



The School Completion Programme



Funded by the Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund

SPECIFICATION

Overall Objective

The School Completion Programme (SCP) is a Department of Education and Science programme that aims to have a significant positive impact on levels of young people's retention in primary and second level schools and on numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or equivalent.

The School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme is a key component of the Department of Education and Science's strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. The programme is funded on a multi-annual basis under the National Development Plan with assistance, to the end of 2007 from the European Social Fund (ESF). Following an evaluation, SCP will be integrated into the School Support Programme on a phased basis over the five year implementation period as outlined in DEIS, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.

Early School Leaving

1

According to the most recent figures available, the adjusted senior cycle retention figure was 81.3% for the 1996 cohort. The focus of the School Completion Programme is on those who are at risk of leaving school early and not reaching the significant educational milestone of school completion. Statistically, early school leavers are more likely to experience social exclusion and unemployment or underemployment. While attaining a Leaving Certificate does not constitute a guarantee of success and social inclusion, it is recognised as an important qualification on many career paths.

Factors that Contribute to Early School Leaving

A wide variety of home, community and school-based factors can contribute to low school attainment and early school leaving. Consequently, strategies designed to address the needs of young people at risk must include a wide range of actions that have a positive impact on all aspects of young people's lives. While education is a vital component in the answer to disadvantage, it is only in tandem with clearly identified actions by other statutory and voluntary services to alleviate the wider issue of socio-economic disadvantage that appropriate prevention and support strategies can be effective. Schools invited to participate in the School Completion Programme are required, in collaboration with the representatives of local statutory and voluntary agencies, to devise focused and targeted integrated plans in the holistic support of young people at risk.

Participation in the School Completion Programme

Urban / town primary schools and second level schools participating in the School Support Programme under DEIS have been invited to participate in the School Completion Programme. Schools already participating in SCP but not selected to participate in the School Support Programme under DEIS will continue to be included in SCP for the duration of the DEIS initiative

A specially constituted committee of participating schools and other relevant statutory, youth, community and voluntary agencies must become the Local Management Committee of the School Completion Programme. The Management Committee must prepare and submit a costed plan - the Retention Plan - for in-school, after-school, out-of-school and holiday supports for children at risk.

Targeting

The local Retention Plan must target and focus programme resources in the first instance on the individual young people who are most at risk of early school leaving and those who are already outside of the formal system. Additionally, some strategies may include a wider group (e.g. in the case of sporting and leisure activities) or the entire school population (e.g. where tracking attendance is involved). Schools must also plan a whole school strategy to develop an ethos of retention and the promotion of completion to Senior Cycle, or equivalent. In developing its strategic plan of action, the school and its local partners should reflect on in-school actions that will make school more relevant, meaningful and attractive to the pupils who are most at risk. Services that provide after-school, holiday time, home, family and community supports to enhance the young person's readiness to benefit from education, must also be part of the plan.

2

Retention Plan

The Retention Plan forms the core of an agreement between relevant primary and second level schools working in collaboration with other local service providers in the catchment area and the Department of Education and Science. Support in formulating the plan is available through the National School Completion Programme Co-ordination service and the plan is subject to a cyclical process of planning, implementation and review. The provision of grants is conditional on the quality of the plan, on the formulation and implementation of appropriate actions in support of the targeted young people and on meeting agreed targets. The schools and their local partners are encouraged to be flexible and creative and to strive to maximise the programme's benefits through appropriate use of its personnel and financial resources.

An Integrated Response

The School Completion Programme is based on the concept of integrated services at two levels. Firstly, the programme involves a review of the use and deployment of existing and traditional financial and personnel resources in the schools and in their catchment area(s). It also entails the co-ordination of a range of more recent Department of Education and Science provisions so that their benefits can be maximised for the targeted young people. These provisions include schemes, resources and programmes such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Home / School / Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), learning support, resource and guidance services and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year Programme (TYP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Integration at this level also includes services and activities that are based on learning from the 8 to 15 Early School Leaver Initiative and the "Stay in School" Retention Initiative as well as other initiatives such as youth services and initiatives supported by the Combat Poverty Agency and Area-Based Partnerships. By developing co-ordination and through more flexible organisation, greater benefits may be derived from the combined effects of these considerable resources.

3

Secondly, effective responses, both preventative and supportive, must include multi-faceted actions that respond to young people's needs. These range from social and personal development to after-school and out-of-school supports including sport and leisure activities as well as supports that target the young person's home and community life. It is imperative, therefore, that the Retention Plan be the collaborative programme of the schools in partnership with community, youth and sporting organisations and with the local representatives of national statutory bodies such as Community Guards, Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs), Social Workers, Health Service Executive Personnel, Area-Based Partnership etc. Contributions by these agencies and their representatives form a necessary and developing component of a comprehensive plan.

Evaluation and Reporting

The local plan under this Programme requires ongoing planning, implementation and review at local level. While evaluation of the overall Programme will be conducted centrally, co-operation at local level with evaluation procedures is required. Annual written reports on actions and outcomes at local level are required. Detailed financial records must be retained at local level and be open to inspection from time to time.

Eligible Actions in the Initiative

There are core areas in which effective actions in addressing low achievement and educational disadvantage have been well tried in multiple locations, evaluated and reported on in research findings. While actions in the School Completion Programme in these areas are deemed to be appropriate for funding, the areas themselves should not be deemed to be exhaustive and proposals from schools for actions in other areas will be considered. The most effective actions operate on two related levels:

- Preventative actions when 'risk' symptoms emerge
- Supportive and ongoing actions when 'risk' symptoms persist

While the core areas into which eligible actions fall are not mutually exclusive or amenable to strict compartmentalisation, they fit loosely into identifiable categories of action:

Home, School and Community

In a context where school is a community resource, there must be:

- The integrated delivery of school and community services with a remit to provide specific complementary supports for young people in-school and out-of-school, for their families and for their community
- Parental involvement in children's learning and the development of their confidence and capability in their role as primary educators
- School related social, sport and leisure activities
- After school and holiday time support - school assignment support, social and personal development, art /craft / drama / leisure activities etc.

4

The Young People

- Clear targeting of children and young people at risk of educational underachievement and early school leaving
- Identification of individual attainment levels and learning needs
- Mentoring at a number of levels - pupil / pupil, teacher / pupil, parent / pupil, adult community person / pupil, higher-level student / pupil, business / community person / pupil.

In-School Development

- School staff development in collaborative ways of working (a) with parents and (b) with local voluntary and statutory agencies
- School development planning
- Development / enhancement of staff attitudes, skills and ways of working in relation to their expectations of educationally disadvantaged young people.

Co-ordination Service

The School Completion Programme is supported by a team that is comprised of a National Co-ordinator, four Regional Co-ordinators, a Research and Development Officer and clerical support. The Co-ordinators advise on and monitor the development of local multi-agency plans and targets that provide for a range of specific additional services for targeted young people who are deemed to be at risk of early school leaving. They monitor the dedication of Programme resources to the provision of those additional services. They support, at school and community levels, the ongoing enhancement of mainstream and additional services and help to exploit the benefits of both mainstream and additional resources in promoting targeted pupils' retention. They work in local schools and communities to:

- Support Principals and Local Co-ordinators in implementing the Programme
- Develop Local Co-ordinators' personal and work skills
- Monitor targeted pupils' participation in and benefits from programme services and resources
- Promote partnership and collaboration between project personnel, schools, parents and local representatives of statutory agencies
- Participate, as necessary, in local management meetings to promote understanding and good practice in relation to the development of the programme.

5

Each member of the National Co-ordinating team has responsibility for a region and engages in regular consultation on planning, implementation and review. They plan, organise, deliver and facilitate information meetings and in-career development for project and school personnel.

General Conditions

- a) A Retention Plan must be submitted annually to the National Co-ordination Service of the programme.
- b) Quantifiable targets in terms of pupil support and retention to be achieved by the retention plan must be clearly set out.
- c) The retention plan and targets are to be agreed between the Local Management Committee, the National School Completion Co-ordinators and the Department of Education and Science.
- d) A separate bank account should be operated for each local School Completion Programme. All banking business in connection with the programme should be through this account, which should be used for no other purpose.
- e) All expenditure in connection with this Programme must be vouched and invoices and receipts must be retained for inspection as required by the Department of Education and Science Structural Fund Unit, Internal Audit

Unit, The Comptroller and Auditor General, the European Social Fund Control Unit, the European Commission or the European Court of Auditors. This requirement extends to very small items of expenditure, so schools should be aware that expenditure on items or services which they might normally meet through petty cash or similar arrangements must be vouched if it is in connection with the School Completion Programme.

- f) Resources provided under this Programme may not be used for expenditure on items for existing provision under schemes currently operated by the Department of Education and Science - e.g. standard classroom furniture, free books scheme, library books scheme, building grants.
- g) Funding may be used for substitution costs to free existing teaching staff to assume duties arising from the Retention Plan and agreed with the Department of Education and Science in connection with this programme. It is not permitted to pay members of staff any additional allowance in respect of duties they assume under the plan.
- h) Where any additional duties arising under the Programme are of a purely clerical / administrative nature they should be undertaken by a person(s) retained for that purpose who should be paid in accordance with the current clerical / administrative scales agreed with the Department of Education and Science.
- i) Quarterly financial returns and yearly specific action reports must be made to the Department of Education and Science. The financial returns must be based on the expenditure by the school in respect of the School Completion Programme.
- j) An Annual Operational Summary must be submitted by participating schools.
- k) An Annual Final Claim must be submitted by participating schools.
- l) All literature or other materials in connection with the School Completion Programme must include the Department of Education and Science, National Development Plan and ESF logos and indicate that the Initiative is funded by Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social fund.

For further information, please contact:

School Completion Programme
Co-ordination Service
Curriculum Development Unit
Sundrive Road
Dublin 12
Telephone: 01-4535487
Fax: 01-4020438
Email: scp@cdu.cdvec.ie

