Early School Leaving: Predictive Risk Factors

Executive Summary

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1.1 Context

Early School Leaving (ESL) is regarded as a significant societal issue, not just in Ireland, but across Europe and the developing world. Education is considered a key driver of economic and social success for individuals, employers and nations (OECD, 2006) and as such, Early School Leaving has a cost for the individual and for society. Early School Leaving may lead individuals to a weaker position in society and in the labour market (European Commission, 2009). A higher level of education can lead to a series of positive outcomes for both the individual and society related to employment, higher salaries, better health, less crime, higher social cohesion, lower public and social costs and higher productivity and growth (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Conversely, inadequate education as a result of Early School Leaving has high costs for the individual, for society and for the economy (Psacharopoulos, 2007; Belfield, 2008; Nevala et al., 2011). As a consequence of leaving education early, young people may be faced with reduced opportunities in the labour market and an increased likelihood of unemployment and socioeconomic disadvantage and they may be less inclined to participate in political, social and cultural spheres of life. Predictions for future skills needs in Europe suggest that in the future, only 1 in 10 jobs will be within reach of an Early School Leaver (European Parliament, 2011). Reducing Early School Leaving is therefore, considered important in terms of improving outcomes for both the individual and society (Borg et al., 2015).

1.2 Predictive Risk Factors of Early School Leaving

There has been extensive research on the factors that lead to Early School Leaving and most research indicates that it is never a single factor but a combination of factors (Dowrick and Crespo, 2005). Early School Leaving is a multi-faceted and complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement that occurs over time (Lyche, 2010; European Commission, 2013). Reasons for Early School Leaving are highly individual. However, as a social phenomena, Early School Leaving follows certain patterns (European Parliament, 2011). It is considered that student and family characteristics can explain approximately 80% of the variability in student achievement and the remaining 20% of the variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that students attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). For the purposes of this report, risk factors for Early School Leaving will be classified into two categories: *Individual and Social Factors* and *School and Systemic Factors*. These two categories will be further subdivided as outlined below in Figure 1:

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
		Attitudes	
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	School Structure		
	School Practices		

Figure 1: Summary of Early School Leaving Predictive Risk Factors – *Individual and Social Factors* & *School and Systemic Factors*

1.3 Individual and Social Factors

Rumberger and Lim (2008) use Tinto's (1987) model to order Individual and Social Factors into four domains: Educational Performance, Behaviour, Attitudes and Social Background (see Tinto, 1987; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

1.3.1 Educational Performance

Educational performance is seen as the greatest predictor of non-completion by most of the research (Lyche, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Traag and van der Velden, 2008; Markussen, 2010; European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015; Marks and Fleming, 1999; Croll, 2009), where students' experiences of schooling are considered a significant predictor of Early School Leaving (Eivers et al., 2000). Some research has indicated that variables relating to school experience are the best screening predictors for potential Early School Leaving. A student's school achievement has therefore, been reported as one of the most predictive factors of Early School Leaving, even after taking into account the effects of socioeconomic background and grade retention. Research shows a strong link between low academic ability and Early School Leaving (see Beekhoven and Dekkers, 2005; Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Marks, 2007). Academic achievement is identified as having a significant effect on the odds of Early School Leaving or upper second level school completion, and grades are found to be a more certain predictor than test scores (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Whilst grades at the end of lower second level are a solid predictor of Early School Leaving, grades from primary school have the absolute highest significance for completion (Byrhagen et al., 2006; Markussen et al., 2008; Markussen, 2010; Jimerson et al., 2002; Croll, 2009). Students who have lower reading and mathematics levels on entry to second level education are more likely to leave school in the years that follow (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Students who struggle or spend little time on homework are those most likely to leave school early (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Having a learning difficulty highly affects the rate of Early School Leaving (Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Student mobility, (the act of transferring schools and/or home), during during primary and lower second level increases the chances of Early School Leaving and decreases

the chances of graduation (Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lyche, 2010).

In terms of attainment, Rumberger (1995) identified grade retention as the single most powerful school-related predictor of Early School Leaving. Those who are retained at a grade level often find that they are older than their classmates, a factor that has been associated with Early School Leaving in an Irish context (Granville, 1982). Rumberger and Lim's (2008) found that older students are more likely to leave school early than younger students.

1.3.2 Behaviour

A wide range of behaviours in the theoretical and empirical research literature has been linked to whether students leave school early or graduate from school. Behavioural factors leading to Early School Leaving can be divided into two main categories: Engagement and Anti-Social Tendency (Lyche, 2010), where anti-social tendency is considered from Winnicott's (1967; 1968) perspective. Winnicott (1967, 1968) argues that adolescents push the necessary boundaries for separation (from parents and what he calls the 'big Others'). This, he considers, is part of the adolescent process and also part of the reason why adolescents are considered 'difficult.' He calls this the 'anti-social tendency' which he says is actually entirely normal, as it is an expression of hope and ultimately should be considered an effort to construct a vital way of communication (see Winnicott, 1967, 1968).

In much of the literature, student engagement is one of the most important behavioural precursors to Early School Leaving (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). A student's level of school engagement comprises both academic and social integration with the school (You and Sharkey, 2009). Students who display stable and higher levels of school engagement over the course of their careers are less likely to leave school early (Janosz et al., 2008; Rumberger and Lim, 2008). The most common specific indicator in Rumberger and Lim's (2008) study was absenteeism, where they found that students with higher absenteeism were more likely to leave school early and less likely to graduate. A high level of absenteeism in lower second level school is very often followed by Early School Leaving in upper second level school (Hernes, 2010; Balfanz et al., 2007; MacIver and MacIver, 2009). Absenteeism and

misbehaviour are predictive of Early School Leaving, from as early as elementary school (Alexander et al., 1997; Barrington and Hendricks, 1989). Irish research continues to indicate that school leaving tends to be preceded by absenteeism and truancy (Smyth, 1999; McCoy et al., 2007; Darmody et al., 2008). Students with poor attendance records in their Junior Cycle year are over twice as likely as those with an average or good attendance to leave school after the end of the year (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Suspension rates are predictive of Early School Leaving (Lee et al., 2011). Early School Leavers were significantly more likely than those who remained in school to report having been suspended or expelled (Eivers et al., 2000; Janosz et al., 1997; Schwartz, 1995).

The research literature finds that engaging in any behaviour such as misbehaving in school, anti-social tendencies outside of school, drug and alcohol use and sexual activity and teen childbearing, increases the risk of leaving school early (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). The most common indicator of anti-social tendency is school misbehaviour (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Anti-social tendencies at age 14 has significant and direct effect on Early School Leaving by age 16, even controlling for a host of other predictors, including prior academic achievement and family background, both studies found that (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Misbehaviour in middle school (lower second level) is significantly associated with higher Early School Leaving. Misbehaviour in lower primary school increases the odds of leaving school early (Ou, Mersky, Reynolds, and Kohler, 2007). Youth with anti-social tendencies were more likely to leave school early than youth without such tendencies (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Drug or alcohol use during second level schooling is associated with higher Early School Leaving rates (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Studies have shown inconsistent findings in relation to the correlation between Early School Leaving and tobacco and drug use. Some studies found that tobacco use during second level had a direct effect on the odds of leaving school early, while drug (marijuana) use did not (Ellickson, Bui, Bell and McGuigan, 1998; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Other studies found that both marijuana and tobacco use had direct effects on leaving school early, but marijuana use had the stronger effect (Bray, Zarkin, Ringwalt and Qi, 2000). Teenage parenting and childbearing increased the odds of Early School Leaving or reduced the odds of graduating, where teenage parenting had more serious consequences for females than for males (Fernandez, Paulsen, and

Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989). Working during schooling is shown to have an inconsistent effect on Early School Leaving in the literature. Several studies found that only students who worked more than twenty hours a week were significantly more likely to leave school early (D'Amico, 1984; Goldschmidt and Wang, 1999; Perreira, Harris, and Lee, 2006; Warren and Lee, 2003; Warren and Cataldi, 2006). On the other hand, other studies found that students who worked fewer than twenty hours (D'Amico, 1984), or fewer than seven hours (McNeal, 1995), or more consistently throughout their second level school careers (Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer, 2006), were less likely to leave school early, compared to students who worked more hours or did not work at all.

1.3.3   Attitudes

Students' beliefs, values, and attitudes are related to both their behaviours and to their performance in school. Cairns et al. (1989) has highlighted that factors such as the young person's personality, (especially aggression levels), can shape later Early School Leaving. Elder and Caspi (1990) spoke about factors and processes that alleviate or magnify the impact of other influences and causes. This is sometimes known as the 'accentuation principle' (Elder and Caspi, 1990, cited by Rutter and Smith,1995). On the one hand, there is a mix of individual susceptibility, vulnerability and adversity that increases the likelihood of a child leaving school early. On the other, there is personal resilience and a variety of protective mechanisms that assist her/him to counter adversity and influence and remain in school (Rutter, 1990; Rutter and Smith, 1995). Individual educational aspirations are also a highly predictive factor where educational aspirations at age 14 are highly predictive of subsequent behaviour regarding participation in education with a third of those who intend to only complete the Junior Certificate leaving school early compared with 5% of those who intended to go on for a degree (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). There is also general agreement that a young person experiencing difficulties in making a key transition, (for example from primary to post-primary school), is significantly more likely to leave school early. Many of these transitions are reflected in schooling (Eurydice, 1994). Children do not all react in the same way and some encounter difficulties which can manifest themselves in behavioural or learning difficulties, or vulnerability to Early School Leaving (Eurydice 1994; Mannoni 1979; CORI, 1996; Boldt, 1997).

There is a broad consensus that such difficulties with transitions are therefore, a direct cause of Early School Leaving (Boldt, 1994; Stokes, 1995; Boldt et al., 1998, Ryan, 1998). Pervasive teasing, bullying, depression and emotional trauma increase the risk of Early School Leaving (Downes, 2012).

1.3.4 Social Background

Using Rumberger and Lim (2008), social background will be divided into: Past Experiences, Health and Family. Following Lyche (2010), Family will be further subdivided in to Demographics, Family Status and Structure, Family Practices and Family Resources.

A growing body of evidence has found that past experiences of high quality preschool can not only improve school readiness and early school success, but long-term follow-up studies have found that preschool can also improve a wide range of adolescent and adult outcomes, including second level completion, and less criminal activity, reliance on welfare and teen parenting (Barnett and Belfield, 2006; Gorey, 2001). Longitudinal analyses since 1986 have found that students who participated in preschool had graduation rates of 10% or higher than non-participants, even after controlling for an index of family risk factors, race, ethnicity and gender (Lyche, 2010).

Several studies have also found that poor health is also correlated to higher Early School Leaving rates (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Having a learning disability also highly affects the dropout rate (Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Certain demographic facts are considered to heighten the risk of Early School Leaving. There is a considerable amount of international research demonstrating that male students are more likely than female students to leave school early compared to their female counterparts (Rumberger, 1995; Byrne et. al., 2009; Croll, 2009). European Union figures indicate males represent 12.5% of Early School Leavers, whilst females represent 9.5% (European Commission, 2016). In Ireland, Early School Leaving figures for 2015 show an Early School Leaving rate of 8.4% for males compared to a 5.4% for females (European Commission, 2016). Being a

member of a minority has a significant effect on the Early School Leaving rate. In terms of ethno-cultural minority groups, Roma and Irish Travellers have often been identified as being amongst the most disadvantaged groups in education and consequently at greater risk of leaving school early (Luciak, 2006; Jugovic and Doolan, 2013; European Commission, 2014). European Union figures show that 19% of Early School Leaving are foreign born in comparison to 10.1% native born (European Commission, 2016). 2015 figures for Ireland show that foreign-born Early School Leavers at 6.8% perform only slightly below native-born Early School Leavers at 7% (European Commission, 2016). Byrne and Smyth (2010) also highlight the notion that newcomers in the broadest sense are also at greater risk of Early School Leaving. Students with disabilities have much higher dropout rates than students without disabilities (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Research shows that the socioeconomic status and the educational attainment of parents are amongst the strongest determinants of Early School Leaving (European Commission, 2015). Early School Leavers are much more likely to come from families with a low socioeconomic status i.e. unemployed parents, low household income, and low levels of parental education, or to belong to vulnerable social groups such as migrants (European Parliament, 2011). A low level of parental education is also considered a major contributing risk factor (OECD, 2013). The higher a parent's level of education, the greater the child's preference for staying in school (Stokes, 2003; Breen, 1984a; 1984b; Gambetta, 1987; Morgan, 1998; European Commission, 2014; Thibert, 2013; McGarr, 2010). The level of education of the mother, in particular, is associated with higher risk (Nevala et al., 2011). Amongst children with low-educated parents, the risk of leaving school early is nearly five times higher than for children whose parents have a second level qualification and more than ten times higher than for children whose parents hold a tertiary degree (Lavrijsen and Nicaise, 2013). Living in a geographical area with high unemployment or in remote areas or small cities, (as opposed to living in medium sized or large cities), increases the chance of being an Early School Leaver (Eurofound, 2012).

Findings in relation to family structure and the number of parents in the home of an Early School Leaver, and the number of siblings, are inconclusive.

Family practices such as low parental involvement in their child's schooling, poor parental aspirations, parenting style and parents' language patterns are seen to exacerbate the risks of Early School Leaving. Bourdieu (1971) outlines in his Cultural Reproduction Theory how systems such as school, help to perpetuate and transmit inequality. For Bernstein (1973) this is evidenced in the use of two language codes – the elaborated code, predicated on middle class ideals, and used in school and the restricted code, more often used amongst family and friends and tight knit group. Due to their socialisation process, some children can experience a linguistic discontinuity between the language used in their home and the language used in the school. The literature cites congruence between the home and school environments as being an integral variable in facilitating student success (Christenson, 2004; Christenson and Anderson, 2002; Finn and Rock, 1997). Clarke et al. (2010) define 'congruence' as the continuity or common approach among home and school contexts. The educational model shown by parents and siblings is seen to influence Early School Leaving. More often than not, students who leave school early come from families where parents do not have more than eight years of study completed (Gyonos, 2014). However, there are exceptions as well. The educational model shown by siblings appears to be more important. If there is an elder child who dropped out school, there are high chances that the younger sibling will do likewise (Gyonos, 2014). Eivers et al., (2000) highlights that there is a greater change of Early School Leaving when there is another Early School Leaver in the family.

The availability and use of a family's economic resources in sustaining educational participation features in the literature with many researchers regarding restricted family income as the primary factor behind many negative aspects of family functioning (Hanson et al., 1997). Factors such as the 'push-pull' factors of the labour market for low skilled workers (Budge et al., 2000) which may be either a necessity or a choice for the young person also feature. The research suggests that daily stressors involving family finances have a particularly strong direct influence on the school performance and Early School Leaving rates of adolescents (Conger et al., 1997).

1.4 School and Systemic Factors

As outlined above, although student and family characteristics can explain most of the variability in student achievement, about 20% of the variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that students attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Eivers et al. (2000) consider these school factors to be the most significant and best screening predictive factor of Early School Leaving. Factors related to schools can be ordered into two main categories: School Structure and School Practices.

1.4.1   School Structure

School structure will be investigated using the following domains: Sector, Composition, Size and Location.

Research has indicated differences by school sector in early leaving rates. In the U.S. substantial differences in Early School Leaving rates have been found between public and Catholic schools. Even when controlling for student characteristics, Early School Leaving is substantially less in Catholic schools than in public schools (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Bryk and Thum, 1989; Rumberger, 1995). Similarly, research suggests that Early School Leaving is generally higher in public than in private schools (MacIver and MacIver, 2009). In the UK, Cheng's (1995) study suggests lower Early School Leaving rates in single-sex schools. In Ireland, 3.9% of all students enrolled in DEIS schools in 2009/10 left school before enrolling in the final year of the senior cycle. This compares to 2.1% of students enrolled in non-DEIS schools. Only 1% of students who were taught all subjects through Irish were Early School Leavers, whereas 2.5% of students who were taught no subjects through Irish were Early Leavers (DES, 2013). When figures are adjusted to considered the numbers of students who leave fee charging second level schools to repeat the Leaving Certificate elsewhere and most notably in a grind school, the vocational sector accounts for the highest number of students leaving school early: second level fee-charging 3.8%; second level non-fee charging 2.1%; vocational 3%; community 2.2%; comprehensive 1.4% (DES, 2013; Smyth, 1999). Overall retention rate comparisions between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, indicate a Leaving Certificate retention rate of

82.09% in DEIS schools compared with a 92.63% rate in non-DEIS schools (DES, 2015). In most OECD countries, the effect of the average socioeconomic status of students in a particular school largely outweighs the effects of the individual student's socioeconomic status (OECD 2007).

Studies have focused on the social composition of the school, finding that a concentration of students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds is associated with higher rates of Early School Leaving for all students (Kerckhoff, 1986; Ryan, 1999; Ayalon, 1994; Goldsmith, 2003; Foskett et al., 2007). Rumberger and Lim (2008) found that mean socioeconomic status, the proportion of at risk students, the proportion of ethnic or linguistic minorities, and the proportion of students who changed schools or residences, as well as the proportion of students from non-traditional families correlated to Early School Leaving rates. In Ireland, Byrne and Smith (2010) indicate lower rates of Early School Leaving in mixed and middle class schools. In the Irish context, studies support the view that the social mix of the school has an impact on student retention (Smyth, 1999; McCoy, 2000; Byrne, 2008). Early School Leaving is seen to be concentrated in schools with higher intake of students from lower socioeconomic status (European Parliament, 2011). Socioeconomic segregation has been shown to be problematic in many ways. School systems with a high level of segregation have worse educational achievement results (OECD, 2007). Consequently, the risk of students leaving school early is considerably higher in these schools (Lyche, 2010; Traag and van der Velden, 2011; Nevala et al., 2013). The effect of socioeconomic segregation on the composition of the student population in a school is, in fact, so powerful that even an average student is more likely to leave school early that has high levels of Early School Leaving than from a school that has more moderate Early School Leaving rates (Audas and Willms, 2001).

There is some evidence to suggest that rates of Early School Leaving are higher in larger schools, though this is not conclusive. It is sometimes assumed that lowering the student-teacher ratio will have a positive effect on completion. However, studies show that there is no correlation between class size and Early School Leaving in upper second level, although reducing the size of primary school classes does seem to have a positive effect on the outcome (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

The location of the school, whether in an urban or suburban area does not seem to have a significant effect (Rumberger and Lim, 2008) though rates of Early School Leaving are higher in remote areas and in small cities (as opposed to medium or large cities).

1.4.2   School Practices

As evidenced above, school structures can contribute to and even promote Early School Leaving. However, school structure is informed and animated by other, largely human effects (Smyth, 1998), which can be evidenced in School Practices. Pierre Bourdieu's (1973) Cultural Reproduction Theory focuses on social structures and practices such as schooling, and on how such social structures and practices shape educational outcomes. For Bourdieu (1973), school is about much more than the transmission of knowledge. His Cultural Reproduction Theory sets out how systems such as schooling transmit and perpetuate social and cultural practices from one generation to the next, with the school system championing its own middle class social and cultural norms and mores. A family's socioeconomic status and its social and cultural norms and mores come face to face with those of the school system when a child begins school. The effect of any discontinuity between these two systems can have far reaching consequences for a child whereas, having the same cultural capital as the school system values immediately places at child at an advantage compared to a child who does not have such cultural capital.

Early Tracking i.e. situations in which learners and their families are required to make obligatory choices between different educational tracks at an early age (European Commission, 2015), has a considerable effect on Early School Leaving rates. Research shows that separating students too early has a strong negative impact on those placed in tracks that do not correspond to their potential and/or aspirations (Hattie, 2009). Early Tracking appears to increase differences and inequalities in student achievement (Hanuschek and Wößmann, 2006; OECD, 2013).

Grade retention describes the process of holding students back to repeat a year when they are considered not to have made sufficient progress. Research results have consistently highlighted the negative effects of grade retention. They provide, in

particular, evidence of the detrimental effects of grade retention on students' academic, socioemotional and behavioural outcomes, which further increase the risk of poor performance and in many cases may lead to them to leave school prematurely (see Thompson and Cunningham, 2000; Jimerson, 2001; Silberglitt et al., 2006; Jacob and Lefgren, 2009). Research continues to show that those who are retained at a grade level, (repeat a year), are most likely to become Early School Leavers (Alexander et al., 1997; Rumberger, 1995; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). Research indicates that retention at primary school level appears to have a greater impact than retention at second level.

The general organisation of schooling into classes, while not thought to be directly causal of Early School Leaving, facilitates the detachment of children who are less school-ready, less motivated, less able or more troubled (Stokes, 2003). Indeed, small remedial classes may themselves be a causal factor in early leaving, being stigmatised as 'relegation' classes (McDevitt, 1998).

Figures from Byrne and Smyth's (2010) study show dramatic differences in Early School Leaving rates by class allocation policy such as ability grouping or streaming. Those in mixed ability classes were least likely to leave school early (7%), while the highest leaving rates were found among those who had been allocated to a lower stream class (60%). Significant differences are evident across different class types, with those in the lower stream having higher drop-out rates than students of similar ability levels allocated to other classes. Students in lower stream classes are thirteen times more likely than students in mixed ability classes to leave school early (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). According to the literature, streaming has a strong negative impact on grades and examination performance among those allocated to lower grade classes and has a negative effect on levels of Early School Leaving in the first three years of post-primary school.

Key transition points, (primary to post-primary, lower second level to upper second level), are critical for potential Early School Leavers (European Parliament, 2011). At the beginning of first year, Early School Leavers are more likely to report feeling isolated or anxious than other students. However, no such difference is evident at later time-points (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Lack of guidance during these periods can also

exacerbate Early School Leaving tendencies. Special attention is given to guidance in some countries when students have to move from one stage of education to another and face challenges linked to these changes.

The adequacy of support services in schools such as guidance and counselling is highlighted in the literature (Banks, 1994; NESF, 1997; Watts 2002) as a protective measure against Early School Leaving.

Smyth and Hattam (2002: 375) focus on the school climate and argue that the 'cultural geography' of the school has an important effect on student engagement. A positive academic climate within the school promotes higher attendance rates and retention within the schooling system. Students perform better in examinations where teachers expect them to continue in full-time education (Bryk and Thum, 1989; Smyth, 1998). Smyth and Hattam (2002) identify three kinds of school culture which can contribute to early leaving. Firstly, an aggressive school culture is characterised by hierarchical relations between teachers and students, with those who speak out being deemed 'troublemakers'. In contrast, a passive school culture may be 'pleasant' in terms of social relations but fails to engage students with curriculum and learning. Finally, the active culture embraces a pedagogy of respect, of actively reaching out to students, of mutual trust between teachers and students and valuing of student voice. Aspects from each culture may co-exist in any one school. The active culture is the most conducive to learning. However, most schools tend to operate along a passive/aggressive dichotomy (Smyth and Hattam, 2002). Research shows greater retention in schools where there is a positive school climate with good relationships between teachers and students and a greater sense of ownership on the part of the students in terms of school life (Malone and McCoy, 2003). A 'strict but fair' disciplinary climate also contributes to student retention (Byrne and Smyth, 2010).

The manner in which schools are managed is also related to Early School Leaving. Schools in which the principal offers leadership, but involves staff in decision-making and setting goals are more effective (Purkey and Smith, 1983). School based staff development, the manner in which new teachers are inducted, and the rate of staff turnover are linked to achievement, truancy and Early School Leaving (Cheng, 1995; Purkey and Smith, 1983). Schools in which students are formally involved in

decision-making such as through a students' council or prefect systems, have been found to have lower rates of Early School Leaving (Smyth, 1999).

Drudy and Lynch (1993) consider that the curriculum is structured in a way that is disadvantageous to working class children. Drudy and Lynch (1993) conclude that the curriculum is a mechanism through which social and educational inequality is perpetuated. Researchers continue to discuss issues of relevancy in relation to curricula and syllabi. Half of the school leavers in Eivers et al.'s (2000) study thought that what they had learnt in school would not be useful in the workplace (see also Natriello, 1982), highlighting the view that schooling may be perceived as less relevant when students do not make a connection between academic work and future economic prospects.

In recent decades, it has become apparent that we live and teach in an increasingly pluralistic society, yet in many cases, schools continue to operate a decidedly monolithic environment in the classroom (Heeran Flynn, 2013). Inclusive teaching and learning methods can be used in an attempt to redress this balance. Teachers' teaching styles can be mismatched to the students' preferred learning preference.

Teachers are considered the face of the education system (Stokes, 2003). For many, the most important element of successful programmes with troubled teenagers is the quality of the relationships between adults and young people (see also Levering, 2000; Cullen, 2000a, 2000b; Budge et al., 2000). Rutter et al. (1979), Bryk and Thum (1980) and Smyth (1998) report that rates of absenteeism and Early School Leaving are higher where students have a negative experience of interaction with teachers and lower where interaction is positive. Cultural bias can lower a teacher's expectations of students from different social or ethnic backgrounds and these lower expectations are fulfilled in lower academic performance and earlier exit from the education system Brierley (1980). Positive teacher-student relationships and high teacher expectations serve to protect against Early School Leaving.

It is the formal elaborated code of standard English which is the language code that is used in schools (see Tosi, 2001) and communicative ability in standard English is

essential in order to derive maximum benefit from the school system. The child is socialised into the language of the home and it is the language of the home, together with the culture of the home that the child takes to school (Bernstein, 1971). For some children, the socialisation contexts in which they have participated have prepared them well for the use of language they encounter in school. For many other children, this is not necessarily the case.

School is an institution of the state which functions through the medium of standard language and considers the teaching of the standard language to all as one of its first and most fundamental tasks (Cregan, 2008a). For some children, this task may be complicated by the fact that the spoken language of the home may not necessarily be the standard language of the school (see Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004; Spolsky, 1998; Vernon-Feagans, 1996; Wolfram et al., 1999) resulting in linguistic discontinuity which can result in educational disadvantage and an increased risk of Early School Leaving.

Limited provision of early childhood education and care (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015) is seen to have an effect on the school readiness of a child. This can lead to further educational disadvantage once the child starts school.

Lack of quality vocational education and training (VET) and alternative routes of educational provision leave less academic students with very little alternative choice (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015).

1.5 Conclusion

The complexity of the discussion has illustrated that there is no one cause of Early School Leaving, thus, any attempt to target those potentially at risk of Early School Leaving must address a range of possible risks that can be organised under the headings of *Individual and Social Factors* and *School and Systemic Factors*. Early School Leaving is not a fixed concept; it is a process of disengagement, brought about by a constellation of difficulties. The more risk factors that an individual is exposed to, the greater the vulnerability of the individual. Though Early School Leavers are a heterogeneous group and reasons for leaving education early are highly individual,

overarching general influences are apparent and these patterns can be used to effectively target potential Early School Leavers.