention strategies without being specific about their nature. The studies we included were those in which outcomes were identified and interpreted without bias, *potentially* signalling a high-quality evidence base.

Figure 2-4: Research focus

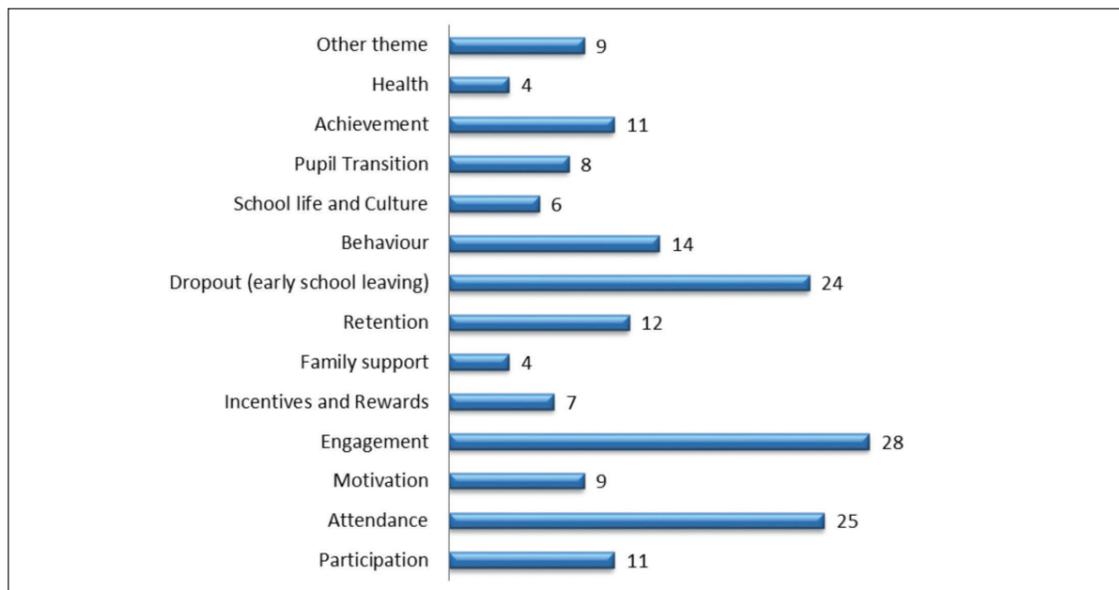


Source: SQW. Note that 'other' included literature reviews, multiple interventions, or strategies targeted at specific groups and so had no single research focus.

Study themes

2.21. The central themes of the studies varied, with proportionately more focusing on engagement, attendance and drop-out or early school leaving than on pupil motivation, retention or behaviour (Figure 2-5). Indeed, quite a few studies (over 20) were specifically related to preventing drop-out, addressing non-attendance or improving attendance, and preventing early school leaving. Other subjects studied were exclusions, teacher-student relationship and school refusal.²⁶

Figure 2-5: Research themes



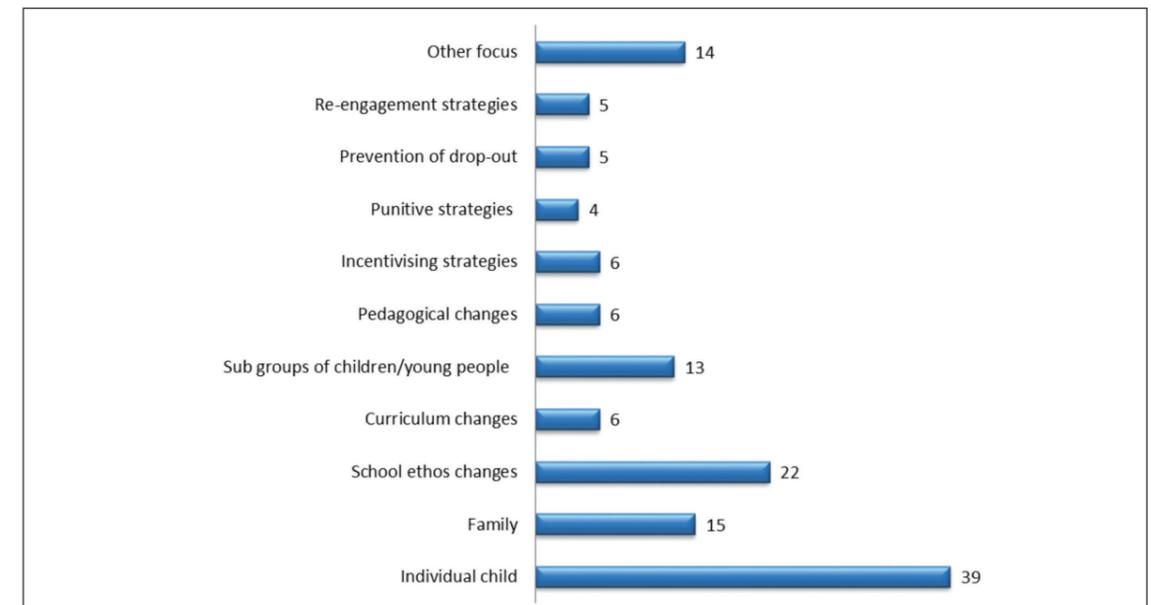
Source: SQW. Based on 55 entries from the third filtering process; studies could have more than one theme.

26. Although the definitions of participation and engagement, retention and dropout are complex, when identifying the themes of studies, we took a more literal approach and marked studies according to their central focus, as mentioned in the abstract and body of the article.

Intervention focus

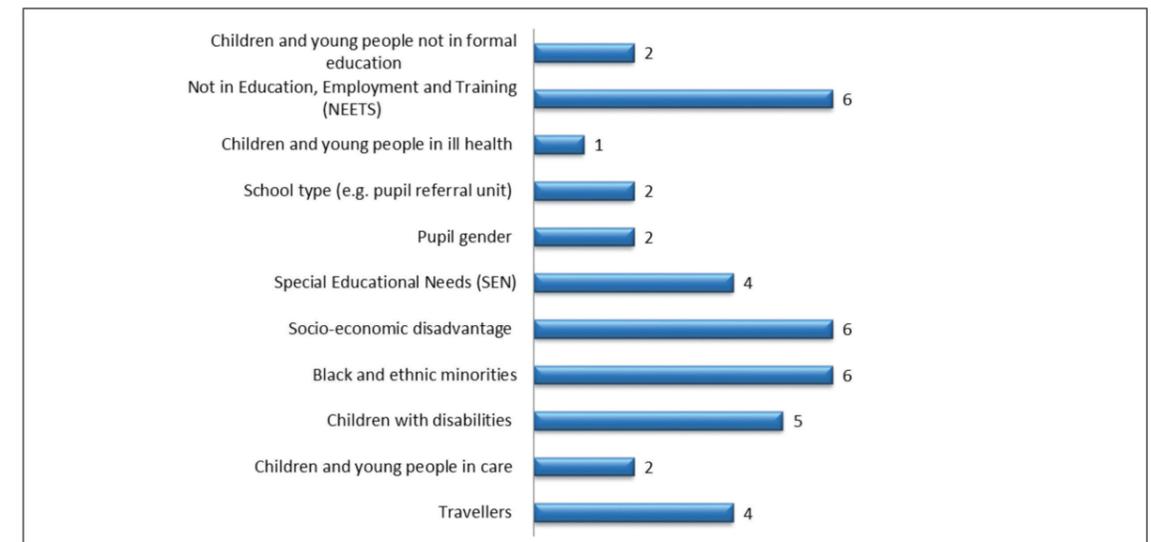
2.22. The majority of the studies reviewed (39) described or evaluated interventions that were focused on the individual child, with 22 studies focussing on interventions related specifically to changing or enhancing the school ethos (Figure 2-6). Most of the studies covered multiple sub-groups within their research, though there was more discussion of those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and those from minority ethnic communities than other children and young people who might be poor attenders, or at risk of becoming poor attenders (Figure 2-7). Although children in care were not a specific focus of the study, we incorporated one recent review from Northern Ireland (PWC, 2011) that looked specifically at ways to improve attendance amongst this group of children.

Figure 2-6: Intervention activity focused on:



Source: SQW. Based on 55 entries from the third filtering process; studies could have more than one intervention focus

Figure 2-7: Sub-groups covered



Source: SQW. Based on 55 entries from the third filtering process; while only 12 studies were specifically focused on a single sub-group, other studies included some sub-group analysis.

2.23. The studies included for review were generally robust in their ability to answer the research questions they set (though not necessarily those this study had set) and to make the appropriate links with outcomes, and were able to generate reliable data and sound analysis. However (and perhaps owing to the largely qualitative and case-study based nature of the research designs) few of the studies constructed a reference case or explored the counterfactual – in other words, what would have happened anyway, in the absence of the intervention. This means, therefore, that the impact or effectiveness of the intervention cannot be assessed objectively. It is possible that, even where positive outcomes were seen, similar outcomes could have been seen without the implementation of the intervention that was being evaluated.

Summary: the weight of the evidence base

2.24. Our review suggests that whilst there were many examples of ‘*promising practice and strategy*’, there were few that could be deemed as ‘*effective*’. This is partly related to the methodological quality of the studies reviewed. Indeed, as we have indicated, very few studies attempted to define or construct a counterfactual, that is, identify what would have happened in the absence of an intervention, so the net impact or effectiveness of the strategies (other than in relation to their own internal aims) was seldom tested. Few studies, therefore, were able to claim that the intervention they were evaluating made a substantive and measurable difference to pupil outcomes that would not have occurred had the intervention not been implemented.

2.25. Similarly, few studies focused on early intervention or on the most appropriate timing of interventions. There was a predominance of studies based on post-primary rather than on primary education, and little evidence that the relative timing of interventions was explored. As a result, we are limited in our ability to:

- provide a clear indication of the scale and/or size of the improvement in proven effective interventions and processes in formal education
- assess the costs and benefits of effective or promising interventions and processes
- identify the most effective time to make an intervention (other than to suggest that ‘earlier’ intervention was generally seen as better).

2.26. The range of themes and the variety of interventions mean that we are in a better position to comment on:

- effective, promising and ineffective interventions and processes in relation to the participation, attendance and retention of children in formal education. It should be noted, however, that our assessment of interventions is not the result of a rigorous meta-analysis (see paragraph 1.12), but a judgement made on the basis of the findings from studies assessed to have conducted sound research. Evidence of ‘effective’ intervention, as represented in this review, is based, therefore, on the limited number of relatively high-quality studies available, supplemented by other studies that may have been less focused or less well designed, but which had implications for the review questions. The evidence (particularly of promising practice) should best be seen, perhaps, as indicative rather than authoritative. Moreover, while we may be in a position to say that an intervention appears effective or promising in a **particular context**, we are not always in a position to say that the intervention could be successfully transferred to a different context.
- the combination(s) of interventions that yield the best outcomes for the child. We should be clear that the research we explored does not provide us with a definitive list of interventions, nor the order in which they should be implemented. It does, however, suggest that **multiple interventions**, addressing specific needs in a targeted, integrated, coordinated way, may often be more effective than a single intervention.

Call for evidence

2.27. While some of the research literature identified discussed the pertinent policy or legislative context, many studies (particularly of small-scale or localised interventions) provided very little or no information about the national context in which the study took place. In order to get some insights into these and the centrality (or otherwise) of policies related to participation, attendance and retention, we worked with data collected and collated within the Eurydice Network.

2.28. The Eurydice Network is the European Commission’s information network on education in Europe and is part of the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme. The network gathers, monitors, processes and circulates reliable and readily comparable information on education systems and policies throughout Europe. At the time of the study, this data was held in Eurybase, a database, written to a common framework, which provided a detailed summary of the education system in each member of the Network. This provided us with some core information on participation, attendance and retention in Europe.²⁷ The Eurydice Network also provides policy makers with a question and answer forum via the National Units, and this forum gave us the second source of (more detailed) information.

2.29. We posted a series of questions to the **37** national Eurydice Units based in all 33 countries participating in the EU Lifelong Learning programme.²⁸ These countries include the 27 EU Member States, plus Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland as members of the Free Trade Area (EFTA), Turkey and Croatia. The text of the questions are printed below (Figure 2-8).

Figure 2-8: Questions to the Eurydice Network

We would like to ask the following questions about the legislative frameworks, policies and promising interventions that support participation, attendance and successful completion of education across the age range 4 to 18.**

With regard to the compulsory phase of education, by what means is it made compulsory? Is this achieved through legislation? If yes, how is the law framed? For example,

- Is there a duty on parents, on schools, or on education authorities?
- Is the law framed in terms of age or in terms of grade completed or in terms of the certificate/qualification attained?
- Is student/pupil level data on school attendance rates collected? If yes, what use is made of such data? What level (school, local authority, or nationally) is such data held at?

Again with regard to compulsory education, are there any sanctions used to enforce attendance and/or participation? If yes, what are the sanctions and are they imposed on parents, schools or on education authorities?

Is there a policy in your country to increase attendance or to encourage young people to stay in education or training beyond the age of compulsory education, i.e., reduce the number of early school leavers?

Who is this policy aimed at? How is the target group defined – e.g., are early school leavers defined by their age or by a certain level of attainment?

What incentives/support services are in place to support this policy? Do they aim to influence the young people themselves, their parents, schools, or education authorities?

How are such incentives/support services organised – at school, local or national level? Is it universal access or targeted support?

Does this policy extend to young people who have already left the education system?

Source: NJER * Croatia has only recently joined the Network and has not yet written a national description for Eurybase. ** By here, we mean **enrolment/participation registration** at a school or other education or training institution, and by attendance we mean regular attendance by enrolled/registered pupils.

27. Eurybase, the database of educational systems in Europe, has since been updated to web-based interactive mapping database, Eurypedia, which went live in December 2011. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php?title=Home>

28. Some countries host more than one unit, reflecting different populations (such as the French, German and Flemish communities in Belgium) or different foci (such as the Lander in Germany).

2.30. Through these two mechanisms, we were able to collate some information about participation and attendance (and supportive legislation) during compulsory education for all 33 countries of the Network. Core information came from the Eurybase national descriptions. Additional qualitative insights were received from the **12** countries that responded to the forum question. The quality and comprehensiveness of the responses varied, as did the emphasis on participation, attendance and retention, with participation (seen by most countries as ensuring that children and young people were registered for school) and the avoidance of early school leaving (hence retention) dominating responses. Strategies to promote regular attendance were less widely reported.

2.31. The Eurybase and Eurydice Network forum data provide some contextual information within which we have sited some of the research findings. Data from these sources means that we can address a further aim of the research, namely to provide some limited insights into the policies and/or supporting legislative frameworks in other countries or that enable successful interventions related to participation, attendance and retention of children in formal education.

2.32. In the following chapter we explore the strategies that research suggests may be effective, promising or ineffective, grouping them according to the way in which the interventions have been formulated and targeted.



3: Effective, promising and ineffective strategies and practices

3.1. The dominance of qualitative research and the limited number of experimental or quantitative studies meant that we used a meta-synthesis and narrative approach (rather than a meta-evaluation approach) for synthesis. The first-order concepts that we identified in the scrutiny of the research identified various **themes** (such as behaviour, motivation, transition), **loci** (including evaluations of policy, national programmes or school initiatives) and **intervention foci** (such as pedagogy, curriculum, ethos). The range of research that covered these concepts was summarised in Chapter 2.

3.2. The second stage of synthesis identified those interventions that might be regarded as effective, promising or ineffective. The research suggested that there was some evidence of effective practice, although not, as we have indicated above, always supported by rigorous scientific analysis. Those interventions that the best evidence suggests might be effective, promising or ineffective practice are summarised in the matrix overleaf, while Tables 3-1 to 3-3 that follow it provide details on the various studies that contributed to that matrix.

3.3. Some caution needs to be exercised in working with this summary, however. The evidence that is available for a number of the intervention strategies broadly defined here as ‘effective’ indicates that they appear effective with particular communities or groups, or in particular circumstances. The research data that is available does not allow us to state that they would be effective universally *or* that strategies that were clearly effective and motivational for young people in one country would transfer to Ireland (see Chapter 4).

3.4. Equally, the design of the research studies that we identified means that it was rarely possible to give an indication of the effect size of the intervention. Even where we found measurable impact compared with a control or comparison group, the financial implications of implementing the intervention might outweigh the size of the impact that it might have.

3.5. The decision to designate an intervention, or, more accurately, a combination of interventions, as effective, therefore, was made as the result of an informed assessment of their likely impact based on the fact that they have been identified as successful strategies:

- in previous international literature reviews
- in high-level practice and policy reviews
- through rigorous research from more than one source and using more than one form of analysis.

3.6. It needs to be recognised that those interventions designated as ‘promising practice’ may, in the long term, be equally effective, but that at this stage there is insufficient research evidence to enable us to make that call. That said, there was some clear commonality in the interventions that were found to be either effective or promising, with an emphasis on:

- early and swift identification of risk or need (and the implications that this has for ensuring the availability of monitoring data)
- appropriate targeting of interventions (and the implications that this has for diagnosis of need and the sharing of information and data across a range of agencies)
- ensuring that the child (and, where necessary, the family) was at the centre of the interventions (which might need to be multiple rather than singular in order to meet identified needs)
- ongoing support for those who are targeted, whether in school or out of school (and the implications that this has for the development and embedding of strategies that enable agencies to work together effectively)

- ensuring that provision is made to enable young people to stay on track (and the implications that this has both for flexibility within – or personalisation of – the curriculum, and for tracking of individuals.

Figure 3-1: Indicative outline of strategies that appear to be Effective, Promising and Ineffective (based on an assessment of international literature reviews, policy and practice reviews and rigorous research from more than one source)

Effective practice	Promising practice*	Ineffective practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - supportive school culture - connectedness with family and community - awareness of need - early and sustained intervention - student-focused strategies 	Strategies aimed at developing connectedness with family and community, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensive preparation for transition - working with parents on attendance and behaviour measures - developing inclusive schools for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children - reducing child-parent conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-agency approaches, including intensive case management, and collaborative approaches to truancy (unexplained non-engagement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with students ‘at risk’ of early school leaving, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - early intervention - targeted intensive personalised support and information, advice and guidance - creating supportive conditions for vulnerable groups - targeting young people at transition points - use of mentors, role models and peer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes that are uncoordinated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes that specifically aim to raise attendance (that is, not just as a limited add-on to another policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum strategies, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teaching and implementing children’s rights education across the curriculum - curriculum flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of curriculum flexibility for teenage parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and family strategies to enable early identification of school refusal and ways to address it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing strong pupil-teacher relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penalty notices to parents (nominal fines – of around €60 - to parents that, unpaid, lead to prosecution – in England this would be in the local Magistrates’ Court and fines in the order of €1,200)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted financial support at ages 16 to 18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational Programmes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - after-school programmes - transition programmes - programmes that promoted confidence and skill developments for young people not in education, training or employment 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined behaviour and attendance strategies, including SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour programmes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - restorative practice - taking account of the pupil voice 	
* Interventions designated as promising may be effective in the long term; at this stage there is insufficient evidence available to make this judgement		

3.7. Tables 3-1 to 3-3 provide further details of the studies that identified effective and other practice. Full details of all of these studies have been provided to NEWB; a complete bibliography, however, is included here as Annex B.

Table 3-1: Effective interventions

Strategies	Studies	Country	Study type/ method	Sample size	Comments and caveats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> supportive school culture connectedness with family and community awareness of need early and sustained intervention student-focused strategies 	Kendall and Kinder (2005)	Europe	Policy and workshop synthesis	Expert representatives from 9 countries	Focused on 16 plus and drew together perceived effective practice from across the EU
	Lamb and Rice (2008)	Australia	Mixed method	25 schools	Looked at strategies used in schools with high retention rates
	Lehr (2004)	US	Literature review	45 prevention and intervention studies	
	Railsback (2004)	US	Literature review	67 research studies	Indicated that there was little 'scientifically robust' evidence, but includes replicable practice
Multi-agency approaches, including intensive case management and collaborative approaches to truancy (including unexplained non-engagement)	Kendall and Kinder (2005)	Europe	Policy and workshop synthesis	Expert representatives from 9 countries	Focused on 16 plus and drew together perceived effective practice from across the EU
	Lehr (2004)	US	Literature review	45 prevention and intervention studies	
	Nevala et al. (2011)	Europe	Literature review and secondary analysis of EU data	N/A	Based largely on qualitative data
	Railsback (2004)	US	Literature review	67 research studies	Indicated that there was little 'scientifically robust' evidence, but includes replicable practice
	Thomas et al. (2011)	US	Doctoral thesis using regression discontinuity design	869 students in one urban area	Opportunity sampling meant that random sampling was not possible. Regression discontinuity is one of the most rigorous quasi-experimental approaches
Programmes that specifically aim to raise attendance (i.e., not just as an add-on to another policy)	Maynard et al. (2009)	International	Literature review	9 RCTs 11 quasi-experimental studies 13 pre- and post-test studies	
School and family strategies to enable early identification of school refusal and ways to address it	Thambirajah (2008)	England and Wales	Evidence-based guidance	N/A	This is a knowledge review (not solely a research review) and draws on clinical perspectives to support the recommendations.
Targeted financial support at age 16 to 18	Chowdry et al. (2007)	UK	Secondary analysis of data	All young people aged 16 in 2001/02 and 2002/03 in England	Measurable difference in retention amongst recipients, particularly in sub-groups
	Middleton et al. (2005)	UK	Longitudinal matched study	7,500 young people in 15 pilot areas and 11 control areas	Measurable difference in retention amongst recipients from lower-socio-income groups

Source: SQW

Table 3-2: Promising interventions

Strategies	Studies	Country	Study type/ method	Sample size	Comments and caveats	
Strategies aimed at developing connectedness with family and community, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> intensive preparation for transition programmes linked to intensive work with parents, students and schools on attendance and behaviour measures developing inclusive schools for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children reducing child-parent conflict. 	Anderson et al. (2004)	US	Quantitative	80 elementary and middle school pupils	Few published tools found to assess adult-student relationships reliably	
	Carmen et al. (2011)	Australia	Small-scale mixed methods	13 pupils, their teachers and families	Study unable to include a counterfactual, so could not comment on whether these results could have happened anyway	
	Crowther and Kendal (2010)	England	Mixed methods	Online survey of 150 local authorities Analysis of national pupil-level data on attendance Case studies with 10 local authorities, 40 schools, 46 parents and 14 pupils	Limited funding in local authorities prevented embedding and support of these measures	
	John Richards Associates (2009)	Ireland	Qualitative Action Learning approach	9 principals 32 support service staff 17 education welfare officers	Strong support from participants. No independent evaluation	
	Wilkin et al. (2010)	UK	Mixed methods	440 primary schools and 455 secondary schools Case studies in 10 secondary, 5 primary and 5 alternative education providers Analysis of national pupil-level data	Authors identified possible survey response bias Gypsy/Roma and Traveller parents often reluctant to disclose ethnicity, so national database may also underestimate number of children	
	Williams and Pritchard (2006)	UK	Quasi-experimental pre-and post-test design	4 schools (2 treatment, 2 control) 105 children (primary) 628 children (secondary)	This was primarily a case study in multi-agency approaches to reducing educational alienation	
	Work with students 'at risk' of early school leaving, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> early intervention targeted intensive personalised support and information, advice and guidance creating supportive conditions for vulnerable groups targeting young people at transition points use of mentors, role models and peer support 	Byrne and Smyth (2010)	Ireland	Qualitative Quantitative, longitudinal	12 case study schools 1,000 students in six waves	Early leavers from 8 of the 12 schools were followed up – a total of 25 pupils
		Cowen and Burgess (2009)	UK	Mixed methods	15 partnerships 47 schools 250 pupils plus families	Promising outcomes in terms of engagement with learning, self-confidence and self-esteem, skills and aspirations. Long-term outcomes data not available
		Evans and Slowley (2010)	UK	Qualitative	38 young mothers aged 13 - 20	Study focused on re-entry rather than on retention while pregnant
		LSC (2009)	England	Literature review and qualitative research	6 case studies 27 stakeholder interviews	Acknowledged potential bias in sample selection
	Nevala et al. (2011)	Europe	Literature review and secondary analysis of EU data	N/A	Based largely on qualitative data	

Strategies	Studies	Country	Study type/method	Sample size	Comments and caveats
Curriculum strategies, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching and implementing children's rights education across the curriculum curriculum flexibility 	Covell, 2010	England	Mixed methods, quasi-experimental design	18 schools 1289 pupils	Data for elementary (i.e., primary) schools. No indication if outcomes continue in the long term
	Steedman and Stoney (2004)	UK	Literature review and expert seminar series	Evaluations of five national programmes	Programmes from 1990 to 2002 and acknowledgement that there was little 'scientifically robust' evidence
Developing strong pupil-teacher relationships	Green et al. (2008)	US	Five-wave longitudinal statistical modelling	Drawn from administrative data in San Francisco on 139 participants.	Focused on immigrants from Latin America. Self-reported data on support. No disaggregation by school or class, so difficult to triangulate with inputs
	Irvin (2007)	Australia	Phenomenography	20 teachers plus documentary evidence	Views limited to teachers. Pupils and parents not part of research design.
	Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2006)	Australia	Quantitative – structural equation modelling	324 pupils in Grades 10 and 11 in high school	Participants in study were from families with above average qualification levels
Motivational Programmes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> after-school programmes transition programmes activity agreements for NEET 	Grolnick et al. (2007)	US	Mixed method quasi experimental	90 seventh grade pupils	Not clear as to whether effects of the programme are due to student involvement or extent of pupil teacher contact
	Martin (2006)	Australia	Pre- and post-test repeated measures design	Two programmes with 53 pupils in each. One programme involved random assignment to activity (26 in treatment group, 27 in control)	No comparison of motivation levels of programme participants and the wider population.
	Maguire et al. (2010)	England	Mixed methods	Monitoring data on all participants and cohort analysis 36 implementation studies 58 young people	Increase in confidence and skills but no immediate re-engagement in education - authors felt programme was too short at 20 weeks
Combined behaviour and attendance strategies, including SEAL	Hallam et al. (2006)	England	Mixed method pre- and post-design	10 local authorities, 16 schools Pre-test = 9,000 pupils (ages 6 to 11) Post-test = 5,000	Robust evaluation highlighted the need for programme fidelity. Schools that saw decreases in unauthorised absence (as well as authorised absence) were those that implemented the whole programme
Behaviour Programmes, including: restorative practice	McCluskey (2008)	Scotland	Mixed method	Surveys of 627 teachers and 1,163 pupils Qualitative work with 138 primary and 93 secondary pupils, 400 staff	Sample possibly non-representative and there was no counterfactual. However, the statistical techniques were appropriate for use in such circumstances, and there were findings of improvements in discipline
Taking account of the pupil voice	Nevala et al. (2011)	Europe	Literature review and secondary analysis of EU data	N/A	Based largely on qualitative data

Table 3-3: Ineffective interventions

Strategies	Studies	Country	Study type/method	Sample size	Comments and caveats
Financial incentives	IES (2006)	US	Mixed method RCT	2,967 teenagers	Observed impact on staying in school rates, but findings were not statistically significant. No impact found on progression or completion.
Programmes that are uncoordinated	Sodha and Margo (2010)	UK	Literature and some qualitative panel research	75 young people at risk of disengagement Panel of practitioners and head teachers	Think tank report
Lack of curriculum flexibility for teenage parents	Vincent (2009)	England	Longitudinal qualitative design	14 pregnant teenage girls, aged 15 to 18, from 9 different schools interviewed at a series of points (March 2007 to May 2008)	Not a study of an intervention, but identified different practices in operation
Penalty notices to parents	Zhang (2007)	England	Mixed method – secondary analysis of data and surveys	150 local authorities	Robust methodology to test hypotheses re impact of penalty notices

Source: SQW

4: The nature and locus of effective practice

4.1. The final stage of the syntheses (the narrative analysis) brought together the context information from the call for evidence from Eurydice and the research literature. It looked across the emerging themes and identified specific differences in relation to:

- the *nature* of the interventions (preventative or curative)
- the *locus* of interventions, which looked at the places and ways in which the interventions operated most effectively, and, where possible, with whom. These could be through specific legislative change, through school-based interventions or through out-of-school, family or community interventions.

The nature of interventions

4.2. Evidence from the literature review suggests that successful interventions tended to be either **preventative** or **curative** in their nature, reflecting the strategies being adopted in Europe to reduce early school leaving. In a Europe-wide review of interventions to ‘reclaim’ young people back into education and learning, Kendall and Kinder (2005), working with ministries and representatives from nine countries²⁹, suggested that the preventative strategies they were using were predominantly about building bridges between sectors (such as academic and vocational education, for example) and strengthening transitions within education. The curative approaches they adopted tended to focus more on facilitating routes back into learning (the intervention approach) and ensuring that data could be used effectively to target resources and assist the evaluation of initiatives.

4.3. Within the research we explored we found evidence of both of these dimensions, with additional elements reflecting the need to assist transition between early years, primary and post-primary:

- Preventative interventions tended to incorporate early and intensive interventions with at-risk groups, the use of pastoral care, the operation of a flexible curriculum, working with families and building trusting relationships, and engagement with multiple agencies. These preventative interventions could be large scale or with a national focus, sometimes linked to legislation, or small scale and local, with individual schools setting up mentoring systems, for example.
- Curative approaches were more to do with re-engaging with those that were already excluded or disengaged, and offering them a number of alternative options in and out of school, working specifically around the young person’s needs. Like the preventative measures, these could be large scale and national (with changes to adult access to education, for instance) or small scale and local (providing remedial support or alternative provision or settings for learning).

4.4. Nonetheless, we did not always find this dual definition to be the most helpful in classifying the range of activities that we found. The current EU approach, which may, perhaps, be more helpful in framing policy, focuses more on a **stage approach** (pre-disengagement, at risk of disengagement and post disengagement). In Ireland, this could include, for example, policies and practices:

- to prevent disengagement amongst future school cohorts, focusing on strategies aimed at young children and their families, but also considering how schools (primary and post-primary) can become more inclusive for all children and young people
- to intervene when there is a possibility of poor engagement, looking at interventions focused on addressing the needs of individual students and groups of students
- to identify routes and ways in which young people can be supported outside mainstream education and encouraged to return to it.

²⁹ Austria, England, Flanders, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and Wales.

The locus of interventions

4.5. In reviewing the research, three clear themes emerged in relation to the central locus of the intervention.

4.6. The first body of research, drawn mainly from the UK and USA, focused on the impact of **legislative or policy practice**. These practices came from two broad and philosophically different approaches, the deficit model and the inclusion model (though it is clear from both the Eurydice information and the research literature that some countries operated both models simultaneously):

- The **deficit model**, in which poor attendance and early school leaving are seen as a problem to be fixed. The sanctions and punitive measures used in truancy or drop-out prevention programmes included prosecutions, penalty notices, sanctions that involved juvenile justice court systems, and parenting orders. Such measures were usually legislated by the responsible government department (not always the Ministry of Education)³⁰ and implemented subsequently at local and/or school level.
- The **inclusion model**, in which poor attendance is seen more in terms of the barriers that needed to be overcome. At a national policy level, these barriers were often seen in **financial** terms (hence the offer of various incentives, including financial support). They were also seen as related to **barriers to learning** (hence education policies focused on overcoming such barriers through changing a national curriculum, arrangements for teacher training/education or the introduction of national school-based strategies, such as mentor support) or issues of **social** inclusion (hence policies aimed at promoting better adult-pupil and/or peer relationships in schools). Government-instigated strategies to overcome barriers to learning and increase social inclusion are often implemented through school-based strategies. Interventions can be both preventative (overcoming barriers), or curative (providing routes back to learning).

4.7. The second body of research examined the impact of a range of such **school-based strategies**. The imperatives for these school-based practices varied. Some were implemented (as indicated above) as a result of national legislative change, or as a result of national pilot or pathfinder programmes (such as those aimed at supporting behavioural interventions or introducing alternative curricula). Others tended to be implemented as a result of local policy or academic initiatives, or as a result of single school or cluster initiatives. These school-based strategies for promoting engagement included:

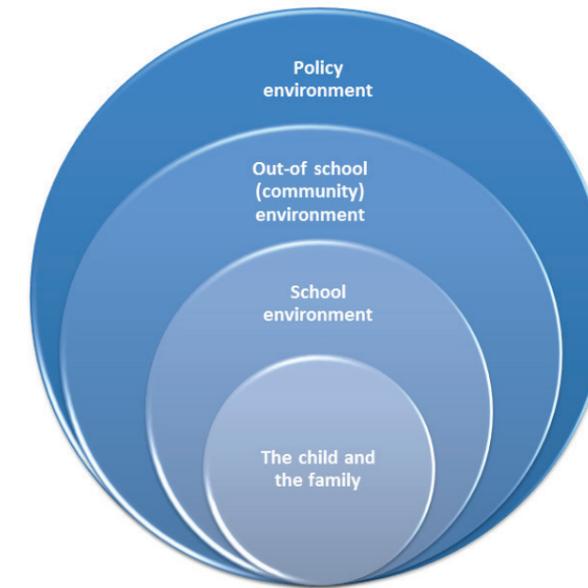
- **whole-school policies**, which often involved looking at approaches to teaching and learning, at pastoral care, at behavioural policies, at careers guidance and counselling, at alternative approaches to the curriculum or to the vocational options offered.
- **student- or child-focused strategies**, which were characterised by working with identified school staff or with external agencies, including the deployment of key workers, peer mentoring, family outreach and intensive case management.

4.8. A third group of studies explored the effectiveness of strategies that involved cooperation between schools, local authorities and other external agencies – a more outward-facing, **out-of-school strategy** involving a **multi-professional approach**. This was especially the case when schools offered a flexible curriculum, alternatives to mainstream provision, links with further education/tertiary/third level colleges and after school provision.

4.9. Figure 4-1 presents a conceptual framework to demonstrate the nested relationship between the child (and their family) and the different environments within which they operate – the locus of interventions. While some of the research we reviewed explored interventions for the child (and/or the family) solely located within one environment (the school environment, the community environment or at the level of national policy), others explored strategies in which the loci of intervention overlapped.

30. In some countries, Ministries of Labour or Social Security and so forth are involved in such legislation.

Figure 4-1: The locus of interventions



Source: SQW

4.10. These overlaps, which influenced the ways in which interventions targeted the child and/or the family in addressing participation, attendance and retention in education are summarised below:

- **The child and the family.** Each child lives within a unique set of family circumstances. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a wide range of factors that can either facilitate school attendance (for example, supportive family and school cultures), or act as barriers to it (such as lack of personal motivation or coping strategies, lack of confidence, inappropriate curriculum challenges, problems of access or financial difficulties), leading to poor attendance, lack of participation and early school leaving. Strategies to address these barriers may be implemented within school, through out-of-school agencies, or through national educational initiatives or legislative approaches.
- **Within schools,** leadership teams and boards of management, with their teaching and support staff, establish the ethos that direct adult-pupil relationships and create the climate within which pupils relate to each other. Some of the strategies they use to promote participation, good attendance and retention may have come about as a result of national policy directives or interventions; others may arise through the adoption of an approach that the staff think will work within their community. These strategies may or may not involve external agencies.
- **Outside school,** a range of agencies may offer support to children and their families to overcome barriers to staying in school. These agencies may work with the schools, with national bodies (including agencies of government) or independently.
- **National policy** provides the context within which both the school system and out-of-school provision operates. In promoting participation, a government might, for example, impose official sanctions for non-attendance, or institute support strategies (whether for the family or the child) that involve non-school agencies. It might facilitate variations to the curriculum that enable schools to offer pupils a different pathway, or support new approaches to teacher education that lead to the use of different pedagogies in the classroom.

What strategies are effective and with whom?

- 4.11.** Given the range of triggers for lack of attendance or early school leaving and the variety of stages at which children and young people might ‘drop out’ (see paragraphs 1.13 to 1.17 and above) it comes as **no surprise that our synthesis of the evidence indicates that no strategy works unilaterally in addressing the participation, attendance and retention** of children in education. The evidence for this assertion is drawn primarily from a range of comprehensive international (both European and worldwide) and country-based (US and UK) literature reviews and so provides a strong weight of evidence to support the conclusions. The strategies collated in Figure 3-1 and Tables 3-1 to 3-3 (Chapter 3), for instance, focus primarily on a combination of in-school strategies, linked (potentially) with external multi-agency activities.
- 4.12.** Central to many of these studies (Lamb and Rice, 2008; Lehr, 2004; Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Railsback, 2004) is the concept of the child (or the whole family) as the centre of the interventions, with a **combination of strategies** used to best meet the identified needs of the child:
- Lamb and Rice (2008) and Lehr (2004) suggest that the most effective school-based practice is where schools implement a combination of strategies when adopting a ‘whole child’ approach, with the child or the family as the focal point of consideration.
 - Kendall and Kinder (2005) also advocated a combination of approaches, which they argued should extend, where necessary, beyond the school, potentially combining whole-school policies, school-based strategies on attendance and behaviour, and external support. This last, however, depended on the identification of the client group and the implementation of effective communication between key agencies.
 - Railsback (2004), in her meta-analysis of evaluative evidence in the US, concluded that even when a combination of strategies to keep children in school are deemed effective, **the first steps** for schools are to determine the reasons for absenteeism, assess the weaknesses and strengths of current practices and look at those promising practices that can be adopted to particular school cultures.
- 4.13.** These reviews highlight the importance of **identifying the needs of the individual child**, thus the need for mechanisms that enable this to be done, including appropriate monitoring strategies that can flag an early warning of a child ‘at risk’ of high rates of absenteeism or early school leaving. Morris and Rutt (2005), in an analysis of authorised and unauthorised³¹ absences of over 100,000 young people in post-primary education in inner-city areas in England over a three-year period, found that over half of the incidents of unauthorised absence (including truancy) were accounted for by just 2% of the pupils. While there was a higher prevalence of such poor attendance amongst the more disadvantaged children (those eligible for Free School Meals) and amongst children in low-performing schools, children with special educational needs were also disproportionately represented amongst those with high levels of truancy.
- 4.14.** Of critical importance, however, the authors also found a significant association between absence rates (both truancy and parentally condoned absence) and school attainment. Even when they included pupil and school level characteristics in the statistical analysis³² (socio-economic disadvantage, special educational needs, pupil gender, school type and so forth) they found that higher than average levels of absence (whether these were authorised or unauthorised) were significantly associated with reduced attainment at ages 16 (the GCSE in England) and 13 (known as Key Stage 3) and poorer progress between age stages, with a particular impact on boys. The authors were careful to note that the analysis

31. In the UK, absence may be explained (child taken on family holiday) but be counted as unauthorised, in that the school does not grant permission for the child to be removed from school during the school day.

32. Morris and Rutt (2005) used hierarchical multiple regression techniques, specifically multilevel modelling and logistic multilevel modelling.

used could not indicate causality, only association. Nonetheless, since fewer than 10% of the young people in the study had no recorded incidences of absence, this could mean that many young people – not just truants – were underperforming in their school career.

- 4.15.** Alongside this need to identify the specific needs of the child is the need to **put in place the appropriate strategies and combination of strategies that will address the needs that have been identified**. As Maynard *et al.* (2009), in their systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions to increase attendance in the US, UK, Canada and Australia, indicated, however, no one type of intervention (in their study) could be identified as significantly more effective than any other. This was partly because of the heterogeneity in the outcomes of the 33 different programmes on which they focused, and the disagreement over the magnitude of any effects found.³³
- 4.16.** Nonetheless, their view was that programmes that specifically sought to improve attendance (as compared to programmes within which improved attendance was one of a number of aims) appeared more likely to be successful. They also argued that some interventions, mainly those using behavioural and cognitive-behavioural strategies (especially with parent training), appeared to be more effective than other techniques. The implications of their review, therefore, are that promoting attendance is not something that can be done by a school in isolation, but needs to involve appropriate agencies within a policy environment that prioritises improving attendance.
- ## When should interventions take place?
- 4.17.** The question arises, therefore, as to how and when interventions to promote attendance (and in the longer term participation and retention) need to be implemented. The research we identified provides some indication of the ‘how’, but less clarity about the ‘when’ and the evidence base for the timing of interventions is relatively thin, with few studies effectively exploring this issue (see paragraph 2.19).
- 4.18.** There is, however, a general agreement that *early intervention* is both more successful and more cost-effective. A recent Irish study on early school leavers (Byrne and Smyth, 2010), for example, noted that disengagement or disinterest among young people who exit the secondary school system prematurely can begin as early as primary school. The gradual nature of the process means that there is potential for reducing the levels and incidence of early leaving by fostering attendance and targeting young people at risk early on. Railsback’s meta-analysis (2004) suggested that strategies that intervened early, offering personalised support and engagement with families and their primary-aged children, were particularly effective.
- 4.19.** There is less agreement as to exactly when such early intervention needs to take place. A recent Demos report (Sodha and Margo, 2010), for example, aimed to identify the earliest possible point of intervention to prevent disengagement. Their critique of early intervention strategies and programmes (such as Reading Recovery, Family Nurse Partnerships and Incredible Years) concluded that early screening and assessment of a child’s needs and circumstances appeared vital in targeting appropriate support to children and their families and that focusing on children’s core skills early on in life was essential to ensuring educational participation.
- 4.20.** Their appraisal did not, however, explore the most appropriate timing of interventions to address some of the wider issues of disengagement that can occur later in life (at transition points or at times of physical change or emotional stress). The focus of their report meant that they could not look at the timing of interventions needed to address, for example, growing disillusion with learning or the apparent limiting of aspirations that might take place because of a young person’s experiences of school, loss of self-confidence, or changing economic circumstances. The question remains to be answered, therefore,

33. Some of this diversity was due to factors associated with study design, participant groups and intervention characteristics.

whether the resilience and coping strategies imparted by early intervention programmes significantly reduce the impact of external factors on young people's longer-term engagement with learning or their propensity to leave school early.

4.21. A number of studies have emphasised transition points (or the lead up to transition) as significant times for interventions (Carmen *et al.*, 2011; Cowen and Burgess, 2009; Martin 2006). Previous reviews (Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Nevala *et al.*, 2011) have also emphasised the policy need to intervene early, both in terms of getting to children when they are young but at risk of dropping out or disengaging from education, as well as in regard to identifying, at an early stage, those children in danger of dropping out, and offering them the requisite support. Such early interventions, it is thought, may be particularly effective in addressing specific vulnerable groups such as those at risk of becoming NEET – not in education, employment or training (Learning and Skills Council England, 2009; Sodha and Margo, 2010).

4.22. In the following chapters, we look at the evidence for effective strategies, starting with a discussion of policy and legislative environments, informed by the Eurydice survey and Eurybase, as well as the research literature, within which all subsequent activities take place. As Dyson *et al.* (2002)³⁴ asserted in an international review of the effectiveness of school-level actions in promoting participation, the local and national policy environment can act either to support or to undermine the realisation of schools' inclusive values, hence its ability to promote educational participation. We then go on to explore the effectiveness of a range of school-based interventions (whether based on whole-school change or on targeting individuals) and on interventions that require external agency or community support.



5: The national policy environment

³⁴ Dyson A, Howes A, Roberts B (2002) *A systematic review of the effectiveness of school-level actions for promoting participation by all students* (EPPI-Centre Review, version 1.1*). In: Research Evidence in Education Library. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.

5.1. The national policy and programme interventions related to engagement (and, specifically, attendance) that we found through the literature review, and through the questions explored with the Eurydice Network, can be seen in a number of different forms, related to:

- the *imposition of sanctions* for non-attendance (the evidence from the Eurydice survey and from Eurybase shows that these sanctions were evident in at least 17 of the EU States, as well as in most of the non-EU countries for which we had research evidence)
- the *provision of financial support and incentives* to remain in education (these were used primarily for post-compulsory education, but data from the Eurydice Network indicates that this was also evident for younger pupils in some Eastern European countries, such as Poland)
- *changes to the curriculum* to allow young people, for example, to follow an alternative curriculum (often vocational) or to create more widely perceived relevance for particular groups (as in the Czech Republic)³⁵
- instituting additional *continuing professional development* (CPD) for teachers to improve their ability to work with young people in danger of disengaging
- developing *policies and programmes to support the development of inclusive values in schools* (this is also looked at more fully in paragraphs 6.12 to 6.17).

5.2. In this sub-section, we look at the research evidence for the relative effectiveness of these different forms of intervention.

The effectiveness of sanctions

5.3. Punitive sanctions for persistent non-attendance were reported in 17 of the 29 EU member states about which we had evidence from the Eurydice Network. In all cases, these sanctions were imposed on the parents (including prosecution, imprisonment and financial penalties) although additional sanctions (including exclusion or, as in Belgium,³⁶ the loss of financial support) were imposed on the children and young people in three countries.

5.4. It should be recognised, however, that such prosecution was often related to cases of non-registration; in other words, parents were not making adequate and appropriate provision for their child's education. This had a number of different causes, varying from perceived difficulties in rural access, negative attitudes to education and parental encouragement to leave school early to earn a living (Malta withholds work permits until young people are aged 16 in order to prevent early school leaving). Survey responses from the member states rarely indicated whether these strategies had proved effective in improving attendance, although the wide range of additional policy strategies identified by some countries (such as Spain) suggest that prosecution was not necessarily seen as the only route to improve attendance.

5.5. Indeed, the wider research evidence provided little support for the use of sanctions and penalties as the sole strategy in addressing poor attendance and drop-out. Railsback (2004), as part of her review of US evaluative evidence, looked at the effectiveness of truancy prevention programmes, and found that, while collaboration between the justice system, schools and the local community was often effective in improving attendance, a purely punitive approach, in which juvenile justice court systems imposed sanctions for truancy, was ineffective. Courts, she concluded, should be used as a last resort, while

35. Information on the Czech Republic from Eurydice.

36. In Belgium, pupils who have not been registered for two consecutive school years or who persistently engage in truancy can lose their school allowance during the second year.

punishments were the least effective method of encouraging children back to school, especially the more vulnerable groups, such as those from minority ethnic groups.

5.6. Where problems of attendance and drop-out are more entrenched, there is evidence that punitive measures may be less effective. In order to look at the impact of sanctions on attendance in England, Crowther and Kendal (2010) reviewed national patterns of usage of four main parental responsibility measures and the corresponding patterns of attendance and exclusions in more than half (56%) of the local authorities in the country. The parental responsibility measures were a mix of:

- voluntary arrangements – these were parenting contracts, which were voluntary, written agreements between a parent and either a school or the local authority, and provided support to the parent
- punitive measures – these included:
 - penalty notices (that is, nominal fines) used as an alternative to court action against parents who failed to ensure their child's regular attendance or where children who had been excluded from school were found in a public place
 - parenting orders, which imposed a requirement on parents to attend a parenting course/ counselling for three months.
- case management interventions, specifically Fast Track, a non-statutory, time-focused attendance intervention, specifying clear actions for improvement. These involved intensive engagement between a case worker, the child and the family, to address, for instance, barriers to attendance and to improve engagement. Where a pupil's school attendance continued to be an issue, prosecution procedures were initiated.

5.7. These measures were introduced by the UK Government in 2004 to encourage parents to engage with schools and local authorities in addressing their children's attendance and behavioural issues. Alongside the review of administrative data, the research team conducted qualitative research in 10 of the then 152 local authorities and 40 schools, interviewing local authority personnel, teachers, parents and pupils.

5.8. The authors found that whilst penalty notices had some short-term effects on attendances, **they were not sustained in the longer term**. They were also less effective when attendance issues were more entrenched and there were underlying family issues. The findings for the outcomes of parental prosecutions of children with severe attendance issues were the same – a short-term, non-sustained impact. Instead, the research concluded that attendance and behaviour measures (the case management interventions working with families and children) were more effective – and most effective when used at the primary school level or as a form of early intervention in addressing emerging problems of poor attendance or behaviour. Here *fear of prosecution* appeared to be a significant motivator amongst children and families where attendance issues had not yet become ingrained.

5.9. These studies highlight the need to look both at the **timing of interventions** (implementing strategies *before* attendance issues become severe) and at the evidence of **pupil and student outcomes** as well as gathering the **perceptions of practitioners**, which can often be more positive about the effectiveness of punitive measures than the evidence suggests. This was particularly evident from one study, which incorporated comprehensive data on truancy notices and individual pupil absence data from all 150 extant English local authorities³⁷ and a survey of education welfare managers within those authorities. Zhang (2007), measuring the correlation between the likelihood of penalty notices and changes in absence rates between 2004 and 2005 in these authorities, found that, although practitioners

37. Additional unitary authorities have been created since 2005, with the separation of Cheshire and Warrington into three authorities, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Cheshire and Warrington.

believed that penalty notices were effective, there was no evidence to suggest that levels of overall pupil absences had been affected by the likelihood of officers to issue penalty notices.

5.10. In summary, there is little evidence that punitive legislative approaches alone are effective as a means of improving school attendance. Of more value, perhaps, are those approaches that seek to support parents in motivating their child to go to school, without creating a combative or adversarial approach. The multi-agency, family-focused approach reported by Williams and Pritchard (2006) may suggest one way forward (see paragraph 7.7).

The effectiveness of financial support and incentives

5.11. Financial incentives from governments tend to be used more to encourage young people to progress in learning beyond the period of compulsory education (the definition of which varies according to age, grade completion or the achievement of a minimum level of qualification). As such, we found **no evaluative evidence about their impact** on primary or post-primary settings, other than on their impact in supporting teenage mothers (a number of whom would not have completed compulsory education before becoming pregnant). Most of the discussion in this sub-section, therefore, relates to the impact of incentives on reducing early school leaving (that is, on promoting participation and retention) rather than on improving attendance.

5.12. The evidence suggests that **targeted and appropriate financial support** can provide the incentives for enabling sustained participation in education and training for those at risk of dropping out, or who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). This argument has been supported to some extent by the success of the UK Government's Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).³⁸ This scheme, aimed at teenagers from low-income households, provided weekly payments³⁹ to young people who took part in at least 12 hours of guided learning in a college of further education, sixth form college or school, or at least 16 hours of guided learning on an entry to employment (work-based learning) course. A lack of attendance led to direct financial consequences, with removal of the EMA for the whole week (or weeks) during which any non-attendance took place.

5.13. A large-scale longitudinal cohort study of the pilots (Middleton *et al.* 2005), which was carried out in 10 of the 15 EMA pilot areas and 11 matched control areas (with some 7,500 young people involved in Wave 1 of the analysis), concluded that EMA **significantly increased participation** in full-time education among eligible 16 and 17 year olds (by 5.9 percentage points), especially for young men and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A later analysis (Chowdhary *et al.*, IFS, 2007) used multivariate regression modelling to assess the impact of the EMA pilots on participation and attainment in post-compulsory education. It matched data from large, national administrative datasets (the National Pupil Database for those who remained in school post-16 and Individual Learner Record) for two different cohorts of state school pupils in Year 11, linking 2001-02 data with data from 2003-04. It reported statistically significant, positive differences in participation among EMA recipients in pilot areas, compared to those in control areas. While these levels were lower than those found in the earlier study (partly because the earlier study was able to control more accurately for parental financial circumstances), the differences were still positive and included a number of positive outcomes for sub-groups that could not be identified by the earlier study in which some sub-groups were too small for rigorous assessment.

38. The EMA, introduced under the Labour administration, was cancelled in England in October 2010 as part of a programme of budget cuts, and has been replaced by a bursary for those from more disadvantaged households. Following a review, the EMA scheme continues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

39. These varied from £10 to £30 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, depending upon parental income (albeit with more generous income thresholds in Wales and Northern Ireland) and was at a flat rate of £30 in Scotland.

5.14. A similar initiative, Activity Agreement Pilots (AAP), was funded by the UK Government (through the then Department for Children, Schools and Families) to support and encourage disengaged 16-17 year olds (NEETS) back into learning, training or employment by giving them a weekly allowance in return for agreeing to an activity plan and completing specific activities. These could include activities to promote skills development or personal development, or activities related to work experience, for example. The most recent evaluation of the Pilots (Maguire *et al.*, 2010) carried out a comprehensive evaluation with between five and eight longitudinal implementation studies in every pilot area (a total of 36 cases), as well as 58 face to face interviews with young people and 35 interviews with managers and delivery staff, and analyses of administrative datasets and of student destinations outcomes. It reported that AAP supported young people, offered them choices and enhanced their confidence and motivation in learning.

5.15. The financial incentive, which differed from the EMA in that it was not associated with an accredited guided learning course in college, was not the only (or even the primary) motivating factor, however. The **advisor-broker support** offered as part of the Pilots was considered of particular value by young people who were interviewed in the evaluation, alongside the financial incentive and the activities that challenged and rewarded them. Indeed, for some vulnerable groups, the blanket financial incentives appeared to have little effect. As an intervention, the AAP led to enhanced self-images, but **was not successful as a curative approach to retention**. Most of those participating failed to re-enter education or training following the AAP, possibly because the intervention (of 20 weeks) may simply not have been long enough to address the complex barriers they faced to education or training.

5.16. The implications of the findings from the EMA study and the AAP study are that financial incentives a) need to be specified in ways that enable them to be used effectively by all of those in the target group and b) may not work in isolation.

- EMAs appear to have been designed primarily to meet the needs of young people who were in disadvantaged circumstances but who were motivated to learn and to engage in learning. For young people in more disrupted circumstances, the EMA appears to have been less effective. As a Barnardos' report on strategies to re-engage teenage mothers found, for example, the EMA appeared to have a built-in disincentive to participate; should young mothers miss one day of education (making clinic visits for immunisations and check-ups for their babies, for example), they would lose the whole week's allowance (Evans and Slowley, 2010).
- The financial support under AAP led to positive outcomes only when young people's needs (whether personal or skills-based) were also met effectively.

5.17. Equally, while financial incentives may promote better attendance, they are not always associated with improvements in academic attainment or progression to further education. A US 'What Works' Clearinghouse Report (IES, 2006) reviewed two separate randomised control trials studies on the effectiveness of financial incentives for teen parents: the evaluations of the Ohio Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP), and the California Cal-Learn Program. The two programmes intended to encourage enrolment, attendance and school completion as a means of increasing employment and earnings, and reducing welfare dependence.

- Ohio's LEAP programme offered \$62 bonuses for monthly attendance and school year completion – the same amount as monthly sanctions for non-attendance – and \$200 for high school completion. Some 2,967 were randomly assigned to treatment or control groups at the start of the study and 913 responded to a survey issued three years after random assignment (an overall 31% follow-up response rate).
- The Cal-Learn programme decreased family support (\$50 or \$100) if course grades dropped and provided a \$500 award for high school completion or GED receipt. A total of 4,859 teens in four

California counties were randomly assigned to research groups. Of those teens, 2,682 responded to the first survey (13 months after they entered the programme). After the survey, the study excluded sample members who had lost custody of their children, moved to a non-research county or out of state, left welfare, or did not receive welfare for at least six months, resulting in a sample of 2,156. The study administered a second survey about 26 months after programme entry, with 1,562 respondents (an overall 32% follow-up response rate).

5.18. The evaluations of the two programmes found that the incentives (which were add-ons to state welfare grants, including allowances, bonuses and sanctions) had positive effects on staying in school (that is, on attendance) for young people, but not on medium and longer-term progression and completion.

The effectiveness of curricular-based strategies

5.19. Interventions that focus on providing curriculum-based support are deemed as particularly effective when the education system as a whole, and schools in particular, are able to offer a range of **alternative options as a solution**: a flexible curriculum, along with vocational education options, and links with further education providers and work-related settings to help students find suitable learning pathways. The relative effectiveness of these approaches may depend on where pupils are on the disengagement spectrum, however. A number of European studies (Steedman and Stoney, 2004 and Kendall and Kinder, 2005) suggest that:

- for those that had been permanently excluded, or had dropped out of education, alternative education initiatives such as vocational courses based in college or an alternative curriculum have proven to be effective
- for those that are at risk of becoming disengaged, provision of a flexible, diversified curriculum, offering courses that enhance skills of low achievers, rather than a subject-based approach, would work better, as would work-related learning and provision of out-of-school activities.

5.20. Curriculum options and appropriate support could be even more essential for specific vulnerable groups. In 2009, a UK-based Learning and Skills Council report (2009) focused on identifying effective practices in raising young people's aspirations. It drew its conclusions from a review of available research evidence, stakeholder interviews, and a number of case studies which included:

- an enterprise and entrepreneurship programme
- a teenage pregnancy support programme
- a programme aimed at raising aspirations for improving progression to higher education
- a brokerage service for young people to help them learn about the financial sector
- the use of creative approaches to CPD for teachers.

5.21. The report suggested that it was necessary to be aware of the **specific needs** of groups within the NEET category and to provide for them, rather than regarding all young people in this category as having the same requirements. They suggested that provision could include an alternative offer to mainstream schooling, as well as the provision of impartial and realistic Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) based on trust and respect.

5.22. This recognition of need was also central to the recommendations of the Barnardos' study on teenage mothers. Evans and Slowley (2010) recommended flexible learning options, such as flexible start dates,

programmes tailored to meet young people's needs, taster courses and accredited parenting courses to motivate and boost the confidence of previously disengaged young women. Similarly, in a DfE report on improving the outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, Wilkin *et al.* (2010) identified several local strategies at school level reported by teachers and school leadership teams. These included:

- the provision of dedicated support for attendance
- close contact and key worker roles that aim at building trust with parents and families
- curriculum support for secondary teachers
- pupil-tracking measures
- adopting a more flexible approach to the curriculum to help Traveller children engage and participate more in learning.

5.23. Drawing on information from a longitudinal large-scale mixed methods study (conducted between 2007 and 2010) the authors concluded that the relevance of school can be communicated to these pupils by determining their need and curriculum interests, and then offering individualised and accessible activities and curriculum content (such as an enterprise-related curriculum), thereby ensuring their engagement with education.

The effectiveness of targeting teacher education/teacher training

5.24. No studies in our review looked directly at the measurable impact of training or educating teachers to institute practices to improve attendance. Nonetheless, and as we will discuss in the following subsection, the research evidence suggests that there may be a need to ensure that teachers are equipped to:

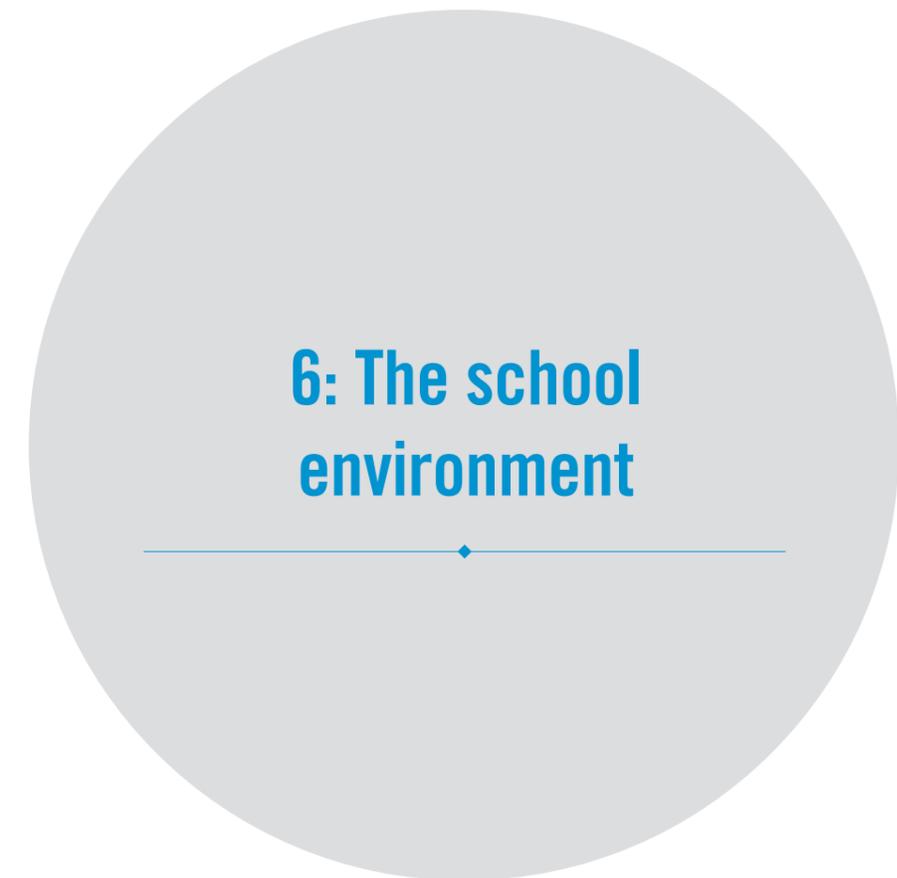
- develop effective teacher-pupil relationships by assigning teachers specific roles in liaising with pupils and families (e.g., Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.*, 2006)
- promote an atmosphere of achievement and expectation, through developing an overall positive school ethos (e.g., Nevala *et al.*, 2011)
- understand pupils' learning and other (social, emotional, behavioural) needs through design of modified classroom activities according to student interest, ability and motivation (e.g., Irvin, 2007)
- promote pupil self-esteem and confidence by offering a personalised programme (e.g., Cowen and Burgess, 2009)
- implement supportive curricula via creative approaches to CPD (e.g., Hallam *et al.*, 2006)
- work effectively with agencies outside the school (e.g., Kendall and Kinder, 2005).

5.25. In some EU countries (such as Germany, where those in training may be examined on the sociological aspects of school education as well as on educational theory, educational and civil service legislation and school administration) there is an emphasis on teacher training as an integral element of improving pupil attendance, although this was not reported as a central facet by other countries responding to the Eurydice Network question.

The effectiveness of policies to support the development of inclusive values in schools

- 5.26.** In the research we reviewed, it was clear that countries conceptualised inclusive values in different ways. In some countries, the concept of inclusion focused primarily on **social inclusion** (with an emphasis on making education accessible to those in disadvantaged or deprived circumstances), in others it related specifically to the strategies related to including young people with **special educational needs** or additional needs in mainstream education. For this review we took a broader view: those values that **enabled all young people** (regardless of need, socio-economic circumstances, learning preferences, aptitudes or aspirations) **to access the curriculum**. As Voncken (2010) identified, this focus on children and young people is evident in a number of European states, including the Netherlands. There the policy of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science focuses on collaborative strategies between the region and the school to identify the needs of the individual pupil, rather than the needs of the school, in order to reduce early school leaving.
- 5.27.** We also identified a number of national policies that had been established to enable schools to develop inclusive values, specifically in the context of improving attendance and engagement or reducing early school leaving. In some cases, these focused on ensuring flexibility in the curriculum, in others on the development of personalised learning programmes (such as the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, aimed at 14- to 16-year-old learners in danger of disengaging in England) and in others on strategies to enhance relationships between pupils, parents and teachers in schools.
- 5.28.** These various policies and programmes related to access and inclusion are explored in more detail in the following chapter, which looks more closely at interventions linked to the school environment.⁴⁰

⁴⁰. Although not included as part of this review per se, there is a significant body of work in this field, with much of it funded under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme framework for the Economic and Social Research Council between 2000 and 2003. See the wide range of outputs from the study 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools' <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/Grants/L139251001/read>



- 6.1.** The impact of national policies on the creation of a supportive and positive school environment was emphasised in a recent literature review (Nevala et al., 2011) of European national policies to address early school leaving. Legislation in Ireland (Section 10 (1b) of the Irish Education Welfare Act, 2000) specifically refers to promoting and fostering ‘*an environment that encourages children to attend school and participate fully in the life of the school.*’ Approaches adopted by EU countries included strategic-level responses (including better national information and monitoring), preventative strategies (including targeted approaches), and reintegration strategies (including more holistic practices to engage with at-risk pupils, transitional classes and second chance schools, and offers of informal and practical learning options).
- 6.2.** We explored some of the strategic-level responses in the previous chapter. In this chapter we focus primarily on the preventative strategies, with some consideration of re-integrative strategies in terms of different learning options. Dyson *et al.* (2010), in a recent literature review, noted that the success of school-based interventions depended on implementing programmes in the context of a whole-school environment that supported social and emotional skills, focused on preventing difficulties and integrated targeted interventions into more general approaches. They also advocated involving parents in programmes. Elements of these success factors are evident in a number of the interventions we reviewed, though few school-based interventions were holistic in their approach.
- 6.3.** We focus, therefore, on those aspects that appear to support the development of supportive and positive school environments, which previous reviews indicate is a central facet of effective practice in promoting participation, attendance and retention (Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Lamb and Rice, 2008; Lehr, 2004; and Railsback, 2004).
- 6.4.** It is apparent that many of the contributory factors for such environments relate to understanding and supporting pupil needs, promoting strong pupil-teacher relationships and setting high expectations. In summary, the evidence suggests that creating a strong school ethos that can make a positive difference to pupils who are at risk of becoming disengaged includes:
- building a general ethos of achievement and high expectations
 - recognising the pupil voice, involving pupils in curriculum design and so actively engaging pupils in their own learning
 - policies and curricula that promote the inclusion and emotional well-being of pupils
 - taking account of relevant contextual characteristics
 - embedding strong teacher-pupil relationships.
- 6.5.** We explore the evidence for each of these elements in the sub-sections that follow.

Building an ethos of achievement and high expectations

- 6.6.** The research literature on the correlates of effective schools is extensive and an exploration of the elements that lead to both high expectations and high achievement was largely outwith the scope of this review. Nonetheless, this wider research literature suggests that there is a balance to be struck between the disincentive that a ‘high stakes’ testing environment can be for those young people whose levels of attainment are low (Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2002)⁴¹ and creating an environment in which teachers’ expectations of pupils leads to higher achievement and a positive attitude to learning (Steedman and Stoney, 2004).

41. Harlen W and Deakin Crick R (2002) *A Systematic Review of the Impact of Summative Assessment and Tests on Students’ Motivation for Learning*. London: Institute of Education, Social Science Research Unit EPPI-Centre.

- 6.7.** In our exploration of interventions that promoted participation, attendance and retention, we found some promising practice in a strategy that focused on incorporating **children’s rights education** into the curriculum. Covell (2010), for example, tested the hypothesis that pupils are more engaged when they are in schools that respect children’s rights, by assessing whether pupils in such schools demonstrated higher levels of engagement than those in traditional schools.
- 6.8.** Covell’s research focused on a specific initiative, the Rights, Respect and Responsibility initiative (RRR), which is a model of children’s rights education implemented in England’s Hampshire education authority’s infant and primary schools. It incorporates specific children’s rights information across the curriculum and provides a framework for all school policies and practices. Rights form the basis of school regulation, mission statements, school and classroom codes of conduct and student activities.
- 6.9.** Using a bespoke research tool (the Young Students’ Engagement in School Scale), in 18 schools, to assess 1,289 young people’s perspective of the climate of the school, interpersonal harmony, their academic orientation and their participation, Covell found that nine- to 11-year-olds in schools that fully implemented the RRR initiative scored more highly on all dimensions (other than academic orientation) than their peers. The author concluded that rights-based schooling increased children’s enjoyment of school, their self-esteem and motivation.

Recognising the pupil voice

- 6.10.** Respecting and valuing pupils’ opinions and giving them control over their learning environment was one of the elements identified by Kendall and Kinder (2005) as contributing to participation and retention in a number of countries, including the Netherlands and the UK. Much of the evidence on the impact of strategies to promote the pupil voice, however, including MacBeath *et al.*, 2001;⁴² Pollard *et al.*, 2000;⁴³ and Ruddock and Flutter, 2000,⁴⁴ pre-dates the parameters of the current study and does not focus specifically on their impact on attendance or retention. Evidence of promising interventions to enable young people to gain more control over their learning at school level is limited and largely draws on small-scale qualitative investigative studies (for example, Riley *et al.*, 2006),⁴⁵ rather than evaluations of interventions *per se*. Even so, the indications are that such strategies may have a role to play in encouraging greater levels of pupil engagement in learning.
- 6.11.** In an Australian study of a range of classroom strategies to facilitate student engagement, conducted using a phenomenographic approach by Irvin in 2007, the author concluded that, based on 20 teachers’ reports, collaborating with students to jointly create a curriculum appropriate for them to develop their learning was both the most complex and fruitful way of facilitating engagement. In comparison with more prescriptive strategies (such as prescribing activities and discipline so that pupils participate and classroom order is maintained), or tailored but teacher-directed strategies (modifying activities to cater for student interest and motivation), it was found that when students put significant inputs into their own learning, and so can take due ownership of it, they engaged more effectively.

42. MacBeath J, Myers K and Demetriou H (2001) ‘Supporting teachers in consulting pupils about aspects of teaching and learning, and evaluating impact’, *Forum*, 43 (2) 78-82.

43. Pollard A and Triggs B with Broadfoot P, McNess E and Osborn M (2000) *What Pupils Say: Changing Policy and Practice in the Primary School*. London: Routledge Press.

44. Ruddock J and Flutter J (2000) ‘Pupil participation and pupil perspective: Carving a new order of experience’. *Cambridge Journal of Educational Change*, 30 (10) 75-89.

45. Riley K K, Ellis S, Weinstock, W, Tarrant, T and Hallmond S (2006) ‘Re-engaging disaffected pupils in learning: Insights for policy and practice’ *Improving Schools* (9) 1.

Promoting inclusion and emotional well-being

- 6.12.** It is not clear how many EU member states have implemented curricula to promote positive social and emotional health as a means of promoting better attendance, although Finland, in their Eurydice response, specifically identified activities (with multi-professional teams) to strengthen pupils' motivation to study and to improve their life control as a whole. Nonetheless, there is a body of research evidence that suggests that interventions that improve motivation, address behaviours and promote positive self-image are promising in promoting participation and retention.
- 6.13.** The evidence we explored suggests that strategies that target the social, emotional and behavioural aspects of learning amongst pupils often prove promising in achieving enhanced and sustained engagement in education, resulting in better attendance and retention amongst pupils. Dyson *et al.* (2010), in a recent literature review, noted that the success of school-based interventions depended on:
- implementing programmes in the context of a whole-school environment that supports social and emotional skills
 - taking a universal approach that focuses on preventing difficulties
 - integrating targeted interventions into more general approaches
 - involving parents in programmes.
- 6.14.** Elements of these success factors are evident in a number of the interventions we reviewed, though few interventions addressed all of these points. A UK-based nationally guided personalised programme for those 14- to 16-year-old learners at risk of disengagement, the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, worked with schools and families and adopted a child, family and pedagogical focus. The programme, which included a work-focused component delivered in a range of environments, supported approximately 15,000 pupils in 2007/08. It was aimed at pupils that were under-achieving, had poor attendance levels and exhibited behavioural issues, and were likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and at risk of being NEET. An evaluation of the programme (Cowen and Burgess, 2009) found that it led to a positive experience for most pupils and contributed to improvements in engagement with learning and building self-confidence and self-esteem, and achievement of more positive first destinations.
- 6.15.** However, there are indications that they may work better **in conjunction with other school-based strategies**. The Primary Behaviour and Attendance Strategy Pilot, for example, was implemented in 25 local authorities in England between 2003 and 2005 with the aim of allowing schools to access high-quality CPD, develop and test models of local authority support, trial curriculum materials that develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, and implement small group interventions for children needing additional help, in addressing improvements in attendance, behaviour and achievement. An evaluation of the Pilot in England (Hallam *et al.*, 2006) found that the largest decrease in unauthorised absences was seen in schools that had implemented the *full range* of the Pilot's strategies. These included curriculum materials on the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL), a school improvement strand and small group interventions. Schools that left out the SEAL programme generally saw lower levels of improvement, suggesting that a programme that helped teachers to understand their pupils better and enhanced their confidence in their interactions with pupils led them to approach behaviour incidents in a more thoughtful way, thus reducing incidences of poor behaviour and of non-attendance.
- 6.16.** Furthermore, programmes and policies may need to be specifically designed with the ultimate aim of enhancing pupil motivation and connectedness to school:

6.17. A community-based pilot programme – 'Rock Up' – targeted at young Australian students, aimed both to identify the risk factors of disengagement and to assist students in their development of well-being, both in and out of school. 'Rock Up' worked with students as they approached the transition from primary to post-primary school. The children took part in individual or group activities designed to focus on their well-being and readiness for secondary schools. A three-wave questionnaire completed by teachers asked about their absence, and social, emotional and behavioural characteristics. The study (Carmen *et al.*, 2011) found positive differences between pre- and post-programme waves, and the majority of feedback reported by students, teachers and parents was positive, with students reporting more resilience and confidence.

- An evaluation of two distinct intervention programmes in Australia designed specifically to enhance student motivation and engagement, based on theoretical understanding and multidimensional conceptualisations of motivation, found that both yielded significant benefits when compared to the control group of pupils (Martin, 2006). The first was a self-completion workbook programme, which included activities that targeted motivation and engagement and exercises designed to encourage reflection. The second was a workshop specifically designed to encourage motivation amongst a group of at-risk boys and girls. The findings suggested that interventions based on an understanding both of motivational theory and the characteristics of the cohorts may have more success than less targeted strategies.
- An evaluation of a science-based after-school programme in the US (Grolnick *et al.*, 2007) was designed to facilitate motivation in middle school pupils from urban and low-income households, and also to develop skills and attitudes applicable to the wider school context. Forty-five pairs of students were individually matched on a number of personal characteristics and randomly assigned to either the 15-week programme (which included in-school and after-school activities) or a control group (who took part in similar, but less intensive activities, during school hours alone). Participants in the programme were known as 'investigators' and were tasked additionally with discovering, practising, and acquiring the skills of scientific investigation. It was a 'hands-on' approach involving group discussions, small group experimentation and community-building activities. All 90 students completed questionnaires on motivation, attitudes and classroom engagement before and after the programme. The results of the quasi-experimental research in this one school suggested that the programme had positive effects on participants' motivation, engagement in school and learning goals, but the reliability of some of the measures used make replicability of the study challenging.

6.18. The issue common to both the two Australian studies and the US study, however, is that the longer-term outcome of the interventions is not clear. The numbers in every case were small and, in the case of both the workbook and workshop programmes, the self-reporting evaluation element of the interventions means that there is a danger that pupils, having gone through the programme, could identify the responses that might be anticipated or hoped for by those administering the programme (a danger, it must be acknowledged, that was recognised by the author).

Taking account of relevant contextual characteristics for pupils

6.19. Many of the recent measures to improve engagement suggested by the EU member states in their responses to the Eurydice questions tend to be based around instituting organisational changes (as in Spain, for example). Nonetheless, such changes are often framed with an emphasis on becoming aware of and meeting pupils' needs (whether for access to the curriculum, improving pupil interaction or for promoting pupil autonomy), for which there is a body of evidence suggesting that this may be an effective practice (Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Lamb and Rice, 2008; Lehr, 2004; and Railsback, 2004).

- 6.20.** The implication of this is that schools may need detailed monitoring information about their pupils (over and above their attendance and attainment profile) and be able to implement curriculum and intervention strategies that can be personalised to suit the needs of the student, as in the range of intervention and support programmes discussed above. This support may also need to be tailored to the needs of particular groups of pupils, whether to address the needs of teenage mothers in school, or the more complex needs of young people designated as ‘school refusers’ or school phobics, for instance.
- 6.21.** A small qualitative study to examine the educational experiences of a group of teenage mothers in one local authority in England (Vincent, 2009) reported particular differences in how schools responded to teenage pregnancy, and noted that effective schools (those that fostered good attendance and participation) were those that adopted a flexible approach to issues such as seating, school uniform and access, whilst adopting a ‘non-recognition’ of difference when it came to expectations around educational continuity, attendance and motivation.
- 6.22.** In evidence-based guidance to practitioners, Thambirajah *et al.* (2008) reflected the need to understand the wider factors that had led to school refusal. In addition to developing an awareness of these, the author suggested the need for flexibility in school responses to include strategies that involved:
- peers (such as support through buddy systems, peer mentoring involving volunteers, and a designated ‘circle of friends’)
 - teachers (including adult mentors)
 - flexible structural and operational arrangements, such as exemptions from lessons or a reduced timetable, or different options for break-times that did not involve the child in circumstances they found stressful.
- 6.23.** Thambirajah *et al.* suggested that these responses could be accompanied by behavioural strategies such as relaxation training and systematic desensitisation that might involve external agencies. In severe cases of school refusal, there was likely to be an additional need for the involvement of external agencies: in England this would most likely involve the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- 6.24.** There is also a need to understand the factors that motivate children and young people in the classroom and out-of-school environment. The issue of pupil motivation is complex, reflected in an extensive body of literature that we have not been able to review here. Nonetheless, previous research indicates variations both in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the ways in which young people work and the ways in which they make decisions. These factors vary from child to child (see, for example, the work on educational mindsets in Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2006)⁴⁶ and even from country to country. Diffey *et al.* (2001), for example, found that Canadian students were strongly motivated by instrumental factors such as test scores and the career advantages of being bi-lingual, factors that had little impact on their Scottish peers.⁴⁷ The latter group were far more strongly influenced by co-operative learning, a strategy that did not motivate the Canadian students.

Embedding strong teacher-pupil relationships

- 6.25.** While none of the countries responding to the Eurydice Network question reported this as central to their legislative approach, there is a solid body of research evidence to support the embedding of

46. Blenkinsop S., McCrone T., Wade P. and Morris M. (2006) *How Do Young People Make Choices at 14 and 16?* (DfES Research Report 773). London: DfES.

47. Diffey N, Morton L L, Wolfe A and Tuson J (2001) ‘Language learner motivation: comparing French class attitudes of Scottish and Canadian pupils’. *Scottish Educational Review*, 33 (2).

strong teacher-pupil relationships as a promising approach in addressing attendance and drop-out or early school leaving issues. These relationships may be general (related to the capacity of the whole-school environment to contribute to students’ psychological needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy) or specific (related to the development of supportive individual links, such as key workers, or staff mentors).

- 6.26.** Studies exploring the first of these two dimensions emphasised the need for schools to:

- increase opportunities for supportive relationships to emerge by establishing policies that ensure **more contact and continuity with teachers**. Green *et al.* (2008), in a US study exploring the engagement trajectories for 139 recently immigrant youth from Mexico and Central America (using longitudinal data), developed a ‘*support from adults and teachers scale*’ by identifying 10 items that assessed student perceptions about current levels of support. The author found that caring adults (all located within a range of public school settings across the Bay Area of San Francisco) could offer protection against vulnerable students’ academic disengagement and their presence was one of the best predictors of student engagement.
- **facilitate student relationships with both their peers and teachers**. Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.* (2006) examined how school fit (for example, structured, predictable school environments) mediated associations between student relationships with teachers and peers, and engagement at school, and could be used as resources to promote pupil engagement. The study, using structural equation modelling of data from 324 students (52% female) enrolled in Grades 10 and 11, found that academic engagement and achievement amongst adolescents in two high schools in Australia were supported by positive relationships at school and the match between the school and the student’s individual needs.

- 6.27.** Evidence for the second dimension (student-teacher relationships) emphasised the need for child-focused strategies and adult mentoring with a member of school staff, who also undertakes home/school liaison. These strategies were found to be beneficial for children who might be at risk of disengaging (Anderson *et al.*, 2004; Thambirajah *et al.*, 2008), for those requiring intensive support in re-engaging with school life (Kendall and Kinder, 2005), and for those from vulnerable groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils (Wilkin *et al.*, 2010).

- 6.28.** Strategies often included the designation of a **key worker** (a teacher or other member of the school staff) whose central role would be to engage with the pupil and their family, whilst liaising within the school and with external agencies.

- Anderson *et al.* (2004) explored the impact of Check and Connect, a US programme designed to promote student engagement with school through relationship building, problem solving and persistence implemented by monitors (members of staff who played the multiple roles of mentor, case manager and advocate). The programme involved checking and connecting with students, families and school staff. ‘*Checking*’ comprised assessment and regular evaluation of student engagement indicators such as attendance and academic progress by monitors. The ‘*Connect*’ component related to the personal links that monitors made with students, families and staff in implementing the model, which involved building relationships. The authors found that **closer, high-quality relationships** with monitors were associated with greater engagement of pupils in school.

- In a handbook for UK professionals in education, health and social care on the issue of school refusal and ways of intervening and supporting children who refuse school, Thambirajah *et al.* (2008) combined individual case studies of children and how they were supported with clinical perspectives and recent research on CAMHS. Based on these they sought to describe school refusal, suggest how to detect it, and indicate the supportive strategies and interventions needed

with pupils and parents. The authors recommended that a **nominated school key worker, who was an influential member of the school staff**, should be around to contribute to multi-agency planning and reviews, attend meetings and liaise with parents and representatives from other agencies. They should also keep an eye on the child's participation and approach to all aspects of school life, as well as attendance.

- This key worker approach was found to be especially effective for engaging with **vulnerable groups** such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in English schools (Wilkin *et al.* 2010). Here, a key individual in school (Education Welfare Officer) was instrumental in building positive relationships with pupils and their families, thus facilitating feelings of safety and trust.

6.29. While many of the strategies under review related to pupil-teacher relationships, **enhancing peer relationships** also seemed promising, as cited in a relatively small body of research: peer support and peer mentoring strategies, creating buddy systems and a circle of trust around those at risk of disengagement, to help overcome their fears and anxieties around school, were all cited in the literature as promising practice (Thambirajah *et al.*, 2008, Wilkin *et al.*, 2010).



7: The out-of-school community environment

- 7.1. In a recent review of research and practice that went beyond attendance and participation to look at narrowing the gap for learning and re-engaging children and young people (particularly those with additional needs) in education, Dyson *et al.* (2010) concluded that improving pupil resilience was unlikely to depend on any one type of intervention or on any particular service, but on a comprehensive strategy involving services working together. They found promising evidence that **integrated strategies** that take into account multiple factors at multiple levels can address a range of resilience factors and processes and lead to improvements in children's emotional well-being and social functioning; improvements in family functioning and circumstances; and improved community relationships and opportunities for local people.
- 7.2. The effective and promising support identified in relation to the out-of-school community environment ranged from direct support to pupils, to parent/carer support and community initiatives. In some cases, this external support overlapped with the legislative process (including the provision of financial incentives or through the courts), in others it overlapped with school provision, through multi-agency working or through the creation of alternative provision.
- 7.3. The strategies that appeared to be **most promising** in addressing disaffection and disengagement were **those that directed support to both pupils and their families**. Often, and as highlighted in a report to the Victorian Government in Australia (Lamb and Rice, 2008), the more effective programmes showed **connectedness** with the school, the student, the family and the community, and addressed both personal and practical issues around disengagement. This stresses the need to develop an understanding of the causes of poor attendance, truancy or drop-out. Thambirajah *et al.* (2008) place significant emphasis on working with parents to provide them with the requisite information about the nature of school refusal (for example), to agree a plan of action and to manage parental anxieties and worries.
- 7.4. Nevala *et al.* (2011) and Kendall and Kinder (2005) both highlighted the need for such multi-disciplinary approaches, drawing on international literature to demonstrate that mixed-staff teams, or collaboration with external stakeholders, meant that a full range of support needs of young people can be addressed. For such approaches to work effectively, however, communication and data sharing between agencies and the clarification of roles and responsibilities was imperative.
- 7.5. One point worth noting before exploring these findings, however, is that much of the research and policy documents we found tended to use terms such as multi-disciplinary, multi-agency, inter-agency, joint working and integrated services as though they were interchangeable. Strictly speaking, each term has a distinct meaning, though it is not always clear from the studies exactly which meaning was being applied. For example, there is a distinction to be made between multi-disciplinary and multi-agency, with the former referring to a range of different expertise (health, education, sociological or psychological, for instance) that can be found, on occasions, within a single agency. The latter (multi-agency) refers to a number of different agencies (each with their own emphasis) working collaboratively. In Ireland, the term inter-agency is often used in this way. A distinction can also be made (though, in practice, is rarely made in the literature) between multi-agency and joint agency, with the latter more correctly used to designate practice in which, while a number of agencies may be involved in working with a child or a family, they are not necessarily collaborating or sharing data. Integrated services, by contrast, reflect practice in which the services are no longer solely defined in terms of their professional expertise *per se*, but by their role in an intervention with a child or family.

Multi-agency strategies

- 7.6. A pilot project in the Republic of Ireland, commissioned by NEWB, was introduced to better articulate and standardise service practice of the Education Welfare Service and to focus more on the client journey. It involved 17 education welfare officers (EWO) and 79 schools in six pilot areas in order to implement a number of changes and new ways of working. Amongst these was a focus on stronger inter-agency collaboration with education support services and other agencies to ensure more effective use of skills and resources. An evaluation of the project (John Richards Associates, 2009) concluded that **structured inter-agency case planning** was the aspect that received strongest support from school principals.
- 7.7. The focus of the multi-agency work may vary, however. One UK-based study by Williams and Pritchard (2006) looked into 'breaking the cycle of educational alienation' by addressing parent-child conflicts. This study adopted a multi-professional approach that aimed to work from the premise that parent-child conflict has a negative impact on the child at school and so aimed to reduce or remove such conflict. A multi-agency committee set out a number of objectives for the three-year project, amongst them deploying a Project Social Worker who worked intensively with families and their children. Indeed, parental support was a central activity of the project team. The nature of the support was received extremely positively by pupils and their families, and encouraged increased and positive parental involvement in addressing their child's truancy and attendance.
- 7.8. The effectiveness of such multi-agency working was evaluated in a more rigorous way by Thomas *et al.* (2011), looking at the impact of a truancy prevention programme in the US. The Truancy Assessment and Service Centers' (TASC) intensive case management programme was aimed at elementary-aged students who had five or more unexcused absences in a single school year. It involved a case manager/social worker undertaking an assessment to decide if the child was high risk or low risk for continued truancy, based on referrals and risk information. For high-risk students, the case manager engaged with the family, which served the purpose of exploring familial factors in affecting truancy. Based on identified needs of the student and the family, the manager then worked with the family to develop a case management intervention plan. They also referred the client, where appropriate, to local services such as health and mental health care. Case managers then monitored the students for the rest of the year, with a minimum of monthly reviews of progress.
- 7.9. The research study examined the effectiveness of the TASC intervention as implemented in the State of Louisiana. Half of the 700 children identified as truants in the study received the intensive case-management intervention, with referral to education and social services, whilst the other half received a warning letter only. Thomas *et al.* (2011) recorded significantly more positive outcomes, including reduced truancy rates, amongst the treatment group that received the multi-agency case management than amongst the control group of children. Furthermore, the participants who were also referred to educational and social services were more likely to complete the programme and were more likely to show positive case outcomes than those that were not. This finding reflects the findings from the evaluation of parental responsibility measures in the UK, in which the evidence of positive outcomes from Fast Track (the case management approach) appeared more effective than less intensive or simply punitive measures.
- 7.10. The Neighbourhood Support Fund in England, which included both preventative and curative measures, relied on local responsiveness and co-operation in addressing the needs of (amongst others) young people aged 13 to 19 who were long-term non-attenders or truants. The strategies used by local voluntary community organisations, working with other agencies such as the youth service, social services and health and housing associations, achieved success in enabling some two-thirds of the 40,000 young people with which it was run to progress to further learning, training, or (for older

children) employment (Golden *et al.*, 2004, referenced in Kendall and Kinder, 2005). The 600 projects that were funded under the initiative offered a variety of approaches, but successful interventions:

- worked with youth workers and others who understood the target community and had credibility with the young people
- gave them choices and involved them in decision-making
- established mutual trust and positive relationships between young participants and the adults working with them
- provided ongoing support up to and beyond the point of re-engagement with learning.

Involving parents

7.11. One of the main challenges for multi-agency working identified in the research was how to engage parents fully in supporting better attendance. In Chapter 5, we looked at some of the policy approaches that had been implemented at national or regional and local level, including parental responsibility measures. The relative success of the various strategies we explored was dictated, in part, by the extent to which parents saw themselves as part of the solution to poor attendance. In cases where there were underlying family problems, the impact of measures (particularly punitive measures) tended to be limited and short term.

7.12. Some research has focused on looking at how best agencies can work with parents. The four-way typology developed by Dalziel and Henthorn (2005), for example, aimed to help professionals to more easily identify the level of parental involvement and so target the multi-agency or other support that may be needed to help tackle a child's poor attendance:

- Parents/carers who **try hard** to tackle poor attendance
- Parents/carers who describe themselves as **feeling powerless** to tackle poor attendance
- Parents/carers who appear to be **over-protective** or dependent on their child
- Parents/carers who are either **apathetic** about tackling poor attendance or who appear **not to engage** with the school or other support professionals.

7.13. Dalziel and Henthorn also suggested that there is a need to consider the ways in which parents can access information about ways to help improve their child's attendance. They advocated multi-agency and 'joined up' working *alongside* school-based support and initiatives.

7.14. In the following chapters, we summarise the findings of the study, look at the relevance of the findings in the Irish context and then identify the implications for future policy, research and data management.

8: In summary

8.1. The literature review and the call for European evidence has highlighted a range of effective, promising and ineffective interventions in relation to the participation, attendance and retention of children in formal education, although each comes with caveats. While the provision of targeted financial support to disadvantaged young people to remain in education appears effective, for example, there is evidence to suggest that such support is *most* effective for those who are already motivated to learn, but who are prevented from doing so by financial barriers. It does not appear to act as a motivator for those who have other barriers to engagement. As a strategy, therefore, it appears more effective as a preventative strategy (reducing the likelihood of early school leaving amongst some groups) than a curative strategy (re-engaging those already disengaged). Similarly, schools may do all they can to develop a supportive ethos (thus becoming potentially effective preventers of early school leaving), but if the curriculum to which they are working does not meet the needs of the young people they are trying to retain, developing that ethos alone may not be enough.

8.2. In exploring the international evidence, we have sought to meet the aims of the research through identifying:

- a number of **effective and promising interventions** and processes to address the participation, attendance and retention of children in education. While there was evidence that some individual strategies were promising in their ability to promote better attendance or participation (including behavioural programmes), the evidence was much stronger for the impact of integrated practice. Thus, *in schools*, effective practice *combined* the development of a supportive school ethos and a flexible and motivational curriculum with mechanisms that enabled early identification of pupil need, liaison with families and the wider community, and professional links with a range of appropriate agencies that could provide the support needed for the individuals and groups identified as at risk of early school leaving. In the *out-of-school* community environment, the most effective programmes also showed connectedness – with the school, the student, the family and the community, addressing both personal and practical issues for the young person.
- the **policies and/or supporting legislative frameworks** in other countries or jurisdictions that enable such interventions. Promising practice was observed where policy supported:
 - flexibility in the curriculum, particularly at post-primary level, including ease of transfer between academic and vocational subjects within schools, or a timetable that enabled pupils to follow a mixed curriculum
 - variations in the primary location of learning (such as workplaces or colleges of further education, in addition to school)
 - CPD for teachers
 - in-class support for teachers and pupils
 - access to curriculum materials for pupils with different needs or challenges
 - collaboration between the justice system, schools and the local community (for the purpose of promoting attendance, not for imposing sanctions).
- the **combination(s) of interventions** that yield the best outcomes for the child. Although it was clear that no single set of interventions would be effective for all children, a sequence of actions emerged that suggested some of the most effective ways in which this could be done, namely through:
 - identifying need – particularly becoming aware of the range of barriers to learning or participation that affected a child/young person (cognitive, social, physical, economic, emotional or other) or may lead to absenteeism
 - working with the child/young person (and the family, school, external agency, community, as appropriate) to find the most appropriate solution to help overcome these barriers – what

are the strengths and weaknesses of current provision and how might it need to be adapted?

- setting in place the support structures (at school or family level) that enabled these solutions to be implemented – these might be by making changes to the school culture; enabling access to an alternative curriculum (or axis of learning); providing access to a programme to promote resilience, self-esteem, confidence or preparedness for transition; setting up academic support (in the classroom or elsewhere); providing financial support to overcome transport or other economic barriers to learning.

8.3. The nature and quality of the evidence base, however, meant that we were less able to:

- provide a clear indication of the **scale and/or size of the improvement** in proven effective interventions and processes in formal education – few studies adopted an experimental design and, while some of those that did were able to demonstrate a moderate, positive impact on school attendance (at least in the short term), none recorded a high level of impact. Even where impact was quantified (such as the impact of targeted financial support), studies differed as to the scale of the impact and, on occasions, as to where the biggest impact was seen.
- assess the **costs and benefits** of effective or promising interventions and processes – the paucity of evidence for this aim of the study means that it has not been possible to provide a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the impact of interventions. While we sought to explore policies and practices that used the concept of ‘*spend to save*’, none of the studies we identified appeared to have adopted this particular approach, partly because the issue of non-attendance was conceptualised in very different ways in different countries and partly because few studies attempted to explore the counter-factual (what would have happened without the intervention). While some studies in the UK and the US sought to evaluate interventions designed to address the underlying causes of non-participation and poor attendance (with the hope of ensuring prevention rather than necessitating specific curative interventions), they did not then assess the net impact of these. In other words, while they identified an issue and put in place (or evaluated) a strategy to address the issue, the focus was on the gross outcomes (short-term improvement in attendance levels in the school or amongst a cohort of pupils) rather than in net gains to the system (improvement in attendance rates to levels associated with higher attainment and better progression, for example).
- identify the **most effective time** to make an intervention – this is partly to do with differences in international perceptions of the issue (countries variously focused more on pupil registration or on early school leaving than on attendance) and partly to do with a predominantly reactive rather than proactive approach to improving attendance. In other words, interventions were often designed to change behaviour (absenteeism, early school leaving, or disruptive behaviour), and so led to a focus on interventions at a particular stage in a child or young person’s school career, rather than on identifying the most appropriate time for an intervention that might have prevented that behaviour. While many studies (including Byrne and Smyth, 2010) talked about the need for early intervention (or, more accurately, earlier intervention), few sought to identify exactly when that time should be.

8.4. This review has identified strategies, legislative frameworks and processes that may lead to more effective targeting and support for children, young people and their schools to facilitate better engagement. The review also suggests, however, that the integration of services and delivery may be *more effective* than individual uncoordinated strategies. A system that supports schools to work with children, their families and the wider community seems to be more effective at reducing absence and early school leaving than a system that puts the onus on individual schools to raise their attendance levels to whatever benchmark or target figure is deemed acceptable.

8.5. **A number of these factors are already elements of the existing NEWB strategy.** In the following chapter, therefore, we summarise the implications for policy and for practice.

9: Going forward

9.1. The issues of school attendance, participation and retention present themselves in different ways across Europe and more widely. In some countries, particularly some of those in Eastern Europe, the issues seem to be more around ensuring that pupils are registered for school than about evaluating the attendance and participation of those who are duly registered. For others, the concern appears to be more about preventing (or redressing) early school leaving than about preventing or curing poor attendance, a concern exacerbated by the current global economic downturn. In a number of countries (and in various states in the US), the focus is more on ensuring provision for different communities – whether indigenous or new migrants – amongst whom school attendance is seen to be problematic.

9.2. Despite these variations in emphases, the findings from the current study have direct relevance to the Irish context, since they highlight the need to:

- obtain **reliable evidence** on pupil attendance, participation and retention that can be tracked and interrogated to develop better insights into which pupils are most likely to have poor attendance – and why. NEWB already focuses on providing support to groups whose very poor attendance suggests they may be in danger of leaving school early; the challenge will be to identify such pupils at an earlier stage.
- develop a range of strategies to address the **different needs** so identified – the strategies currently in place through the HSCL, the SCP and the Education Welfare Service (as well as those that were in place in the now-abolished Visiting Teachers Service to Travellers) provide support to specific communities and groups of children; the challenge is also to meet the needs of children and young people with less immediate critical needs, but whose intermittent low-level absence means that they may not benefit from their educational experience to achieve their full potential in school.
- establish effective **whole-school policies** to provide an overarching support framework within which teachers, pupils, parents and external agencies can work effectively and efficiently in improving attendance, promoting participation and ensuring retention.

9.3. In developing its work, NEWB has focused on three guiding principles: **strengthening prevention** (working with school communities) **strengthening teamwork** (looking at how to secure the best outcomes for individual children) and **strengthening the network of support** (making strong links with other support services within education and in the wider social support services). The findings from the review support this approach, additionally suggesting that strengthening prevention benefits from exploring curricula and working closely with parents, as well as with schools and other agencies. The challenge comes in needing to develop, fund and structure a long-term strategy, targeting work on areas and activities that will have a longer-term positive impact (an ‘invest to save’ strategy), alongside addressing some of the more acute problems of non-attendance, providing targeted support for those who need it most.

Implications for future policy

9.4. The first implication of this review and call for evidence is the need to develop, first, a detailed understanding of the **nature and type of pupil absence** in Ireland. Poor attendance may be a symptom of current and future poor engagement and, ultimately, of poor retention. It may, however, be a symptom of deeper underlying issues in the school environment, the home environment, or the child’s emotional or mental health that need to be addressed before individual pupil attendance can improve. Without an understanding of the causes as well as the symptoms, there is a danger that interventions (however promising they may have been found to be in previous studies) may prove ineffective because they have been implemented with the wrong group of people and/or at the wrong

time. The suggestions for future policy that we make here arise out of the findings from this review and are:

- To explore the ways in which **individual pupil data** could be collated and explored *more effectively* at school, county or national level to provide insights into the characteristics of pupil attendance, absence and retention. The Education Welfare Act, 2000, referred in Section 10 (1c) to a need to look more closely into the reasons for non-attendance; the research suggests that pupil-level information is needed to facilitate this. Clearly, there are complex issues of data protection here and the development of any such pupil-level database would need to consider the legal and ethical implications of recording, collating and analysing such data. Access to such data would, however:
 - facilitate the analysis and interrogation of data to provide information for policy makers on the pupils where more intensive support work might be needed
 - provide information on the different types of pupils with poor attendance, facilitating better targeting of intervention strategies
 - provide information on the schools within which there might be different patterns of poor attendance (amongst different groups of pupils or demonstrating seasonal or other variation), which might help in identifying where schools may need more support in promoting inclusion for all pupils (in the broader sense of inclusion defined by Booth *et al.*, 2000)
 - provide clearer insights into the pupils who do not progress in formal education, in order to help identify alternative progression pathways.
- To provide **guidance to schools** on how best to monitor pupil attendance. As a pre-requisite to this, there is a need to develop a shared understanding and agreement as to what constitutes absence from school and what absence, if any, could be **regarded as acceptable**. While all children may have periods of absence through illness or through dental or hospital visits, the current differentiation (*explained/not explained*) may not be sufficiently nuanced to identify children and young people for whom parents have supplied an explanation of non-attendance, but whose non-attendance may, even so, not be acceptable in an educational sense. Schools need to be alert to the early warning signs of potential disengagement or early school leaving, which may not emerge immediately as non-attendance but manifest itself as, for example, late arrival in school or in lessons, changes in attitude or behaviour in classrooms or around the school, and emotional or cognitive withdrawal in lessons.
- To provide **advice and guidance to schools** as to the **most effective strategies** to support pupils whose behaviour or attendance record indicates the likelihood of non-attendance becoming more systemic and long-term or lead to lack of participation and retention and thus early school leaving. These support strategies need to be tailored to support children with different needs. As Morris and Pullen indicated in 2007, those absenting themselves from school may be doing so not as a result of disengagement from the learning process, but because of engagement in other activities (including being a young carer), indicating a need for multi-agency intervention. For other young people, disengagement from school could relate, for example, to disaffection with the curriculum offer, low self-esteem and a lack of belief in their ability to achieve in an academic environment, low expectations of or aspirations for the future, poor peer or staff relationships or a lack of support from home. This has clear implications for practice (see below) in enabling teachers to identify the reasons for pupil absence, including whether children have additional support needs (not just in relation to learning) or those whose poor attendance is the result of different home or school circumstances.

- To **monitor and evaluate the work of NEWB and any national intervention programmes** (as indicated in Section 10 [1g] of the Education Welfare Act, 2000) to assess the net impact they have on attendance, participation and retention. This means considering the following:
 - The expectations of each programme and how progress towards these expectations is measured (what is the theory of change that underpins the logic model for each programme, what outputs, outcomes and impacts are expected and what monitoring systems are in place to measure progress?)
 - The need for a cross-programme monitoring strategy – will it be possible, for example, to identify whether pupils (and/or their families) are involved in interventions supported by more than one such programme?
 - Identifying the relative inputs of each programme and how their respective contributions will be assessed
 - Reviewing the findings and ensuring they inform future service development.

9.5. There is also a need to take a **longer-term perspective** on the outcomes and impact of interventions. The 2006 Hallam study identified significant improvements in attendance, but found that improvements in attainment were less marked and became evident *only* as children got older. For NEWB, this suggests the need to take a long-term view of policy development and monitoring. It may be some time before improvements in attendance nationally are accompanied by measurable improvements in retention and attainment.

9.6. The findings also indicate the need for **cross-departmental and inter-departmental** working with a range of different policy teams. These include working with the Department of Education and Skills to disseminate (and act on) the findings related to:

- curriculum provision, particularly in relation to the need for access to alternative, flexible or tailored curricula for some groups of pupils⁴⁸
- enabling children and young people, where appropriate, to have a contributory voice in scoping their curriculum/learning route
- the need for **initial and on-going professional education** for teachers⁴⁹ to support their pupils in, for example, the social and emotional aspects of learning as well as in providing academic support. This includes helping teachers, for example:
 - to understand, more fully, the warning signs that might indicate that a child or young person was at risk of poor attendance, prior to that attendance becoming sufficiently poor to trigger a notification to NEWB.
 - to build supportive relationships in the classroom and around the school⁵⁰
 - to adopt pedagogical practices that are inclusive and motivating for their pupils
 - know best how to work with the different support agencies around the child and the family.
- the need to back the development of **supportive school cultures**

48. See Section 10 (1j) of the Education Welfare Act, 2000.
 49. See also Section 10 [1i] of the Education Welfare Act, 2000.
 50. See Section 10 (1b) of the Education Welfare Act, 2000.

- the potential value of having school staff with designated mentoring, advocacy or home liaison roles (roles already within the remit of the Home-School Community Liaison Scheme, the Education Welfare Service and the School Completion Programme).

9.7. In particular there is a need for NEWB to work closely **in liaison** with policy teams at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and other relevant departments, and to participate, where appropriate, in Children’s Services Committees, for example, in order to promote and support inter-agency working and explore the ways in which inter-agency work with schools can be best supported and integrated.

9.8. Each of these suggested actions has implications for **resource allocation**. NEWB will need to decide their short, medium and long-term priorities for improving attendance and retention and reducing early school leaving. Instituting an enhanced data collection and management system will be costly in the short term, for instance, but has the possibility of generating data that enable the insightful targeting of support and intervention strategies in the future. Balanced against that are legitimate concerns (nationally and at school level) about data protection and the recording and sharing of data on individual children; any such data collection system would need to ensure the option of anonymising data before transfer and analysis.

9.9. Equally, **advocating multi-agency working** requires some serious consideration of how such work could be best supported. Such a strategy requires looking closely at the factors that best promote effective collaboration. Previous research in this field suggests the need to consider:

- the implications for professional cultures and for data management and transfer between agencies
- the triggers for the involvement of an agency in a particular case (with a school, child or their family)
- the person who has oversight or responsibility for the case and how to avoid duplication of effort
- how the results of the intervention will be recorded – and with whom they will be shared.

9.10. This wider research literature on the effectiveness of multi-agency working was not included in the scope of this review, but could inform NEWB’s approach to adopting any such strategies.

Implications for practice

9.11. NEWB’s current approach of strengthening prevention, promoting early intervention and teamwork with individual children and developing strong inter-agency support is largely affirmed in the current review, which highlights the need to retain a strong focus on school attendance, in the light of the strong association between attendance, participation and retention. It also highlights the need for a ‘whole child’ approach and recognises the significance of strong pupil-teacher relationships in schools. The recent integration of the HSCL and the SCP within NEWB offers the possibility for providing a continuum of intervention from early years, involving children and their families.

9.12. The emerging implications for practice include:

- Developing ways to better **diagnose and understand** the reasons behind pupil disengagement, whether by schools or other agencies. Markedly poor attendance will trigger external support once the school has notified the Education Welfare Service. Yet there may be other children and young people (who skip individual lessons or odd days with no discernible pattern and so do not ‘come above the radar’ of their own school) for whom interventions are needed and for whom schools

need to provide support (and with whom they need support). This implies a need to **focus on the individual child, not just the school** – research has indicated that some strategies are more effective with particular pupils than others and that the approach that is adopted may be critical to success.

- **Developing a more detailed understanding of the nature of parents’ engagement with education.** NEWB’s work with schools already adopts a preventative approach targeted at pupils ‘at risk’ (because of their background characteristics) of dropping out, or of not reaching their potential in the educational system and promotes the establishment of partnerships and of collaboration between parents and teachers in the interest of the child’s learning. Is it possible for schools and other agencies to draw up a typology of parental attitudes and involvement? What provision appears most helpful and for which parents? What types of external support (curriculum-based help – such as literacy, numeracy support, personal development – such as skills-based or parenting support, or opportunities for leisure activities) appear to be most effective and with which type of parent?

- Staff from schools and different agencies learning about **how best to work together** to meet the various needs of the child and the family. These approaches might include strategies such as intensive case management or mentoring support (whether to overcome barriers to learning, raise aspirations or provide an alternative trusted adult with whom the child can relate). This would also include putting in place systems to ensure that the child and the family are actively engaged and can contribute to the planning and implementation of support.

- Adopting pedagogical approaches in school that recognise the place of the child in the learning process. Children and young people all have different aptitudes and ways of learning; research has indicated that **enabling children** to have some **input to the curriculum** has the potential to increase pupil engagement.

9.13. Addressing these questions would be helpful in relation to identifying the strategies that appear to be most effective with each community and so would facilitate the development of tailored programmes and strategies that are more likely to lead to a) buy-in from schools, teachers, parents and children and young people, and b) the desired outcomes.

9.14. The study has also suggested that some practices (such as the use of legal sanctions for parents of children with very poor attendance) might benefit from review to see whether they are the most effective approach to addressing the problem. A pre-requisite to this review might be a more systematic use of the data on individual children’s attendance already available to the Education Welfare Service in order to see what patterns of poor attendance (as well as what groups of children have poor attendance) can be identified and better understood.

In summary

9.15. Clearly, developing a system that focused on the needs of individual children and/or their family and led to the implementation of individually tailored support could be financially prohibitive; we have no detailed cost-benefit data to support our recommendations. Nonetheless, the research we have reviewed suggests that, where a whole system approach is adopted, underpinned by consideration of the need for strategic integration (thereby removing duplication of roles and service provision), for operational effectiveness (acknowledging and integrating different professional cultures and practices) and fiscal considerations (ensuring that policies and programmes are implemented economically and sustainably), the outcomes for young people (and their schools) are positive. The programmes and structures already in place in NEWB could support that whole-system approach, with the proviso that they were monitored, evaluated and reviewed to ensure the effectiveness of their performance.

Annex A: Additional detail on search strategies

A.1. This Annex describes the overall parameters used for searching for the international literature, and the specific strategies adopted by the study team to search for and retrieve key documents for selection and review.

Step 1: Conducting bibliographical searches

A.2. The first stage, the bibliographic searches, was carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Centre for Information and Reviews. A search strategy was devised by NFER, in collaboration with SQW and NEWB, to identify literature on interventions and processes that are considered effective in relation to the participation, attendance and retention of children in primary and post-primary education interventions. This involved the NFER's information specialists matching database keywords to all the research questions and agreeing the search strategy with the review team at SQW and NEWB. The keywords comprised sets that were devised to cover concepts for each facet of the review: participation, attendance, retention and disengagement within education; interventions and processes; and the characteristics of the populations that NEWB wished the review to examine.

A.3. The precise search strategies used with each of the bibliographic databases (in terms of the keywords used and, in some cases, the combinations of keywords) are specified in detail in Annex B. The search strategy for each database reflects the differences in database structure and vocabulary. Smaller sets of keywords were used in the more specialist databases.

A.4. In addition, a set of terms was devised to define those populations that were outside the scope of the review. This population set was used to establish one set of *exclusion* criteria and was incorporated into all of the searches.

Population set – exclusion criteria

Adult education, adults, adult students, higher education, universities, professional education, teacher education.

A.5. The search used two types of sources to ensure thorough coverage of the evidence base:

- a range of general (and largely educational) bibliographic databases
- websites of key organisations/institutions

A.6. The bibliographic databases and organisations' websites that were included are listed in Tables A-1 and A-2. These websites were searched on main keywords and/or the publications/research/policy sections of each website were browsed, as appropriate.

Table A-1: The databases used in the search strategy

Database	Description	Search details
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	This is an index of over 600 international English language social science journals, which provides unique coverage of educational and developmental aspects of children.	searched via CSA 22/06/11
Australian Education Index (AEI)	AEI is Australia's largest source of education information, covering reports, books, journal articles, online resources, conference papers and book chapters.	searched via Dialog Datastar 01/06/11
British Education Index (BEI)	BEI provides information on research, policy and practice in education and training in the UK. Sources include over 300 journals, mostly published in the UK, plus other material including reports, series and conference papers.	searched via Dialog Datastar 20/05/11
British Education Index Free Collections	The free collections search interface of the British Education Index (BEI) (formerly the British Education Internet Resource Catalogue) includes access to a range of freely available internet resources as well as records for the most recently indexed journal articles not yet included in the full BEI subscription database.	searched 10/06/11
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. Coverage includes research documents, journal articles, technical reports, programme descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.	searched via Dialog Datastar 06/06/11
Science Direct	An information source for scientific, technical, and medical research. Subscription required for some sections.	searched via Science Direct 06/06/11
Emerald Insight	Emerald is a long-established publisher with over 200 titles in the fields of management, information science and engineering.	searched via Emerald 06/06/11
Oxford Economic Papers	Oxford Economic Papers is a general journal publishing papers in a wide range of areas in theoretical and applied economics.	searched via Oxford Journals 06/06/11
Social Policy and Practice	Social Policy and Practice is a bibliographic database with abstracts covering evidence-based social policy, public health, social services, and mental and community health. Content is from the UK with some material from the US and Europe. Searches were carried out across the descriptors, heading word, title and abstract fields, to enable retrieval of terms both as keywords and free text.	searched via Ovid SP 24/06/11
Social Science Research Network (SSRN)	Social Science Research Network (SSRN) is devoted to the rapid worldwide dissemination of social science research and is composed of a number of specialised research networks in each of the social sciences.	searched via SSRN 24/06/11

Source: NFER/SQW

Table A-2: Web resources included in the searches

<p>Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) searched June 2011</p> <p>United Nations (UN) searched June 2011</p> <p>World Bank searched June 2011</p> <p>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) searched June 2011</p>
<p>Economic and Social Research Institute searched June 2011</p> <p>National Educational Welfare Board searched June 2011</p> <p>National Economic and Social Forum searched June 2011</p> <p>St Patrick's College Educational Disadvantage Centre searched June 2011</p> <p>Marino College searched June 2011</p> <p>Combat Poverty Agency searched June 2011</p> <p>Department of Education and Skills searched June 2011</p> <p>National Council for Special Education searched July 2011</p>
<p>Barnardos searched June 2011</p> <p>Department for Education (England) searched June 2011</p>
<p>Campbell Corporation searched June 2011</p>

Source: SQW

Step 2: Retrieving documents and initial screening

- A.7.** Details of the numbers of records retrieved by and selected from each database search are indicated in the table below (A-3).
- A.8.** Initial searches were carried out on the British Education Index and Australian Education Index, as well as the economic databases (as named in Table A-1 above) covering the period 2000-2011. This produced a volume of hits that was so high that the decision was taken to limit the start date to 2004 for the other bibliographic database searches to reflect the resources available for the review. This year was chosen so that the review would be able to build on other comprehensive reviews carried out up to that date, including Fredricks *et al.* (2004).⁵¹
- A.9.** The number of hits retrieved from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database was of such a volume that a further decision was taken to combine interventions *and* characteristics sets with each other set in turn, to focus the results more effectively.
- A.10.** When exploring the economic databases, we found that, beyond the first 50 search results sorted by relevance, articles became less relevant and valid for this study and so we decided to focus only on the first 100 hits to search for and select the most relevant articles for review.
- A.11.** Table A-3 summarises the results of the search strategy, indicating first the number of items found using the keyword or free text searches, a total of **16,230** hits. Following the initial search, items were screened (as far as possible) for duplication, then screened for emphasis (articles may have included the search terms but be focused on a different area of investigation or research). We then applied a number of more detailed criteria to the **791** documents identified through the initial screening, in order to identify items of relevance and priority for the shortlist of literature for review.

51. Fredricks, J A, Blumenfield P C and Paris A H (2004) 'School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence'. *Review of Educational Research*, 74 (1) 59-109.

Table A-3: Items found and selected from the bibliographic database searches*

Database	Items found	Items selected by NFER/SQW for consideration
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	315	36
Australian Education Index (AEI)	1692	206
British Education Index (BEI)	1191	197
British Education Index Free Collections	131	31
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	550	113
Science Direct	2000	66
Emerald	3270	20
Oxford Economic Papers	6384	9
Social Policy and Practice	697	113
Total items	16,230	791

Source: NFER/SQW *After initial searches of the Social Science Research Network, it appeared that a majority of results were not relevant to the research, mainly down to the journals and the topics covered by the network.

A.12. A further 59 documents were found as a result of searches of web sources, hand searching of reference lists and recommendations from subject experts.

Identifying literature with Ireland as source of publication or subject of research

A.13. We also used a comprehensive search strategy with regard to searching for and identifying literature that was either published in Ireland or had Ireland (Irish schools and/or Irish policy) as a subject for research.

- The bibliographic database search was extended to cover the full time period (from 2000) for the three education databases searched by NFER in order to identify relevant Irish literature.
- Our web sources included those of a number of educational and other institutions based in Ireland and also those that undertake associated research in Ireland, such as St Patrick’s College Educational Disadvantage Centre, Marino College, the National Council for Special Education and the Economic and Social Research Institute.
- We also conducted an iterative manual search (scanning references within initial search results) to ensure we did not miss any important documents.

A.14. We identified a total of 43 documents related to Ireland, of which five were subsequently included in the full review.

Step 3: Applying exclusion criteria

A.15. We applied **further screening and exclusion criteria** to the 850 documents to arrive at a shortlist of documents for review and synthesis of evidence. These criteria were derived specifically to ensure that the selected documents explicitly addressed the study research questions, and were methodologically sound. The criteria were used initially on abstracts of articles and/or on full documents (where we had access to these).

A.16. We excluded those documents that did not discuss or mention the **study methodology**. We believed that this aspect was crucial in judging the robustness of the study and in forming judgements about the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the intervention or practice in question.

A.17. In considering the **study purpose** in selecting articles for review, we also screened out documents that did not focus on the main research questions for the study and did not cover the relevant study themes, including the key outcomes of interest – participation, retention and attendance. However, owing to the relatively loose way in which some of the terms are defined in the literature, we also scanned the abstracts of documents we selected for exclusion in order to avoid entirely excluding potentially useful references (some of the articles that were originally identified, for example, were practitioner journal articles based on more detailed and comprehensive research papers that provided the necessary study details).

A.18. We also reviewed the documents to see whether the research was conducted independently, or was conducted by the funders of the intervention (or those implementing it) being studied. Although this was not used as an exclusion criterion, it was an important descriptor, since we needed to consider the question of bias when identifying and interpreting outcomes.

A.19. Table A-4 presents the variables that were considered for selecting articles from the long list, and other factors that would need to be taken into due consideration when categorising the literature. Note that some of the exclusion criteria, such as excluding pre-2004 articles and specific populations (adult, higher and teacher education), were applied for screening articles during the search process. However, these were re-applied during the screening process, in order to ensure that the process was thorough (the initial screen sometimes let documents through when the date of publication was not clear, for example).

Table A-4 : SQW descriptors and exclusion criteria

Descriptors	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irish or non-Irish document • Independent research or non-independent • Three outcome reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation - Attendance - Retention • General or sub-group of client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-2004 • No methodology statement • No direct relevance to three outcomes • Population set <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult Education - Adults - Adult students - Higher Education - Universities - Professional Education - Teacher Education

Source: SQW

Step 4: Reviewing (use of review template)

- A.20.** We designed an internal review template (initially using Key Survey to capture comparable data) to interrogate the documents that were initially shortlisted for full review. This template aided the process of drawing out the most pertinent findings of individual studies for synthesis and analysis. The template also acted as a final screening device, by revisiting some of the search selection parameters applied earlier.
- A.21.** The template focused the review on the key research questions, and sought the reviewer’s judgements with regard to the methodological quality of studies. During this process, we considered both quantitative validity *and* qualitative credibility to ensure that we gave appropriate weight to the outcomes of studies using different methodologies.
- A.22.** On a practical note, we also needed to look at the **ease of access** to the article in question. Many of the articles were accessible through journals (whether by subscription or free access) or could be obtained on a costed inter-library loan via the British Library. Others needed to be purchased from publishers. We believe, however, that we have accessed most of the documents that were identified as relevant during the various screening processes.

Table A-5: Review Template fields

Access – yes or no
Type of research
Geographical coverage
Whether independent or not
Pupil ages covered
Research focus and themes
Method statement – yes or no
Type and scale of intervention
Sub-groups covered
Method details and characteristics
Method quality
Summary of findings
Judgements on effectiveness of intervention
Gaps in evidence base

Source: SQW

- A.23.** A total of 27 of the documents identified through the research databases were taken through to full review (Table A-6). Of the documents identified through web and referencing searching and following expert leads, a total of 28 were included in the full review. In all, therefore, 55 documents were included in the final review, of which 39 provided sufficient evidence for this study; the report also includes additional reports that provided contextual information and/or insights into the issues.

Table A-6: Summary of database searches and progression to final review

Database	Items found	Items selected by NFER/SQW for consideration	Taken through to Key Survey	Full review completed
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	315	36	9	
Australian Education Index (AEI)	1692	206	14	4
British Education Index (BEI)	1191	197	12	6
British Education Index Free Collections	131	31	13	4
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	550	113	11	3
Science Direct	2000	66		
Emerald	3270	20		
Oxford Economic Papers	6384	9	1	
Social Policy and Practice	697	113	16	10
Total items	16,230	791	76	27

Source: SQW

Annex B: Key words used in each bibliographic database

B.1. Below, we present the precise search strategies used with each of the bibliographic databases in terms of the keywords used and, in some cases, the combinations of keywords. The search strategy for each database reflects the differences in database structure and vocabulary. Smaller sets of keywords were used in the more specialist databases. Throughout, the abbreviation ‘ft’ denotes that a free-text search term was used, the symbol \$ denotes truncation of terms and the symbol ? is used as a wildcard to accommodate variant spellings. NEAR finds words within a five-word range either before or after the first search term. Terms were not automatically ‘exploded’ to search on all narrower terms in those databases offering this facility. However, wherever possible, narrower terms were included in the search string.

Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)

Interventions set

- #1 Initiatives
- #2 Intervention
- #3 Interventions
- #4 Processes
- #5 Programmes
- #6 Programs
- #7 Strategies
- #8 Techniques
- #9 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8

Participation / Attendance / Retention set

- #10 Alienation
- #11 Absenc
- #12 Absenteeism
- #13 Attendance
- #14 Disengagement
- #15 Dropping out
- #16 Engagement
- #17 Exclusion
- #18 Motivation
- #19 Participation
- #20 Retention
- #21 Suspension
- #22 Wastage
- #23 #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22
- #24 #9 and #23

Australian Education Index (AEI)

Interventions set

- #1 Intervention
- #2 Intervention program\$ (ft)
- #3 Educational intervention\$ (ft)
- #4 National intervention\$ (ft)
- #5 Local intervention\$ (ft)
- #6 School based intervention\$ (ft)
- #7 School intervention\$ (ft)
- #8 Initiative\$ (ft)

- #9 Educational initiative\$ (ft)
- #10 National initiative\$ (ft)
- #11 Local initiative\$ (ft)
- #12 School based initiative\$ (ft)
- #13 School initiative\$ (ft)
- #14 Educational strategies
- #15 National strateg\$ (ft)
- #16 Local strateg\$ (ft)
- #17 School based strateg\$ (ft)
- #18 School strateg\$ (ft)
- #19 Educational practices
- #20 Methods
- #21 Educational methods
- #22 Counselling techniques
- #23 Motivation techniques
- #24 Educational process\$ (ft)
- #25 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23 or #24

Participation set

- #26 Participation
- #27 Educational participation (ft)
- #28 Pupil participation (ft)
- #29 Student participation
- #30 Pupil motivation
- #31 Student motivation
- #32 Classroom participation (ft)
- #33 Pupil projects
- #34 Student projects
- #35 Parental support (ft)
- #36 Engagement (ft)
- #37 Student engagement (ft)
- #38 Pupil engagement (ft)
- #39 Extracurricular activities
- #40 Pastoral care education
- #41 Ethnic NEAR care (ft)
- #42 Cooperation
- #43 Incentives
- #44 Rewards
- #45 Peer mentoring (ft)
- #46 Belonging (ft)
- #47 Family support (ft)
- #48 #26 or #27 or #28 or #29 or #30 or #31 or #32 or #33 or #34 or #35 or #36 or #37 or #38 or #39 or #40 or #41 or #42 or #43 or #44 or #45 or #46 or #47
- #49 #25 and #48

Attendance set

- #50 School attendance (ft)
- #51 Attendance
- #52 Attendance patterns

- #53 Attendance data (ft)
- #54 Attendance monitoring (ft)
- #55 Punctuality (ft)
- #56 Nonattend\$ (ft)
- #57 Non-attend\$ (ft)
- #58 Educationally disadvantaged
- #59 Absenteeism (ft)
- #60 School absence (ft)
- #61 Dropouts
- #62 Dropout attitudes
- #63 Dropout characteristics
- #64 Dropout prevention
- #65 Dropout rate
- #66 Early school leaving (ft)
- #67 Early school leavers (ft)
- #68 Labour force nonparticipants
- #69 Staying NEAR rate (ft)
- #70 Staying NEAR rates (ft)
- #71 Expulsion
- #72 Truancy
- #73 Mitching (ft)
- #74 School phobia
- #75 School refusal (ft)
- #76 Peer influences
- #77 Peer influence
- #78 Family influence
- #79 Parent influence
- #80 Relevance education
- #81 Student teacher relationship
- #82 Student school relationship
- #83 Family school relationship
- #84 Care teams (ft)
- #85 Year heads (ft)
- #86 Behaviour support\$ (ft)
- #87 Key workers (ft)
- #88 Project workers (ft)
- #89 Communication with parents (ft)
- #90 Mental health
- #91 Clinical assessment (ft)
- #92 Diagnostic assessment (ft)
- #93 Psychological evaluation
- #94 Chronic nonattendance (ft)
- #95 Poor attendance (ft)
- #96 Bullying
- #97 #50 or #51 or #52 or #53 or #54 or #55 or #56 or #57 or #58 or #59 or #60 or #61 or #62 or #63 or #64 or #65 or #66 or #67 or #68 or #69 or #70 or #71 or #72 or #73 or #74 or #75 or #76 or #77 or #78 or #79 or #80 or #81 or #82 or #83 or #84 or #85 or #86 or #87 or #88 or #89 or #90 or #91 or #92 or #93 or #94 or #95 or #96
- #98 (#25 and #97) not #48

Retention set

#99 Academic persistence
#100 Retention not Grade repetition (ft)
#101 Student attrition
#102 Pupil attrition (ft)
#103 Pupil wastage (ft)
#104 Nonparticipation (ft)
#105 Non-participation (ft)
#106 Poor participation (ft)
#107 Disengagement (ft)
#108 School disengagement (ft)
#109 Transition education or Preschool-primary transition or Primary secondary transition or School to work transition or Secondary postsecondary transition
#110 Transfer students
#111 Transfer pupils (ft)
#112 Infant NEAR primary (ft)
#113 Transition NEAR key (ft)
#114 Transition NEAR school
#115 Targeted support\$ (ft)
#116 Student counselling or Student counsellors
#117 Pupil counselling (ft)
#118 Community support
#119 Agency support\$ (ft)
#120 Achievement
#121 Peer relationship
#122 Educational experience
#123 Part time employment
#124 Employment
#125 Access program (ft)
#126 Whole school support (ft)
#127 #99 or #100 or #101 or #102 or #103 or #104 or #105 or #106 or #107 or #108 or #109 or #110 or #111 or #112 or #113 or #114 or #115 or #116 or #117 or #118 or #119 or #120 or #121 or #122 or #123 or #124 or #125 or #126
#128 (#25 and #127) not (#48 or #97)

Behavioural disengagement set

#129 School life (ft)
#130 School culture
#131 Educational environment
#132 School ethos (ft)
#133 School engagement (ft)
#134 Behavioural disengagement (ft)
#135 Behavioral disengagement (ft)
#136 Boredom (ft)
#137 School conduct (ft)
#138 Student alienation
#139 Pupil alienation (ft)
#140 Antisocial behaviour
#141 Suspension
#142 Exclusion

#143 #129 or #130 or #131 or #132 or #133 or #134 or #135 or #136 or #137 or #138 or #139 or #140 or #141 or #142
#144 (#25 and #143) not (#48 or #97 or #127)

Characteristics set

#145 High risk students
#146 Children NEAR risk (ft)
#147 Migrant children
#148 Travellers (ft)
#149 Traveller children (ft)
#150 Gypsies (ft)
#151 Transient children (ft)
#152 Early parenthood
#153 Males
#154 Females
#155 Ethnicity or Ethnic groups
#156 Minority group children
#157 Special needs students
#158 Student adjustment
#159 Child welfare
#160 Young carer\$
#161 #145 or #146 or #147 or #148 or #149 or #150 or #151 or #152 or #153 or #154 or #155 or #156 or #157 or #158 or #159 or #160
#162 (#25 and #161) not (#48 or #97 or #127 or #143)

British Education Index (BEI)

Interventions set

#1 Intervention
#2 Intervention program\$ (ft)
#3 Educational intervention\$ (ft)
#4 National intervention\$ (ft)
#5 Local intervention\$ (ft)
#6 School based intervention\$ (ft)
#7 School intervention\$ (ft)
#8 Initiative\$ (ft)
#9 Educational initiative\$ (ft)
#10 National initiative\$ (ft)
#11 Local initiative\$ (ft)
#12 School based initiative\$ (ft)
#13 School initiative\$ (ft)
#14 Educational strategies
#15 National strateg\$ (ft)
#16 Local strateg\$ (ft)
#17 School based strateg\$ (ft)
#18 School strateg\$ (ft)
#19 Educational practices
#20 Methods
#21 Educational methods
#22 Counselling techniques
#23 Motivation techniques

#24 Educational process\$ (ft)
#25 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15
or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23 or #24

Participation set

#26 Participation
#27 Educational participation (ft)
#28 Pupil participation (ft)
#29 Student participation
#30 Pupil motivation
#31 Student motivation
#32 Classroom participation (ft)
#33 Pupil projects
#34 Student projects
#35 Parental support (ft)
#36 Engagement (ft)
#37 Student engagement (ft)
#38 Pupil engagement (ft)
#39 Extracurricular activities
#40 Pastoral care education
#41 Ethnic NEAR care (ft)
#42 Cooperation
#43 Incentives
#44 Rewards
#45 Peer mentoring (ft)
#46 Belonging (ft)
#47 Family support (ft)
#48 #26 or #27 or #28 or #29 or #30 or #31 or #32 or #33 or #34 or #35 or #36 or #37 or #38 or
#39 or #40 or #41 or #42 or #43 or #44 or #45 or #46 or #47
#49 #25 and #48

Attendance set

#50 School attendance (ft)
#51 Attendance
#52 Attendance patterns
#53 Attendance data (ft)
#54 Attendance monitoring (ft)
#55 Punctuality (ft)
#56 Nonattend\$ (ft)
#57 Non-attend\$ (ft)
#58 Educationally disadvantaged
#59 Absentecism (ft)
#60 School absence (ft)
#61 Dropouts
#62 Dropout attitudes
#63 Dropout characteristics
#64 Dropout prevention
#65 Dropout rate
#66 Early school leaving (ft)
#67 Early school leavers (ft)

#68 Labour force nonparticipants
#69 Staying NEAR rate (ft)
#70 Staying NEAR rates (ft)
#71 Expulsion
#72 Truancy
#73 Mitching (ft)
#74 School phobia
#75 School refusal (ft)
#76 Peer influences
#77 Peer influence
#78 Family influence
#79 Parent influence
#80 Relevance education
#81 Teacher pupil relationship
#82 Pupil school relationship
#83 Home school relationship
#84 Care teams (ft)
#85 Year heads (ft)
#86 Behaviour support\$ (ft)
#87 Key workers (ft)
#88 Project workers (ft)
#89 Communication with parents (ft)
#90 Mental health
#91 Clinical assessment (ft)
#92 Diagnostic assessment
#93 Psychological evaluation
#94 Chronic nonattendance (ft)
#95 Poor attendance (ft)
#96 Bullying
#97 #50 or #51 or #52 or #53 or #54 or #55 or #56 or #57 or #58 or #59 or #60 or #61 or #62 or
#63 or #64 or #65 or #66 or #67 or #68 or #69 or #70 or #71 or #72 or #73 or #74 or #75 or #76 or
#77 or #78 or #79 or #80 or #81 or #82 or #83 or #84 or #85 or #86 or #87 or #88 or #89 or #90 or
#91 or #92 or #93 or #94 or #95 or #96
#98 (#25 and #97) not #48

Retention set

#99 Academic persistence
#100 Retention (ft)
#101 School retention (ft) or Pupil retention (ft) or Student retention (ft)
#102 Academic retention (ft)
#103 Pupil wastage or Student wastage or Course completion
#104 Nonparticipation (ft)
#105 Non-participation (ft)
#106 Poor participation (ft)
#107 Disengagement (ft)
#108 School disengagement (ft)
#109 Transition education or School to work transition or Primary secondary transfer (ft) or Primary
transition (ft)
#110 Transfer students
#111 Transfer pupils (ft)
#112 (Infant NEAR primary) (ft) or (Preschool NEAR primary) (ft)

#113 Transition NEAR key (ft)
 #114 Transition NEAR school (ft)
 #115 Targeted support\$ (ft)
 #116 Counsellors
 #117 Pupil counselling (ft) or Student counselling
 #118 Community support
 #119 Agency support\$ (ft)
 #120 Achievement
 #121 Peer relationship
 #122 Educational experience
 #123 Part time employment
 #124 Employment
 #125 Access programmes
 #126 Whole school support (ft)
 #127 #99 or #100 or #101 or #102 or #103 or #104 or #105 or #106 or #107 or #108 or #109 or #110
 or #111 or #112 or #113 or #114 or #115 or #116 or #117 or #118 or #119 or #120 or #121 or #122
 or #123 or #124 or #125 or #126
 #128 (#25 and #127) not (#48 or #97)

Behavioural disengagement set

#129 School life (ft)
 #130 School culture
 #131 Educational environment
 #132 School ethos (ft)
 #133 School engagement (ft)
 #134 Behavioural disengagement (ft)
 #135 Behavioral disengagement (ft)
 #136 Boredom (ft)
 #137 School conduct (ft)
 #138 Student alienation
 #139 Pupil alienation
 #140 Antisocial behaviour
 #141 Suspension
 #142 Exclusion
 #143 #129 or #130 or #131 or #132 or #133 or #134 or #135 or #136 or #137 or #138 or #139 or
 #140 or #141 or #142
 #144 (#25 and #143) not (#48 or #97 or #127)

Characteristics set

#145 Children at risk
 #146 Migrant children
 #147 Travellers itinerants
 #148 Traveller children (ft)
 #149 Gypsies
 #150 Transient children
 #151 Early parenthood
 #152 Boys
 #153 Girls
 #154 Ethnic groups
 #155 Ethnicity

#156 Minority group children
 #157 Maladjustment
 #158 Child welfare
 #159 Young carer\$
 #160 #145 or #146 or #147 or #148 or #149 or #150 or #151 or #152 or #153 or #154 or #155 or
 #156 or #157 or #158 or #159
 #161 (#25 and #160) not (#48 or #97 or #127 or #143)

British Education Index Free Collections

Interventions set

#1 Educational strategies
 #2 Intervention
 #3 Initiative\$
 #4 Strateg\$
 #5 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4

Participation / Attendance / Retention set

#6 Academic persistence
 #7 Attendance patterns
 #8 Attendance
 #9 Dropout characteristics
 #10 Dropout prevention
 #11 Dropout rate
 #12 Dropouts
 #13 Expulsion
 #14 Motivation
 #15 Participation
 #16 Persistence
 #17 Pupil alienation
 #18 Pupil motivation
 #19 Pupil participation
 #20 Pupil wastage
 #21 School culture
 #22 School to work transition
 #23 Student alienation
 #24 Student motivation
 #25 Student participation
 #26 Student wastage
 #27 Suspension
 #28 Transfer pupils
 #29 Transfer students
 #30 Transition education
 #31 Truancy
 #32 #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or
 #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23 or #24 or #25 or #26 or #27 or #28 or #29 or #30 or
 #31

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Interventions set

- #1 Intervention
- #2 Intervention program\$ (ft)
- #3 Educational intervention\$ (ft)
- #4 National intervention\$ (ft)
- #5 Local intervention\$ (ft)
- #6 School based intervention\$ (ft)
- #7 School intervention\$ (ft)
- #8 Initiative\$ (ft)
- #9 Educational initiative\$ (ft)
- #10 National initiative\$ (ft)
- #11 Local initiative\$ (ft)
- #12 School based initiative\$ (ft)
- #13 School initiative\$ (ft)
- #14 Educational strategies
- #15 National strateg\$ (ft)
- #16 Local strateg\$ (ft)
- #17 School based strateg\$ (ft)
- #18 School strateg\$ (ft)
- #19 Educational practices
- #20 Methods
- #21 Educational methods
- #22 Counselling techniques
- #23 Motivation techniques
- #24 Educational process\$ (ft)
- #25 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23 or #24

Characteristics set

- #26 High risk students
- #27 Children NEAR risk
- #28 Migrant children
- #29 Travellers
- #30 Traveller children (ft)
- #31 Gypsies
- #32 Transient children
- #33 Early parenthood
- #34 Males
- #35 Females
- #36 Ethnic groups
- #37 Ethnicity
- #38 Minority group children
- #39 Special needs students
- #40 Student adjustment
- #41 Child welfare
- #42 Young carer\$
- #43 #26 or #27 or #28 or #29 or #30 or #31 or #32 or #33 or #34 or #35 or #36 or #37 or #38 or #39 or #40 or #41 or #42
- #44 #25 and #43

Participation set

- #45 Participation
- #46 Student participation
- #47 Pupil participation (ft)
- #48 Educational participation (ft)
- #49 Classroom participation (ft)
- #50 Student motivation
- #51 Pupil motivation (ft)
- #52 Classroom participation (ft)
- #53 Pupil projects (ft)
- #54 Student projects
- #55 Parental support (ft)
- #56 Engagement (ft)
- #57 Student engagement (ft)
- #58 Pupil engagement (ft)
- #59 Extracurricular activities
- #60 Pastoral care (ft)
- #61 Ethnic NEAR care (ft)
- #62 Cooperation
- #63 Incentives
- #64 Rewards
- #65 Peer mentoring (ft)
- #66 Belonging (ft)
- #67 Family support (ft)
- #68 #45 or #46 or #47 or #48 or #49 or #50 or #51 or #52 or #53 or #54 or #55 or #56 or #57 or #58 or #59 or #60 or #61 or #62 or #63 or #64 or #65 or #66 or #67
- #69 #44 and #68

Attendance set

- #70 School attendance (ft)
- #71 Attendance
- #72 Attendance patterns
- #73 Attendance data (ft)
- #74 Attendance monitoring (ft)
- #75 Punctuality (ft)
- #76 Nonattend\$ (ft)
- #77 Non-attend\$ (ft)
- #78 Educationally disadvantaged
- #79 Absentecism (ft)
- #80 School absence (ft)
- #81 Dropouts
- #82 Dropout attitudes
- #83 Dropout characteristics
- #84 Dropout prevention
- #85 Dropout rate
- #86 Early school leaving (ft)
- #87 Early school leavers (ft)
- #88 Labour force nonparticipants
- #89 Staying NEAR rate (ft)
- #90 Staying NEAR rates (ft)
- #91 Expulsion

#92 Truancy
 #93 Mithing (ft)
 #94 School phobia
 #95 School refusal (ft)
 #96 Peer influence
 #97 Peer influence
 #98 Family influence
 #99 Parent influence
 #100 Relevance education
 #101 Student teacher relationship
 #102 Student school relationship
 #103 Family school relationship
 #104 Care teams (ft)
 #105 Year heads (ft)
 #106 Behaviour support\$ (ft)
 #107 Key workers (ft)
 #108 Project workers (ft)
 #109 Communication with parents (ft)
 #110 Mental health
 #111 Clinical assessment (ft)
 #112 Clinical assessment (ft)
 #113 Diagnostic assessment (ft)
 #114 Psychological evaluation
 #115 Educational psychological assessment (ft)
 #116 Chronic nonattendance (ft)
 #117 Poor attendance (ft)
 #118 Bullying
 #119 #70 or #71 or #72 or #73 or #74 or #75 or #76 or #77 or #78 or #79 or #80 or #81 or #82 or #83 or #84 or #85 or #86 or #87 or #88 or #89 or #90 or #91 or #92 or #93 or #94 or #95 or #96 or #97 or #98 or #99 or #100 or #101 or #102 or #103 or #104 or #105 or #106 or #107 or #108 or #109 or #110 or #111 or #112 or #113 or #114 or #115 or #116 or #117 or #118
 #120 (#44 and #119) not #68

Retention set

#121 Academic persistence
 #122 Retention not Grade repetition
 #123 Student attrition
 #124 Pupil attrition (ft)
 #125 Pupil wastage (ft)
 #126 Nonparticipation (ft)
 #127 Non-participation (ft)
 #128 Poor participation (ft)
 #129 Disengagement (ft)
 #130 School disengagement (ft)
 #131 Transition education (ft) or Preschool primary transition (ft) or Preschool-primary transition (ft) or Secondary postsecondary transition (ft) or Primary secondary transition (ft)
 #132 Transfer students
 #133 Transfer pupils (ft)
 #134 Infant NEAR primary (ft)
 #135 Transition NEAR key (ft)
 #136 Transition NEAR school (ft)

#137 Targeted support\$ (ft)
 #138 School counselling
 #139 School counselors
 #140 Pupil counselling (ft) or Student counselling (ft)
 #141 Community support
 #142 Agency support\$ (ft)
 #143 Achievement
 #144 Peer relationship
 #145 Educational experience
 #146 Part time employment
 #147 Employment
 #148 Education work relationship
 #149 Access program\$ (ft)
 #150 Whole school support (ft)
 #151 #121 or #122 or #123 or #124 or #125 or #126 or #127 or #128 or #129 or #130 or #131 or #132 or #133 or #134 or #135 or #136 or #137 or #138 or #139 or #140 or #141 or #142 or #143 or #144 or #145 or #146 or #147 or #148 or #149 or #150
 #152 (#44 and #151) not (#68 or #119)

Behavioural disengagement set

#153 School life (ft)
 #154 School culture
 #155 Educational environment
 #156 School ethos (ft)
 #157 School engagement (ft)
 #158 Behavioural disengagement (ft)
 #159 Behavioral disengagement (ft)
 #160 Boredom (ft)
 #161 School conduct (ft)
 #162 Student alienation
 #163 Pupil alienation (ft)
 #164 Antisocial behaviour
 #165 Suspension
 #166 Exclusion
 #167 #153 or #154 or #155 or #156 or #157 or #158 or #159 or #160 or #161 or #162 or #163 or #164 or #165 or #166
 #168 (#44 and #167) not (#68 or #119 or #151)

Social Policy and Practice

All terms were searched across the abstract, descriptor, heading words, notes and title fields.

Interventions set

#1 Initiatives
 #2 Intervention
 #3 Interventions
 #4 Processes
 #5 Programmes
 #6 Programs
 #7 Strategies
 #8 Techniques
 #9 #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8

Participation / Attendance / Retention set

- #10 Alienation
- #11 Absence
- #12 Absenteeism
- #13 Attendance
- #14 Disengagement
- #15 Dropout
- #16 Dropouts
- #17 Engagement
- #18 Exclusion
- #19 Motivation
- #20 Participation
- #21 Retention
- #22 Suspension
- #23 Wastage
- #24 #10 or #11 or #12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23
- #25 Pupil\$
- #26 Student\$
- #27 #25 or #26
- #28 #9 and #24 and #27

Search terms used in Economic Databases (free text searches)

Intervention/programme*educational participation*schools
Educational participation*intervention/programme*schools
pupil participation*intervention/programme*schools
pupil participation*schools
pupil motivation*schools
school strategies*attendance
education participation* intervention/programme*schools
pupil participation*intervention/programme*schools
pupil participation *schools
pupil motivation* schools
school strategies attendance
dropout*intervention/programme*schools
interventions/programmes*school attendance
school truancy* intervention/programmes
parent support* school *intervention/programme
pupil motivation*school*intervention/programme
school strategy* attendance
parent* support *school *intervention/ programme
school engagement intervention/ programme
pupil engagement*intervention/ programme
school reward *intervention/ programme
school incentive *intervention/ programme
school phobia* intervention/ programme
school non-attendeess *intervention/ programme
school absenteeism *intervention/ programme
school dropout* intervention/ programme
school retention* intervention/ programme

school disaffected or disengage* intervention/ programme
school behaviour/behavior support* intervention/ programme
school expulsion exclusion* intervention programme

Annex C: Bibliography

Background literature

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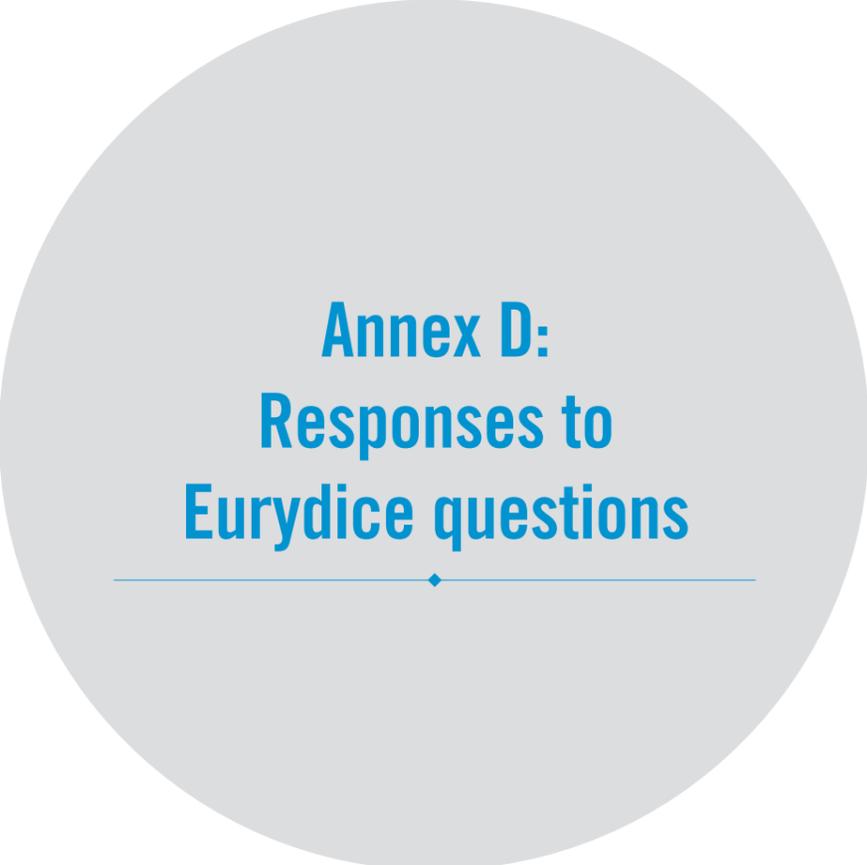
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**Annex D:
Responses to
Eurydice questions**

D.1. The table below summarises the responses to key Eurydice questions, based on individual country responses as well as country descriptions derived from Eurybase, and provides a discussion of the findings.

Table D-1 : Summary responses from Eurydice contacts

	Framing of legislation			Data			Sanctions			Target group		Incentives												
	Duty on attendance	Local authorities / schools	Parents	Age completion	Grade completion	Qualification attained	Pupil School	Local authority	National	Unknown	Imposed on	Students	Parents	Prosecution student	Penalty on student / other	Type	Unknown	Yes	No	Unknown	Yes	No	Unknown	
Czech Republic	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓					✓	
Cyprus	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
England	✓	✓					✓				✓							✓						
Finland	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Germany	✓		✓		✓		✓				✓							✓						
Greece	✓		✓		✓		✓				✓							✓						
Ireland	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Latvia	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Lithuania	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Poland	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Scotland	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Spain	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Austria	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Belgium	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Bulgaria	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Denmark	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
France	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Hungary	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Iceland	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Italy	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Liechtenstein	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Luxembourg	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Malta	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Netherlands	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Norway	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Romania	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Slovakia	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Slovenia	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						
Sweden	✓		✓				✓				✓							✓						

Source: SQW based on data from primary data and data in Eurybase from countries in the Eurydice Network

Discussion

D.2. The data from the responding countries was augmented by data included in the National Education System Descriptions (Eurybase) produced by the Eurydice Network. Some of the information provided in these descriptions covers compulsory education.

Compulsory phase of education

D.3. All 29⁵² countries that either responded to the questions, or for whom we had Eurybase descriptions, identified a compulsory phase of education. While all countries shared the concept of compulsory education, not all shared the concept of compulsory attendance. The difference is subtle, but means that legislative imperatives in such countries focused on ensuring that children and young people were registered for school and had access to it rather than on measures to ascertain the extent of their daily attendance in school.

How is it made compulsory?

D.4. Compulsory education is achieved through legislation for all 29 countries. Two countries (Finland, Germany) also stated that compulsory education is grounded in their respective Constitutions.

Framing of legislature

D.5. Across the responding countries the law on compulsory education is framed in different forms.

Duty on parents, schools or education authorities?

D.6. In 13 countries (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta) the duty is on parents/guardians alone to ensure that the law on compulsory education is adhered to. In a further six countries (England, Germany, Latvia, Spain, Scotland, Iceland) the duty is shared between parents/guardians and local authorities. Where a duty falls on local authorities, the main remit is to ensure adequate and efficient provision rather than to maintain attendance.

In terms of age or in terms of grade completed or in terms of the certificate/qualification attained?

D.7. For the majority of countries, compulsory education law is framed in terms of age, with very few exceptions. Among the 29 countries, 25⁵³ framed their law in terms of age, two in terms of the grade completed (Germany, Greece) and two countries (Ireland and Netherlands) used a combination of age and certificate attained, depending on which came later.

52. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

53. Czech Republic, Cyprus, England, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Scotland, Spain, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Malta, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden.

Data on school attendance

D.8. Note that: for the countries where national country descriptions were accessed only from Eurybase, it was not possible to ascertain information on the collection of student-level data.

D.9. Ten of the responding countries (Czech Republic, Cyprus, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland and Scotland) indicated, either in response to the questions or via Eurybase, that they collected student-level data on school attendance. This did not mean, however, that the data was held in such a way that individual pupil level data could be tracked. In most countries (other than Scotland and England, where individual pupil level data on school attendance can be tracked throughout a child's school career), data appears to be aggregated to school level (Cyprus, Poland) or higher, to local authority/municipality level, or to national level (Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland).

D.10. Countries reported that they collected this data for a variety of reasons, including:

- for educational management across regions
- to enable the prediction of educational profiles
- to identify students with serious issues
- to inform the local authority of pupils that are not enrolled
- to collect and analyse data to identify the main reasons for non-attendance
- to support policy development.

Sanctions

Usage

D.11. 18 countries⁵⁴ indicated that they used sanctions to enforce attendance and/or participation. For three (Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania) of the responding countries, however, it was not clear whether sanctions were used.

Types of sanctions

D.12. The majority of the sanctions used were imposed on parents. In 15 countries (Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Malta, Romania, Turkey) the sanctions were imposed on parents alone, while three countries (Spain, Netherlands, Bulgaria) imposed sanctions on both parents and students.

D.13. Very few of the countries provided detail on the types of sanctions imposed. The majority of countries stated that parents would be fined and prosecuted and further legal action would be taken if necessary. Both the English and Scottish responses provided more detailed descriptions on the sanctions used, which were:

54. Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Spain, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Turkey

- school attendance orders
- prosecution for irregular attendance
- penalty notices for irregular attendance
- education supervision orders
- parenting orders
- anti-social behaviour orders.

D.14. Other sanctions of note included:

- Spain, where parents could be legally prosecuted and students could be deprived of the right to continuous assessment
- Belgium, where students could lose their school allowance if attendance problems persisted over two years
- Bulgaria, sanctions are imposed on students with poor attendance, including transfer to another school
- France, where social services are involved and provide warnings to parents and students
- Romania, where there is no state allowance for parents whose children have attendance issues.

Policy to reduce early school leavers

D.15. There was much variation in the detail provided by countries about the policy used to increase attendance or to encourage young people to stay in education or training beyond the age of compulsory education.

Target group

D.16. Amongst the responding countries, policies to encourage young people to stay in education were aimed at a range of groupings (Table D-2). Three countries providing information about target groups used age descriptors, though only one of these defined them by certificate completed. Four specifically targeted pupils from difficult or disadvantaged backgrounds, although the inclusion of urban/rural dimensions in two others seems to be a proxy for disadvantage. The definition of disadvantage varied, but seemed to focus on those from poorer or socially disadvantaged families (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany), in danger of not being in education, employment or training (England), from migrant families (Germany and Belgium) or from particular communities (such as Roma children in the Czech Republic).

Table D-2: Policy target group

Country	Target group
Czech Republic	Roma community, socially disadvantaged children
England	Those at risk of NEET, most vulnerable families
Finland	Disadvantaged children, especially those in the 13-15 year age group
Germany	Those without a first general education attainment certificate, migrant families and children from difficult backgrounds
Lithuania	Gender differences, urban rural differences
Belgium (from country descriptions)	Non-nationals, 17 year olds, young people from urban areas

Source: SQW

Does this extend to young people who have already left the education system?

D.17. It was not clear from responses whether every country's policy extended to those young people that had already left the education system. England, Poland and Spain explicitly stated that the policy to reduce the number of early school leavers extended to young people that had already left compulsory education, whereas Germany explicitly stated that their policy does not consider this.

Incentives to support policy

D.18. Table D-3 summarises the different incentives used by the responding countries to decrease the number of early school leavers. The majority of these incentives aim to influence the young people themselves (financial support, flexible education options), while some are targeted at schools/teachers (teacher training, curriculum changes).

D.19. Three countries noted that, in recent years, they had extended the phase of compulsory education by a year. In Greece a year of pre-school education was made compulsory and in Italy and Poland the leaving age was extended from 15 to 16. In England, the minimum age at which young people can leave learning (currently 16) will be increased in two stages – to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015.

Table D-3: Incentives to decrease the number of early school leavers

Country	Incentives to support policy
Cyprus	Do not issue work permits to under 16s
England	Early Intervention Grants (especially focused on transitional arrangements)
Finland	Flexible education options for disadvantaged 13-15 year olds Municipality Youth Network targets the transitional phase
Germany	Further development of teachers' training
Poland	Prolong the phase of compulsory education from 15 to 16 years old Increase financial support available to stay in school
Spain	Ordinary measures (slight adjustment to mainstream curriculum e.g, flexible groups, in-class support) Extraordinary measures (curriculum adaption, special education support, etc.)
Greece	Increase the number of years of compulsory schooling from 9 to 10 years Better curriculum and text books Less syllabus and more innovative actions Flexible education zones
Italy (from country descriptions)	Increase the number of years of compulsory schooling from 9 to 10 years

Source: SQW

Geographic level

D.20. From the country responses it would seem that most incentives are organised at a national level. The main exceptions are England and Scotland, where many incentives are delivered at a local authority level.

