



# **National Educational Welfare Board**

## **Annual Report 2013**

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## Introduction

This is the final annual report of the National Educational Welfare Board, being a dissolved body under Section 71 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, and has been prepared in accordance with Section 80(1) of the Act of 2013.

## Overview of the National Educational Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is an independent statutory agency, established under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 with responsibility for ensuring that every child in the State, either attends school, or otherwise receives an education. In particular, the Board has a key role in responding to instances where children are not attending school regularly, or where there is concern about the child's educational welfare.

In mid-2009 a Government decision led to a widening of the remit of NEWB to incorporate responsibility for the operational management of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) in a single strategic approach to the delivery of integrated services in socially disadvantaged communities supported by the Department of Education and Skill's DEIS initiative.

### Statutory Remit and Functions of the Board

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, establishes a comprehensive framework for promoting school participation, retention and regular attendance, as well as tackling the causes of absenteeism and early school leaving.

The Act provides the legislative framework for the extended remit of the NEWB regarding responsibility for developing an integrated strategic approach to attendance, retention and participation, building on the work and experience of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme and the Educational Welfare Service.

The Act requires the NEWB to exhaust all welfare interventions before considering taking legal action against parents, who are failing in their duty to have their children attend school regularly.

The Act also charges the Board with responsibility for children who are being educated outside of recognised schools, for example at home, as well as 16 – 17 year olds, who leave school to take up employment.

### Mission

The underlying mission of the NEWB is to maximise the level of educational participation of children and young people, by ensuring that each child is attending school, or otherwise participating in an appropriate education.

### NEWB Vision for Children

The vision of the NEWB is for a society where all children receive entitlement to an education, so that they can enjoy their childhood, realise their full potential and gain maximum benefit from education.

## The Board

### Members of the Board at 31 December 2013

Title	First Name	Surname	Nominated by/ Organisation
Ms	Nuala	Doherty, Chairperson	Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms	Catherine	Connery	Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government
Ms	Mary	Donnelly	Department for Social Protection
Mr	Bob	Dowling	Minister for Health
Mr	Eamonn	Flynn	NEWB (staff representative)
Mr	Ruairi	Gogan	Department of Justice
Ms	Marian	Jennings	Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms	Sally	Maguire*	ASTI
Ms	Deirdre	Matthews**	Minister for Education and Skills
Ms	Marie-Claire	McAlear	Community and Voluntary Pillar
Ms	Anne	McDonnell	School Management Bodies
Mr	Don	Myers	National Parents Council Post Primary
Mr	Pat	Mac Sitric	Chief Executive Officer (interim)

\*Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013

\*\*Appointed 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013, Board term completed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013

## Chairperson's Statement

At the time of writing, the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) have transferred to the new Child and Family Agency TUSLA established by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. This 2013 Annual Report is, therefore, the last report of the Board under Section 34 of the Education Welfare Act 2000.

In addition to the normal service responsibilities of the organisation in 2013, much of the energy of the board and executive of NEWB was focused laterally on preparations for the transfer of the statutory and operational functions to the new Agency. The transition process included a structured and comprehensive handover to the board of the Agency by means of a handover paper and direct engagement at inter-board level.

The NEWB Board highlighted the considerable opportunity presented for the NEWB services to become a part of the Child and family Agency with the potential for a more cohesive approach to vulnerable children and also for a more streamlined connection between education and social services. The Board also articulated the significant challenges for the new agency in its support of educational welfare services. The core challenges included the leadership of educational welfare services within the Agency, alignment between present and future corporate structures, the new service environment for NEWB service strands, governance and budgetary relationships with the parent Department, continued relationship with the Department of Education and Skills and overall impact on on-going statutory obligations and related operational projects in the context of diminished resources.

The imminent new service and governance landscape notwithstanding, 2013 was yet another challenging but fulfilling year for the NEWB. Work on delivering on our statutory remit continued apace, in collaboration with the wider education community, in seeking to maximise the resources of the organisation to address issues of school attendance, participation and retention and to develop our capacity to develop the statutory assessment of education in places other than recognised school for the purposes of registration of children educated in such settings. The organisation's work was enriched throughout the year by virtue of its varied and stimulating engagement with staff, schools, parents, representative bodies, other agencies and services, its linked Departments and its future colleagues in the new Agency.

From my position as Chairperson, I was yet again impressed by and proud of the professionalism of our staff across all field services and corporate departments. The desire to put the needs of children and families ahead of other considerations reflected the commitment of individuals and teams to their work and is worthy of the highest commendation. Change, in relation to the new Agency, is a challenge that will be embraced willingly and energetically by staff and I wish them all every success in their new environment. The executive team also led and supported this change in a most diligent and positive way.

Finally, to the outgoing board members of NEWB, I convey my most sincere gratitude for their own contribution to the work of the organisation in 2013. Their wisdom and guidance in a time of imminent change was greatly appreciated by the executive.

**Nuala Doherty**

**Chairperson**

## Chief Executive Officer's Review

The Annual Report of the National Educational Welfare Board for 2013, the final such report, provides an opportunity for some reflection on the work of educational welfare services in the context of the new and imminent service environment encapsulated in the aims and objectives of the statutory Child and Family Agency - TUSLA - established on 1 January 2014.

For the NEWB services fulfilling functions under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, it is encouraging and affirming to note the complementary remit of the new Agency, as set down in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, to '*support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children*' and to '*support and encourage the effective functioning of families*'. The work of the three service strands under NEWB's remit – the statutory educational welfare service, the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP) - is focused on the important child welfare concern of engagement with education. It impacts on the lives of children and families and in so doing contributes to improving educational outcomes. This work, however, in its various manifestations, brings NEWB staff, along with school-based HSCL and SCP personnel, into direct contact with complex family and wider social issues that impact on children's school attendance, participation and retention. In that regard the potential for synergies and efficiencies in the coming together of child and family welfare services under the new Agency bodes well for the future.

The continuing developmental work of the NEWB in 2013 on its service model *One Child One Team One Plan* has paralleled the emergence of the new Agency's proposed service delivery approach that seeks to deliver services within a coordinated, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency framework integrating the work of different agencies and professionals. The *One Child* model mirrors such an approach in harnessing the potential impact, primarily of integrated NEWB services and of schools' own capacities and resources, in addressing educational welfare issues.

A key objective of the *One Child* model is to more effectively and coherently distribute involvement in addressing attendance, participation and retention issues as between school-based services and the statutory educational welfare service, especially in schools supported uniquely under the DEIS initiative to address educational disadvantage. In this regard, and notwithstanding the continual, if modest, improvements in school attendance figures over recent reporting periods as shown in the Annual Attendance Reports, it is important to note the consistently high demands on the statutory service in addressing the most serious school attendance cases, and especially in the context of current staffing resources.

Transition to the new Agency will bring many challenges, not least of which will be to ensure the 'voice' of educational welfare services is strongly embedded in the wider child welfare service offering. The dedicated staff of NEWB – in the service strands and corporate team – are well placed to contribute strongly to the development of Ireland's State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It has been a privilege to lead this fine team and organisation into a new service environment and I wish each and every staff member deserved success for the future.

**Pat Mac Sitric**

**Chief Executive Officer (Interim)**

# Review of 2013

## Introduction

The NEWB was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and mandated to ensure that *'each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education'*. The legislation establishes a framework for promoting regular school attendance, participation and retention.

Since its establishment, the Board has undergone many changes. In 2009 the Board's remit was extended to include the HSCL and the SCP in addition to the existing EWS. This presented the Board with a unique opportunity to develop an integrated approach, which could respond to the complexity of issues that impact on attendance, participation and retention and by so doing improve outcomes for children, young people and their families, schools and communities.

In June 2011, responsibility for the functions of the NEWB transferred from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to the newly established Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The new Department is charged with leading the development of policy to ensure quality integrated service delivery for children and young people across a range of sectors, including health, education, youth justice, sport, arts and culture.

In November 2012, following the Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Ms Frances Fitzgerald T.D. announced the Government decision to proceed with the drafting of a Bill to establish the Child and Family Agency. The Government decided that the proposed Agency would have service responsibility, *inter alia*, for child welfare and protection services currently operated by the HSE including family support and alternative care services, in addition to child and family related services for which the HSE currently has responsibility, including pre-school inspections and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services.

The Board was advised that the new Agency will also assume responsibility for the functions and services currently within the remit of the NEWB upon establishment.

The following section of this report outlines the NEWB's progress in 2013 with regard to the development and implementation of a single strategic approach to attendance, participation and retention. It also provides details of the work of the NEWB's service strands (EWS, SCP and HSCL) and other important aspects of our statutory remit, including education outside of recognised schools and our work regarding the development of school attendance strategies. Preparatory work undertaken in 2013 in advance of the Board's transfer into the new Child and Family Support Agency is also outlined.

## Key operational activity in 2013

### Integration of NEWB services and development of NEWB's intervention practice model

The integration of NEWB services around school attendance, participation and retention has been a core operational challenge for the organisation in recent years. In 2013, significant progress was made in developing the Senior Management Team's capacity around common leadership and management functions, while recognising the ongoing management duties in respect of each of the three service strands. A further planned step in the integration and alignment of management functions will focus on the sharing of leadership responsibility for the Home School Community Liaison scheme and the School Completion Programme which derive their common strategic aims and objectives from the School Support programme of the DEIS initiative.

The key strategic vehicle for service integration is the development of the Board's intervention practice model *One Child, One Team, One Plan* (for brevity, termed *One Child* in this Report). The model is designed to facilitate the integrated working of NEWB services with the school and the home where individual children/families require support around school attendance, participation and/or retention while also recognising the particular contribution of the individual services working independently where that is the focus of support and intervention. *One Child* grew, *inter alia*, out of 'best practice' research commissioned by NEWB and published in November 2013:

- Addressing the Participation, Attendance and retention of Children in education: A Review of Best Practice (NEWB 2012)
- Mission In Possible: Report on the Mapping Practice Project (NEWB, Anne McMurray, June 2012)
- Providing integrated support for pupil attendance, participation and retention in education: A report of the consultation for the NEWB (SMCI Associates, 2012).

Principle components of the model include:

- A continuum of support and intervention proportionate to need
- A request for service or referral arrangement
- A problem-solving framework: Understand-Plan-Do-Review
- A multi-dimensional perspective to understand the needs of child and family
- An outcomes framework
- Lead intervention

In 2013, the model was developed incrementally, focusing initially on how the assumptions and processes embodied in the model aligned with existing interventions with children and families from NEWB service strands. Subsequently key components of the model were tested theoretically with the 'team around the child' in a range of school settings using exemplar cases of children with attendance, participation or retention difficulties.

Between September and December 2013, the *One Child* approach was trialled in nine pilot sites across DEIS and non-DEIS settings ranging in size, complexity and service availability. This work was preceded by training for service strand and school personnel involved. The pilot was designed to establish whether it can be demonstrated that, by virtue of using this practice model, outcomes for children and families have been enhanced, or whether there is potential for so doing, whether the model can actually deliver on each of its components using the proposed processes and documentation and whether it can be demonstrated that NEWB service strands and schools can work more effectively together.

An evaluation of the pilot outcomes is scheduled for early 2014.

## **The Statutory Educational Welfare Service**

The NEWB's statutory educational welfare service operates through a number of regional teams, each of which is headed by a Senior Manager at regional level leading a number of Senior Educational Welfare Officers (SEWOs), who in turn manage teams of Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs). The statutory service operated from 31 locations across 4 regions in 2013. At December 2013, the service comprised 74 senior management and field staff and 4 clerical support staff.

The statutory service has a national remit. Consistent with Government policy, EWOs are mandated to prioritise children who are out of school and who have no school place. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme of the Department of Education and Skills for schools serving socially disadvantaged communities provides a key policy context for the work of the NEWB.

The EWO's remit concentrates on finding solutions within a collaborative intervention framework involving children and their families, schools and other relevant agencies. Key aspects of the EWO role include:

- Monitoring of school attendance in cases of children with whom they are actively working and taking a range of measures where children do not attend school regularly and where parents breach their legal obligations in relation to school attendance.
- Engaging with children and families to try to ensure that children attend school.
- Working with NEWB strands and other statutory and voluntary agencies to support children's attendance, participation and retention in schools.
- Encouraging and advising schools in developing school attendance strategies, codes of behaviour and other policies designed to create an environment that encourages children to attend school regularly and participate fully.

### ***Casework***

When a young person is referred to the Board by a school, parent or another agency the initial work of the EWO is to assess the nature, scope and depth of the problem. This work falls into two key categories.

The first category involves brief interventions by an EWO, which are designed to resolve a school attendance issue before it escalates. This work includes assistance with finding a school place in a range of situations, advice and support around Section 29 Appeals (Education Act 1998) in relation to refusals to enrol, suspensions or expulsions. EWOs also assist parents in making applications to the DES for Home Tuition in particular circumstances and advise them in cases where their child may have low level non-attendance issues. Other important elements of the EWO's work lies in advising school personnel in relation to individual children whose attendance may be problematic, liaising with other service personnel such as social workers and arranging educational welfare meetings with other agencies in relation to individual children. In certain cases, intervention may involve the issuing of warning letters if attendance of individual children continues to be a cause of concern.

In 2013, the Board's EWOs engaged in almost 20,000 brief interventions with children and families.

In the second category, problems of poor school attendance that are the manifestation of more complex and deep-rooted issues require intensive intervention involving significant time and on-going support from the EWO to ensure progress. Work involves developing a plan with the family, young person and school to address the various barriers to school attendance identified. Wider

family support may be required with the assistance of other statutory and voluntary agencies to adequately address issues. In 2013, a total of 2434 cases involved children who received an intensive intervention from Educational Welfare Officers.

### ***The Legal Process***

Court proceedings are a core component of the Educational Welfare Service's work. Taking legal proceedings against a parent or guardian for failing to ensure that their child receives an education is a serious matter for the EWS. Prior to taking this action, EWOs must have established that all welfare interventions have been considered and that the parent has failed to engage with the NEWB.

A School Attendance Notice (SAN) is the first step in enforcing the law. When a SAN is issued, the EWO then begins a formal monitoring process of the child's situation, and the parent or guardian is afforded extensive opportunity to address the underlying issues with the EWO and the school. Occasionally, the involvement of other agents and services, offering additional support to the family can be sufficient to bring about change.

The imposition of sanctions on parents or guardians for their child's non-attendance is the responsibility of the court, further to normal court proceedings. The law provides that upon conviction, either a fine or up to one month's imprisonment, or both, can be imposed.

From January to end December 2013, 536 SANs were issued in respect of 318 children. 175 new summonses were issued by the NEWB in respect of 101 children.

### ***Recognising and rewarding good attendance***

Research demonstrates that children who attend school regularly are more likely to stay in school and thus are more likely to be emotionally, financially and socially secure in later life. Section 10 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 charges the NEWB with '*promoting and fostering an environment that encourages children to attend school and participate in school life.*' Consequently, the Board promotes regular school attendance in a variety of ways, including providing sample certificates commending achievement in attendance.

An annual school attendance awards ceremony in Cork city, which has been a tradition now for over a century, is organised annually by the Educational Welfare Service in conjunction with Cork City Council. In 2013, 6 outstanding pupils received awards for fourteen years unbroken school attendance. These pupils never missed a day in primary or post primary school. 68 pupils ranging from 8 to 14 years unbroken school attendance also received awards. A further 1400 other pupils throughout Cork City also received certificates for unbroken attendance over periods ranging from 1 year to 7 years.

Unbroken school attendance is a considerable achievement but it is not simply a result of good health. It is only possible in a school environment where young people feel secure and fulfilled and where there is a strong foundation of family support and encouragement. NEWB has continued to support schools in recognising various degrees of achievement in school attendance through the availability of a range of certificates.

### ***Education in places other than Recognised Schools***

Section 14 (1) of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 obliges the NEWB to establish and maintain a register of all children in receipt of an education in a place other than a recognised school. Children registered for this purpose typically may be educated in the home or may be attending one of a range of non-recognised educational settings.

The registration process is managed by a Senior Educational Welfare Officer (SEWO) in the statutory educational welfare service, assisted by an Educational Welfare Officer. A panel of expert assessors is commissioned to carry out the assessments of education required under Section 14. The number of home educated children registered has grown from 17 in 2004 to 897 at the end of 2013.

Similarly, the number of children currently registered as being in receipt of education in a non-recognised setting has increased to 8,234 at the end of 2013; this number includes a significant number of children not removed from the register due to the absence of confirmation of places received in recognised schools subsequent to a period of education in the home or in some other non-recognised setting.

## Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

### ***Vision and Objectives of HSCL***

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) was established in the Autumn of 1990 and is now a mainstream DES initiative to help combat educational disadvantage under the DEIS (Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools) strategy. The clear vision of the scheme is the promotion and development of partnership between parents, teachers and community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and assist their retention and participation in the educational system. The HSCL Scheme works at the preventative and universal level by enabling parents to become active participants in their children's education, thus acknowledging them as the primary educator.

### ***Structure of HSCL***

The HSCL Scheme is managed and coordinated by a national leadership team of Senior Managers, on secondment to the NEWB through the DES. Their role supports more than 400 HSCL Co-ordinators serving 605 schools and develops the HSCL Scheme at school, family and community level to ensure that service delivery is prioritised in accordance with the DEIS strategy. The team assist with DEIS planning and in developing integrated work practices between the three service strands of the NEWB. A key support mechanism in the HSCL Scheme is a cluster model, where coordinators meet regularly at local level to share best practice. In addition, coordinators receive and share training and professional development, which focuses on integrated working as well as practical exemplars of good practice.

The HSCL Scheme also operates Local Education Committees comprising parents, other agencies, community groups, teachers and students. The Local Education Committee identifies and addresses issues in the community that impinge on children's learning and life in the community. The involvement of parents is the cornerstone of the Local Education Committee. Parents who might not otherwise participate in the school are provided with an opportunity to be involved in their child's education through community initiatives, designed to support literacy, numeracy and positive engagement.

### ***Scheme Activity HSCL***

Initiatives currently operated by HSCL coordinators, in conjunction with Local Education Committees, for students and parents include:

- Literacy and numeracy initiatives (e.g. Maths for fun, Maths Eyes, Science for fun Reading for Fun, One Book One Community, Storysacks)
- Structured information briefings/courses pertinent to the life of the child in school e.g. transfer from primary to post-primary, cyber-bullying and health issues etc.
- Supports and courses such as parenting skills, speech therapy and FETAC accredited courses, e.g. Maths, Irish Language, IT., Child Care

### ***Continuous Professional Development (CPD) HSCL***

A comprehensive programme of CPD is essential to ensuring that each HSCL Co-ordinator is fully equipped to implement local initiatives that deliver best practice and integrated working in accordance with the vision and objectives of HSCL. Regional Co-ordinators plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development for all HSCL coordinators.

### ***Outcomes from HSCL Activities 2013***

During 2013, HSCL coordinators nationally strengthened their focus on integrated working to achieve improved attendance, participation and retention, among pupils, in line with the strategic vision of NEWB. In addition to this and in keeping with the HSCL aim of empowering parents as

prime educator, there was evidence of more involvement of parents in school structures such as Parents Council, Boards of Management; increased levels of literacy among marginalised parents as a result of targeted interventions as well as involvement of parents in classroom activities and in family learning programmes.

From September to December 2013, the *One Child, One Team, One Plan* intervention practice model was tested in 9 DEIS and non-DEIS pilot sites, which incorporated 45 schools in total, 30 primary and 15 post primary. In all these settings, HSCL coordinators played a very significant role in utilising and testing comprehensively the 9 principle components of the model; this was carried out in conjunction with other strand personnel in the School Completion Programme and the statutory educational welfare service, as well as with care team and other support structures in schools. As a result of this pilot, there is evidence that the use of a continuum of intervention as a means of streamlining activity and of more effective targeting around participation in school, continues to enhance the work of HSCL towards improved outcomes for children and families.

In addition to the work carried out in the 9 pilot sites, where the importance of recording and documenting interventions was highlighted, HSCL coordinators nationally have begun to standardise their use of appropriate reporting templates which will also indicate numbers of families and children that are in receipt of either universal/preventative, targeted or intensive support. To this end, senior managers, in conjunction with HSCL practitioners, have provided guidance and support to all coordinators at CPD events held at various locations nationally.

## The School Completion Programme (SCP)

### ***Vision and Objectives of SCP***

The SCP 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. SCP is a component of the DEIS strategy of the DES to combat educational disadvantage. 2013 was a particularly challenging year for the SCP to maintain frontline service delivery in the context of continuing budget reductions as required under a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure for the period 2012-2014.

### ***Structure of SCP***

The SCP predominantly serves school communities participating in the DEIS strategy but is also available in a number of non-DEIS schools. To date, the SCP has been implemented in 470 primary schools and 224 post-primary schools. There are 124 local SCP projects employing 252 full-time and over 2,000 part-time staff. Each of the 124 local SCP Projects are governed by a Local Management Committee comprised of a Local Co-ordinator, Principals, HSCL teachers, parents and members of local statutory and voluntary organisations. The Local Co-ordinator leads the implementation of the SCP Retention Plan which provides in-school, after-school, holiday and out of school supports for targeted students.

Since 2009 the NEWB has had operational management responsibility for SCP, in collaboration with the DES for strategic direction under DEIS and, since 2011, with the DCYA in relation to budget allocation, financial oversight and overall policy matters.

At a national level, SCP is supported by a leadership team of three Senior Managers and a Research and Development Manager. The leadership team provide support to local projects on the development and monitoring of local retention plans and on financial governance arrangements in accordance with SCP guidance, to ensure an integrated approach to working in accordance with the NEWB's single strategic approach to attendance, participation and retention, and in the compilation, analysis and dissemination of research undertaken by SCP.

The School Retention Plan forms the core of an agreement between primary and post-primary level schools working in collaboration with other local service providers in the catchment area who have a remit to support young people at risk of early school leaving. The plan includes appropriate educational interventions and actions in support of the targeted young people and on meeting agreed targets. The SCP leadership team within NEWB has responsibility for approving each Retention Plan as the basis for programme funding provided by the DCYA from the available annual budget as voted by the Oireachtas for the programme.

### ***Scheme Activity SCP 2013***

In 2013 SCP projects at local level continued to provide educational interventions and supports to young people identified as most at risk of early school leaving, these included:

- Targeting and supporting children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of poor attendance, participation and retention via initiatives such as breakfast clubs; homework clubs; afterschool supports; mentoring programmes; and therapeutic interventions
- Ensuring that schools have in place the appropriate procedures to monitor, identify and respond to attendance, participation and retention issues

- Working in an integrated way with other NEWB service strands - in that regard, between September and December 2013, ten SCP projects participated in piloting the *One Child One Team One Plan* intervention practice model in 9 DEIS and non-DEIS sites nationally
- Transfer programmes to support young people transitioning from primary to post-primary school
- Working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary groups.

### ***SCP Continuous Professional Development (CPD)***

As with the HSCL scheme, CPD is essential to ensuring that the SCP projects deliver a service in accordance with SCP best practice. In 2013, CPD focused on the following areas:-

- SCP project planning in the context of resource constraints
- Child protection training in accordance with revised national guidelines - Children First 2011 and Designated Liaison Person (DLP) training for SCP Co-ordinators in accordance with the SCP Child Protection Policy
- Progress overview on the development of an integrated practice model involving the three strands of the NEWB and integrated training for staff participating in the *One Child One Team One Plan* pilot exercise.

### ***Review of School Completion Programme***

In November 2013 the NEWB invited tenders from suitably qualified and experienced consultants to lead and facilitate a review of the SCP in line with the commitment in the Government's Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) for 2012-2014 published in December 2011. The CRE also set out the 6.5% per annum savings required in the SCP in each of the years 2012 to 2014 – a total adjustment of €5.5 million.

Research and evaluation are essential elements underpinning DEIS. Evaluations to date of the impact of the range of supports provided under DEIS demonstrate positive improvements in retention and attainment since its introduction. The CRE signalled the need to undertake a programme review of the SCP element of the School Support Service in order to achieve greater consistency and efficiencies in service delivery and clarify roles and responsibilities. It will also assist to further develop best practice by building on the learning and experience gained to date across the programme. It is anticipated that a programme review will assist to identify the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing for the future and ensure that available funds can be targeted to those services which provide the greatest contribution to educational outcomes for children at risk of early school leaving and educational disadvantage.

Accordingly, the DCYA tasked the NEWB to commission appropriate external expertise to facilitate and lead a review of the SCP. This review will complement the ongoing priority work of the NEWB to develop an integrated national approach to school attendance, participation and retention. It is also consistent with the mandate of the DCYA to lead the development of harmonised policy and quality integrated service delivery across children's services.

The review is intended to focus on two distinct but interrelated aspects of the Programme. The detailed requirements for the review project are specified in the Terms of Reference as follows:

Focus 1: Review of programme administrative structures to ensure programme design remains fit for purpose.

- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of the existing programme structures and evaluate the degree to which they can support an integrated service approach to combat early school leaving.
- Recommend appropriate programme structures which build on existing strengths (as identified in Point 1) and streamline the administrative and governance arrangements for the DCYA, the NEWB (Child and Family Agency) and the projects.
- Define roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships within the proposed programme delivery, management and administrative structures.
- Evaluate the extent to which available resources are effectively targeted within the programme. Examine the operation of present school clustering arrangements in targeting resources effectively.

Focus 2: Analysis of interventions and supports.

- Conduct an analysis of interventions and supports in projects funded under the SCP to determine the outcomes being achieved, the method and cost of delivery and the contribution to the objectives of the DEIS programme.
- Recommend evidence informed SCP interventions and student supports, having regard to the findings of this analysis, which could be endorsed as core activities within an integrated services approach to efficiently and effectively meet locally assessed needs.
- Specify outcomes focused performance measures consistent with school level targets within the DEIS programme and other relevant national objectives to be used to evaluate outcomes for children, families and schools.

## Other Work of the Board

### School Attendance Strategies

In 2013, work continued on the development of Guidelines for schools and on the preparation of Attendance Strategies as outlined in Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. Formal guidance will provide clarity to schools in terms of their responsibilities under the Act in supporting and encouraging school attendance and a framework of good practice to assist school authorities and the wider school community in that regard.

The draft guidelines, prepared by consultants RSM McClure Watters, with the support of an Advisory Group of experts established to oversee the development process, were quality assured and benchmarked with reference to a number of indicators including: compliance with statutory provisions; alignment with a range of relevant education policies and practices; NEWB experience and evidence-informed good practice; alignment with NEWB's Code of Behaviour Guidelines; and with the *One Child, One Team, One Plan* Practice Model.

Finalisation of the Guidelines will continue into 2014, with implementation planned for the 2014-2015 school year.

### Review of the Guidelines for the Assessment of Education in Places Other than Recognised Schools

In 2013, work progressed on the review of *Guidelines for the Assessment of Education in Places Other Than Recognised Schools*. The original Guidelines were completed by the DES in 2003, fulfilling a requirement of section 16 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Drafting and consultations on the new Guidelines will continue into 2014 for implementation by the end of the year. Key issues in the review include the need to revisit, for the assessment process, our understanding of the concept of a certain minimum education in light of modern conditions, the assessment of education in structured settings other than the home and the challenges for the assessment and registration process in the case of children with special education needs.

### Working with the Traveller and Roma Communities

The NEWB participates on the Traveller Education Strategy Advisory and Consultative Forum (TESACF). This forum is chaired by the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES and is charged with monitoring the implementation of the Traveller Education Strategy. Since the withdrawal of a range of school-focused supports for Traveller education, NEWB views its participation in this forum as vital to its capacity to respond to school attendance, participation and retention issues within the Traveller and Roma communities. Through this forum, NEWB aims to ensure effective working with the DES and voluntary and community groups around Traveller and Roma children's school attendance. The NEWB works closely with Pavee Point to facilitate close working relationships at a national level with Traveller and Roma representative groups. NEWB is also involved at local level with schools and other services in developing initiatives to support school attendance at school within these communities.

### Annual Attendance Data

Under Section 21(6) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, schools are obliged to submit a report to the Board within six weeks after the end of each school year on levels of student attendance during that school year. These data are subjected to a series of rigorous validation checks and analysis by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), Drumcondra which provides an annual report to the Board. The annual attendance information has been gathered from schools since 2003/2004. The information provides valuable high level national and county data in relation to numbers of school

days lost through student absence, numbers of students absent for more than 20 days and numbers of students suspended and excluded/expelled.

The data for 2011/12 show the following:

- The response rates of schools to annual attendance reporting requirements rose to their highest levels (99.1%) for both primary and post-primary in 2011/12. The 2011/12 Annual Attendance Report represents a de facto census.
- The percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year was 5.8% in primary schools and 7.7% in post-primary schools. The figures at both levels for 2011/12 are lower than for 2010/11 and are at the lowest for the five year period 2007/08 – 2011/12.
- Approximately 55,000 students on average miss school each day, consisting of approximately 30,000 primary and 24,800 post-primary students. This equates to a loss – similar to that in 2010/11 – of 11 school days for a primary school student from the required 183-day school year and 13 days for a post-primary student from the 167-day school year.
- Figures for Twenty-Day Absences remained stable for primary school pupils (11.1% of pupils) but were lower for post-primary students (16.1% as against 16.5% in 2010/11). Based on population numbers this represents approximately 57,500 primary school students, and 52,000 post-primary students.
- In the primary school sector non-attendance remains substantially higher in special schools and higher in ordinary schools with special classes.
- Rates of non-attendance in primary schools are higher in towns and cities than they are in rural areas. This is particularly apparent in terms of the percentage of pupils absent for twenty days or more where rates of 20-day absences are almost double the rural rate. This pattern remains stable year-on-year.
- In primary schools non-attendance is generally higher in schools involved in the DEIS School Support Programme (SSP) for designated schools (approximately 700) serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities. However, there continues to be an important urban/rural dimension in non-attendance when DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools are compared. General non-attendance and twenty-day absences are higher in urban schools outside DEIS than they are in rural schools within the DEIS programme. This pattern is stable year-on-year.
- In post-primary schools all forms of non-attendance were higher in schools within the DEIS programme. Around 27% of students in these schools were absent for twenty days or more in 2011/12. This figure is down 1.5% from 2010/11 and down approximately 3% from 2009/10. In schools outside DEIS the figure for 20-day absences was 14.2% for 2011/12, down 0.4% on the previous year.
- Only 26 expulsions were reported in primary schools in 2011/12 (25 in 2010/11). The corresponding figures in post-primary schools showed an increase of 50 in 2011/12 (186 students, accounting for less than 0.06% of students).
- Less than 5% of post-primary students were suspended in 2011/12. However, there was a small increase from 4.4% to 4.7% when compared to 2010/11. Just 0.2 % of primary pupils were suspended in 2011/12.
- Non-attendance in Irish primary schools was 5.8% of student/days in 2011/12 (removing data for special schools) compared to between 4.4% and 6.2% for Northern Ireland, England and Wales. Non-attendance for Irish post-primary schools was 7.7% of student days, compared to between 5.7% and 7.8% in neighbouring jurisdictions.

## Organisational Information

### Transfer of NEWB to the Child and Family Agency

In late 2013, significant progress was made in the preparation for the transfer of NEWB functions under the Education (Welfare), Act 2000 to the Child and Family Agency, when established. There was no impact on the management or operation of services and none is anticipated in the transition phase. Corporate services specific to NEWB will continue over the transition period, but with some functional areas already engaged with colleagues from HSE Child and Family Services and Family Support Agency in corporate set-up activity. The Chief Executive Officer of NEWB was a member of the joint management group under the CEO-Designate overseeing the establishment of the Agency.

The transition process included a structured and comprehensive handover to the board of the new Agency by means of a handover paper and direct engagement at inter-board level. The NEWB board highlighted the considerable opportunity presented for the NEWB services to become a part of the Child and family Agency with the potential for a more cohesive approach to vulnerable children and also for a more streamlined connection between education and social services. The board also articulated the significant challenges for the new agency in its support of educational welfare services. The core challenges included the leadership of educational welfare services within the Agency, alignment between present and future corporate structures, the new service environment for NEWB service strands, governance and budgetary relationships with the parent Department, continued relationship with the Department of Education and Skills and overall impact on on-going statutory obligations and related operational projects in the context of diminished resources.

### Board

The board of the NEWB was established under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and comprises a Chairperson and 12 ordinary members, including the CEO. The board members are appointed by the Minister for Children following consultation with Departments and bodies prescribed in the Act as having a special interest and expertise in matters that relate to the functions of the Board and represent children, young people, families, schools and education partners. The board met on 7 occasions in 2013.

The role of the board of the NEWB is to provide strategic leadership, direction, support and guidance for the organisation and promote commitment to its core values, policies and objectives. As the governing body, the board is also responsible for ensuring effective systems of internal control, statutory and operational compliance and risk management.

Specifically, under a schedule of reserved functions, the board is obliged to:-

- Meet regularly and ensure that collective responsibility is safeguarded
- Comply with all statutory obligations
- Confirm annually the adequacy of internal financial controls
- Oversee major items of expenditure
- Establish and monitor procedures for post-retirement employment of directors and employees
- Establish and monitor procedures for managing potential conflicts of interest
- Publish annual report and accounts
- Maintain appropriate relationship with external auditor
- Have a proper constituted audit committee and other committees, as appropriate
- Establish a procedure for 'confidential reporting' and meaningful follow-up of matters raised
- Prepare a strategic plan within the requirements set down
- Review the board's operation and effectiveness

### Audit and Risk Committee

Under the Code of Governance for State Bodies, the NEWB is required to have in place an Audit and Risk Committee. Due to capacity issues in 2013, the Board also assumed the role of the Audit and Risk Committee. Given the imminent transfer of Board functions to the new Child and Family Agency, it was agreed that the Board would continue to act as the Audit and Risk Committee in 2013.

### Internal Audit Programme

The Board of the NEWB commissioned an internal Financial Controls Review in 2013 in accordance with financial governance requirements and monitored progress on previous recommendations. No significant issues were identified.

### External Audit Programme

The Comptroller and Auditor General's external audit of the NEWB's Internal Financial Control Environment was completed for 2013. However, the report was not finalised at the time of production of this Report. Unaudited accounts are attached and the Comptroller and Auditor General's report will be attached as an Appendix when available.

### Budget and Staffing

#### **NEWB**

The NEWB budget for 2013 was €9,042,000, comprising €6,100,000 pay and €2,942,000 non-pay. The staffing ceiling for the NEWB under the Employment Control Framework (ECF) is as follows:-

end 2012	end 2013	end 2014
100	98	97

In December 2013, the NEWB had a staffing complement of 93 in the following operational areas:

Statutory educational welfare service, including senior management and clerical/administrative support	78
Corporate senior management	2
Corporate services	13

In addition, 6 Senior Managers continued to be seconded to NEWB through the DES as part of the integration of DEIS school support initiatives – the School Completion programme and Home-School-Community Liaison scheme – with the statutory educational welfare service in a single strategic approach to school attendance, participation and retention. Together with the Senior Managers of the statutory service they form the Senior Management Team for the NEWB's service strands.

#### **School Completion Programme (SCP)**

In December 2011, the Government's Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) for 2012-2014 set out the 6.5% per annum savings required in the SCP in each of the years 2012-14 – a total adjustment of €5.5million.

In 2013, the SCP budget allocation from DCYA was at a reduced level of €26.465m covering the 124 local projects covering 470 primary schools and 224 post-primary schools, employing 252 full-time and over 2,000 part-time staff, in addition to a small number of other programmes (e.g. the Schools Business Partnership and Teen Parent Support Programme) with objectives consistent with those of SCP. To achieve required savings, a 3% reduction was implemented across all projects on the first €0.215m of project funds with a 6.5% reduction on all funds above the €0.215m threshold.

***Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (HSCL)***

HSCL is funded out of the DES vote and the budget comprises circa €25,000,000 in salary costs. There are just over 400 HSCL Co-ordinators. The HSCL is not affected by the Government moratorium on staffing as it is a frontline teaching service.

***Freedom of Information and Data Protection***

11 requests for information were received in 2013 under Freedom of Information legislation, 4 of which were fully granted, 6 were part granted and 1 was refused.

There was one request for information under Data Protection legislation.

***Health & Safety***

NEWB complies with all aspects of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Acts, 2005 and 2007 and a Health and Safety Committee continued in place in 2013.