



Interview – Apple on the Tree Booklet with Dr Angela Canny

Notes

There is reference to Irish Travellers: Irish Travellers are the most disadvantaged group in Irish society, including education and face discrimination in many areas of Irish society. They are not genetically related to the Romani and are indigenous to Ireland (DNA research suggests they are very similar to the Irish population). Traditionally they would have lived in caravans but since the 1960s there would have been a process of providing housing or other forms of housing for them. Currently, some Irish Travellers live in halting sites (where they live together in caravans in a site that has amenities – running water, toilets and electricity) and social housing. Some have purchased their own house as well. Their engagement with both education and the formal labour market is still quite poor. DEIS schools have a high concentration of children from a Traveller background. They received special ethnic status from the Irish state in 2017. They are the group who are most likely to leave school early (especially males) and suffer poor health and mental health. There are approximately 31,000 Irish Travellers in Ireland (under 1% of the population). They are a young population, marry young and have much higher families than the general population. They have a shorter life expectancy and higher suicide rate compared to the general population.

There are a some gaeilge word in the document that are not that easy to translate.

- **Deis** is the Irish word for chance (giving someone a chance)
- **Oscailt** is the Irish word for open (an open door)
- **Céim** is the Irish word for degree (qualification)
- **Droichead** is the Irish word for bridge (bridge over a river etc)
- **Cosán** is the Irish word for path (sidewalk, pathway)

Nomenclature: I have used the word ‘child’ to mean any person up to the age of 18. Therefore, the word includes children in pre-school, primary and post-primary education.

What do you think is currently working well regarding collaboration between families and institutions?

Across the EU, we have made a lot of progress with regards to developing strong partnerships with parents to ensure their child/children reach their full potential. The child’s development (social, emotional, academic) is enhanced when there are strong links between home and school. Research (national and international) over the last 40 years has demonstrated that strong family partnerships with the school has a significant impact on a range of outcomes for children (positive attitude towards their own academic ability, happiness and wellbeing, social



development, and academic success). Family social, cultural and economic capital are important factors to consider when we think about family and school partnerships. Middle-class parents have the social and cultural capital to approach and negotiate with the school if they feel there is an issue with their child. They are also more likely to seek external help for their child, for instance seeking private educational psychological assistance etc. They have the resources and knowledge to exercise their voice and choice for their child. Results demonstrate that those children are then more likely to succeed in education. In the case of working-class parents or parents with poor education themselves, they are more likely to leave things to the school. This does not imply they are less interested in education or in helping their children to succeed in education, it is primarily because they lack the knowledge, resources and know-how to seek help. This is why building partnerships with parents, particularly with parents who are disadvantaged or living in disadvantaged areas is absolutely critical if we are to address educational inequality or disadvantage. Partnership with parents is one of the most important ways of addressing inequality of condition. Children have greater success in school (less likely to be absent etc.) when they receive support, encouragement and guidance from parents, teachers and the community. Good partnerships happen when parents are positively encouraged to become involved in their children's education via the school. Schools and teachers must meet parents half way and create welcoming environments for the parents. Once a welcoming environment is created, the partnership can lead to much bigger elements such as building child parent relationships (especially where a parent is not living with the child etc.), encouraging parents to return to education themselves or developing literacy programmes for parents that are located in the same school as the child. In essence, the school becomes part of the community.

Successful partnerships with parents & families must be developed and supported from a number of fronts – the school community, teacher education & teachers own continual professional development and broader educational policy. Focussing on the school community, creating and sustaining partnerships must be something that the teachers and school leaders embed within the school culture. They must create an 'open door' welcoming policy where parents feel they can call to the school if they have an issue. It could be something as simple as in the morning the teacher stands at the school or classroom door and welcomes children and their parents. There may even be a couple of minutes to have an informal chat with a parent. In this way, the parent gets to know the teacher. Using Ireland as an example, in most schools in Ireland, schools have parent associations and the parents organise events such as internet safety etc. They also get involved in fundraising for the school. Another really important way that partnerships are built with parents is through the School's Board of Management. In Ireland, while the State funds education and there is a national curriculum, management of individual schools is devolved to a school board of management. The board is made up entirely of volunteers. The board is responsible for managing the school finances and recruitment (including teachers). here is an external Chairperson who chairs the meetings (usually five/six per academic year). The board consists of the school head, a teacher representative, two parent representatives, a community representative and the patron's representative. The parent voice is strong at management level. Just to note that there is legislation governing the operation of boards of management and they have to adhere to



educational legislations (enrolment etc.). From my experience of Chairing a Board of Management over the last ten years, in a primary school located in a disadvantaged area of Limerick city, the parent representatives have been invaluable in bringing forward suggestions for improving parent school-relationships, highlighting issues and supporting educational initiatives.

In Ireland, developing parent and family partnerships is core to the work of DEIS schools, particularly the work of the Home-School-Community Liaison coordinator. The DEIS programme (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) was designed to give tailored support to schools who have high concentration of disadvantage. Both DEIS and TEIP place family partnership at the centre of their work.

One of the most successful initiatives in the DEIS programme has been the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (HSCL), which has been in operation since 1990. The HSCL scheme aims to improve student outcomes by focussing directly on the important adults in their lives, usually the parents. It is designed to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies and to help parents realise their own capacity to enhance their children's educational progress and to also assist parents in developing relevant skills (numeracy and literacy etc.). Home visitations is a crucial element in establishing trust with families. This is especially important for children from Traveller families and families from migrant backgrounds who may have poor or no English. The HSCL would also organise or facilitate courses for parents, such as literacy or numeracy classes. They may act on behalf of a parent with an organisation, for instance in completing paperwork or following up on a housing application etc. They would also liaise with therapists/counsellors when obtaining assistance for a child with a specific need. A major goal of the HSCL scheme is to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education and to promote positive and effective partnerships between the school and families. The HSCL would encourage parents to get involved in extra-curricular activities in the school, helping in the classroom (shared reading for example), and even in the development of school policies. The HSCL would be instrumental in assisting parents with poor or no English to become involved in the school community. Evaluation of the HSCL scheme have been positive in creating and sustaining positive partnership between families and schools.

What do you think would be its ideal operation? What should be done this and what should be needed?

Successful partnerships work when they are organised with the parents and families and are built upon respectful relationships with parents. The other crucial aspect of successful partnerships with families is they must be long-term initiatives. In the current climate of school accountability and demonstrating quantitative results, there is a tendency to terminate initiatives that do not show immediate positive results. Additionally, what we measure and define as "success" must be measured not just in a quantifiable sense (reading and



mathematics scores etc.) but also the qualitative aspects that are not easily measured (building a sense of belonging or encouraging a parent to return to education etc.). Building and sustaining partnerships with families and communities can take a long time and therefore need time to embed into the school community. Successful partnerships must be based on multiagency cooperation, and this is one element of the HSCL scheme. The HSCL scheme is successful because it has built up relationships between schools and parents, schools and outside agencies and outside agencies and parents and people know each other over a long period. The other factor is to consider who is going to be facilitating the partnership. The HSCL coordinator is a qualified teacher and this has aided a real educational focus to the scheme. They organise and facilitate classes with parents that are embedded within educational good practice. For instance, a few years ago, the HSCL coordinator (attached to the school I manage) organised literacy classes for parents around a 'story sack' concept. Parents were brought to a bookstore, where they selected a book for their child. Over the course of a couple of weeks in October and November, the parents designed literacy and numeracy activities around the story. They were eventually included in a story sack which the child received at Christmas. The parents were taught phonological awareness activities that they could then implement with their own children. The development of the physical story sack, enabled parents to enhance their own language skills and also gained an understanding of the importance of reading with their children. Successful partnerships are sustained by people (including parents) who are passionate about education, who see the potential of education to change lives and who are willing to make a difference in a child's life. Family school partnerships grow when there is strong leadership from the school, and where there is consistency regarding the personnel. It can be difficult to keep partnership initiative alive when there is high staff turnover.

Partnerships between schools and families, especially schools in disadvantaged areas must be resourced properly. In the past, there have been some really good partnership initiatives that were resourced for a couple of years but when the funding finished, the partnership also finished. In my view, the state needs to take a long term view when investing money in partnership initiatives involving families and schools. We also need to invest in people and building capacity so that they continue to grow the partnership long after funding has finished. Partnerships must also focus on the development of broad parenting skills alongside educational abilities and confidence building. Some DEIS schools for instance, have baking and cooking classes for parents. One DEIS school in Limerick had a number of innovative projects such as a boat building project and horse care project. In the case of the boat building project, a boat builder worked with fathers and their children in an after-school project. This project brought fathers into the school and in the process, it also enhanced father-child relationships in the process. Similarly, some of the children who were involved in the horse care project went on to become horse jockeys when they finished school. Targeted initiatives such as those mentioned above, can be expensive in the short term, but can be game changers in the long run in enabling a child excel in an area and to become interested in carpentry etc. These projects can be instrumental in breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, deprivation and exclusion.



What does inclusion mean to you? Please mention three key words if possible.

Inclusion is a complex term and inclusive education can include children with special education needs, children from migrant, Traveller and Roma communities and children from disadvantaged communities. It essentially means putting the child at the centre of learning and empowering all children to succeed. Inclusion is about integrating (in an active way) all children in a classroom and celebrating their skills and talents. It is also about enabling active participation in learning, cultures and communities. It is based on the premise that all children have abilities that are worth celebrating. Inclusive education focusses on what the child can do, rather than what they cannot do. It requires the teacher to be highly knowledgeable in both pedagogy and teaching methodology in providing differentiated and inclusive lessons. It also requires a lot of planning by the school and teachers, particularly in the area of curriculum planning. Curriculum planning for inclusion aims for learning experiences which include differentiated content (material taught), process (methodology, activities) and assessment outcomes (how the child demonstrates their learning in the lesson). Teachers are required to differentiate their teaching and assessment methods based on a recognition that children are at different points in their development but that they have the potential to succeed. Inclusion is about having high expectations for all children and the teacher works to ensure all children can reach their potential. Inclusive education celebrates the uniqueness of each child and recognises that we learn and develop in different ways. Inclusive education is also intercultural education which is education that respects, celebrates and recognises diversity within the classroom and school. It is also about developing children's knowledge, skills and attitudes and foster conditions conducive to pluralism, where children develop and understanding not only of their own culture but also an understanding and respect for other cultures and different points of view. Essentially inclusive education is education that promotes equality and human rights, challenges discrimination and bias and promotes principles of equality. Inclusive education goes further than equality of opportunity, to one where we embrace equality of condition. Promoting equality of condition implies that we remove all barriers in education so that all children benefit (socially, emotionally and academically). Inclusion is increasingly linked to Universal Design Learning (UDL) that is a set of principles for curriculum development that essentially provides all children (irrespective of ability) with equal opportunities to learn. UDL implies more flexible methods of teaching and assessment to cater for the diversity within our classroom. Inclusive education must be cognisant of the diverse abilities, characteristics, learning needs and styles of all children in the classroom. All schools have a responsibility to be inclusive in their policies and practise. One of the essential elements of inclusive education is there has to be individualised education planning that takes account of the individual child's specific learning requirements and supports that are required in the school and classroom. In Ireland an inclusive education is one that provides a continuum of educational provision and support for children with special educational needs that encompasses mainstream classes, special classes in mainstream schools and special schools. Over the last two decades because of legislative most children with special education needs are educated in mainstream schools and in mainstream classes.



Three key terms that come to mind when considering inclusion are: removing barriers to education, celebrating diversity and differentiated teaching and assessment methods.

[Why is it important to talk about cooperation between families and institutions in relation to inclusion?](#)

Inclusion is meaningless unless it incorporates engagement between the school, the child and their family. The family is the best source of information when a child is starting in that school. They know the interests, skills, strengths and abilities of the child. Consultation with the family is very important when they are making the transition from pre-school to primary or primary to post-primary. Research suggests school family engagement and cooperation aids smooth transition and less likely to lead to disengagement, particularly from primary to post-primary education. If we consider children with special needs, parents and children need to be involved in the planning stage. Schools are required to develop learning plans for students who are receiving additional support in the school and parents are involved in developing and reviewing these plans, appropriate to detail of the plan. They would obviously be more involved if their child had a complex learning need. This plan contains information about goal setting, progress to date, and learning outcomes. The level of detail in the learning plan matches the level of the child's learning need and the intensity of support required by the child. For example the learning plans would be expected to be more detailed for the student who requires small group or individualised attention and less detailed for the student receiving in-class support only. There is a significant emphasis on agency and voice for both the family and the child when making decisions around additional learning supports in the school or classroom.

Similarly, when a child is having particular learning issue in school or where they perform badly in standardised tests (primary) or post-primary (end of semester tests or state examinations), it is important that the family are consulted because this can help plan a solution or future strategy. The same issue applies if there is a behavioural issue as sometimes the behaviour is as a result of some issue that is occurring in the home (domestic abuse, relationship issues etc.). Consultation with parents and family is therefore very important, particularly if the school is to obtain a complete picture and also help prevent disengagement with school or dropping out of school early.

[What new communication channels and forums have you become aware of in recent years to facilitate contact with families, has there been any positive outcomes?](#)

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on digital communication and the work of initiatives such as the School Completion project and the HSCL scheme have been more difficult, because the personnel were unable to work with children face to face. This was especially problematic during the early lockdowns. However, in instances where schools were concerned about



families, the HSCL coordinator, school completion leader and volunteer teachers made physical visits (knocked on the door etc.) to families during the first lockdowns. Social media platforms such as Facebook were also important means of keeping in touch with families via messenger. In some instances, zoom was used to meet families online to make sure they were ok. DEIS school also worked with other agencies such as Bedford Row Family project (this project supports families and children affected by imprisonment of a family member), TUSLA (Child & Family Agency) and charities such as St Vincent De Paul to provide joined-up communication channel to the families, particularly in instances where there was a risk of poverty or homelessness. When one of the agencies made contact with the family, the HSCL and school head were informed.

WhatsApp and Twitter have become important channels of communication between schools and families. WhatsApp in particular, has created a fast communication channel between families and schools. WhatsApp group messaging keeps parents informed and engaged about events etc. They also create a sense of community between the families, especially those that may have been at risk of isolation (newly arrived migrants into the community). WhatsApp also enables school heads and teachers to reach out families who may be less reluctant to get in touch with the school. Similarly, WhatsApp enabled teachers in Youthreach to keep in touch with vulnerable young people and those at risk of dropping out of education. Twitter is used primarily as a tool to showcase school success and events such science and maths week etc. This can create a sense of pride in the school and also encourage children's engagement. Social platforms can also increase the profile of a school in the local area. Facebook is also used by a lot of schools.

When presenting the various good practices in the STAIRS project that promote inclusion it was prominent that the relationship between families and the institution, nurturing that relationship, making frequent connections, making communication more effective was a recurring endeavour. In your opinion why is the relationship between families and the institution so central concerning the realisation of inclusion?

DEIS schools work with the most vulnerable families and children and we cannot underestimate the importance of building relationships to ensure that every child reaches their potential. In reality, the school becomes much more than just an education institution. They take on significant social responsibility. For instance, it would be quite common that the school head and/or the HSCL coordinator would help a family apply for social welfare assistance or a medical card by helping them complete the application online or phone a government service on behalf of a family. The school would intervene if there was a risk of homelessness and help find accommodation or refer the family to a state agency. The school would also ensure they keep in touch with families where there were real risks to children such as domestic abuse etc. They may also provide assistance to women and their children to find refuge in instances where domestic abuse was occurring. It is evident that when there is



trust established between the family and the school, the school has the potential to assist families in quite a holistic way.

The School Completion leader (one of the initiatives within DEIS schools) works very closely with those children (and their families) who are at risk of dropping out of school early. In the case of children who are making the transition to post-primary education, they would work with the relevant school completion leader in that school to ensure there is as smooth a transition as possible. The School Completion leader organises Easter and summer camps with children and thus keep them in touch and engaged with the school. They also organise after school homework clubs for vulnerable children.

Nurturing relationships and building capacity is also at the heart of Youthreach project. It is built upon the premise that all children and young people deserve respect and have potential and abilities that are worth developing and celebrating. The ethos of the Youthreach project is to nurture the whole person. Youthreach works with young people (up to the age of 20 years) who are very vulnerable and in a lot of cases have been expelled from formal schooling or would left school early. Youthreach teachers do a lot of work with the young people on building trust, self-esteem and communication skills. They provide opportunities for young people to return to education in an environment that is comfortable for the young person, who are enabled to learn new skills or an apprenticeship and enter the labour market. They also enable some young people to take state examinations. Universal design for learning is really emphasised in Youthreach.

For learners with special educational needs and disabilities, integration, learning and behavioural difficulties, disadvantages or cumulative disadvantages – what is the significance and reality of this endeavour? Is it more important than for the average? Why (not)

Socioeconomic disadvantage can impact quite profoundly on a child that has special needs. Research shows that children with a special need are more likely to have a positive long term educational outcome, if their parents are advantaged (from middle class backgrounds). Where parents are educated, they have the power (education, social cultural and economic) to help their child with SEN. So when we think about inclusion and special needs, we also need to consider the socio-economic background as this a significant mediator. Issues such as homelessness, poverty, precarious employment or unemployment, insecure housing (where parents are renting) are shown to have a negative impact on a child's education, particularly children with special needs. This is why initiative such as DEIS are so important because they are targeted at lower socio-economic families and their children.



During the collection of good practices, was there a difference in the relationship between families and the institutions in terms of the age of the learners?

Parents are more involved with the school when the children are younger. It is also easier to build trust and to identify issues because in both pre-school and primary school, the child is with the same teacher throughout the day. In post-primary, it is more difficult to build and sustain relationships as the schools tend to be much bigger and the child has different teachers (English, Gaeilge, Mathematics, Science, language etc.). Evaluations of the HSCL scheme also shows that it is more difficult to get parents involved in school based initiatives at post-primary level. There is also the issue of parental competence, a lot of parents may not be able to help their child with school work in post-primary education. In post-primary schools, the HSCL coordinator tend to work more closely with the child by providing advice (careers advice, sexual health etc.) and encouragement. In primary school, there would be a lot more daily and frequent contact between families and the school. This would not be as frequent in post-primary schools. The School Completion leader works quite intensely with post-primary schools, and children who are at risk or who have behavioural issues in education are targeted specifically by school completion. As the child gets older in post-primary education, there would be more emphasis on the agency and voice of the child, particularly through decision-making regarding subject choices and careers.

What good practices would you highlight in the VET sector regarding this topic?

Youthreach is an interesting initiative to consider as it is based on a very specific group of young people, those who have dropped out of formal education without qualifications. Youthreach takes those young people, who may have been deemed 'failures' in the general education system, and help build up their confidence and self-esteem and at the same time provide them with the opportunity to gain a qualification. Youthreach works on developing respectful relationships between staff and the young people and their families. They provide a broad range of courses from literacy & numeracy to hairdressing, art and design, woodwork etc. Young people work towards national certification (level 5, 6 etc.) with the aim of enabling the young person to make the transition to further and higher education. It also works with a high proportion of young people with special needs and evaluations of youthreach have been very positive in provide an inclusive learning environment for all young people. The teaching, learning and assessment approach in Youthreach is based upon the universal design for learning approach. Youthreach teachers recognise that the young person it serves do not fit into the traditional models of teaching and learning. Youthreach would have young people who have autism or another special need, a disability or whose first language is not English and a very high proportion of Irish Travellers. They have young people who have family responsibilities or with home-life issues. Therefore they require a different approach to teaching and learning compared to those young people who are able to success in general education. The Universal Design for Learning enable the teacher to use a variety of teaching methods in order to lower barriers to learning and give all young people equal opportunities



to succeed. It builds in flexibility into the learning space that addresses the young person's strengths and needs.

Which of the good practices collected for STAIRS would you highlight and why?

As mentioned above, Youthreach is a successful initiative that has been in operation since the 1980s and has provide an alternative pathway for young people that do not fit into general education. The Irish general education system is very academic in focus and Youthreach offers those children an alternative way of succeeding in education and make a successful transition to employment.

Focusing on impact, the DEIS initiative has been a successful initiative which is targeted at disadvantaged communities. While it is a state led initiative, schools have a lot of flexibility to tailor initiatives to fit their particular community. Similarly, while all DEIS schools have to implement the DEIS specific initiatives (literacy and numeracy etc.), schools can work with local agencies to provide additional interventions, such as after school projects, and other initiative such as LEGO Education, EDNIP project etc. The HSCL and the School Completion project, which are based within the DEIS initiative have been very successful in building positive relationship between schools and families to ensure children attend school regularly and make positive transitions to post-primary education. Evaluations of DEIS children's education such as reading, oral and maths scores etc. have demonstrated significant improvements year on year, and the proportion of children from DEIS schools entering further and higher education has improved. However, there is still differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in terms of success at state examinations such as the Leaving Certificate examination and the type of higher education institution they enter and the programme of study they pursue. One of the most positive aspects of DEIS is the cultivation of positive education attitudes amongst parents and the disadvantaged communities it serves. As discussed above it works with parents to encourage interest in their child's education through a broad range of targeted initiatives.

What do you think can make the adaption of a good practice successful? What are the conditions for this? What is needed? Who holds key roles in this process?

Adapting an initiative from another country needs careful planning, investigation and dialogue. The process of adapting the initiative also needs to be considered and monitored. What works in one country may not work in another and therefore an understanding of context is really important. Every adaption needs to take into consideration the culture of the country and perhaps differences in educational histories as they can be important issues for successful adaption.

In the first instance, there must be willingness to adapt and change ways of thinking about an issue (inclusion for instance) and working together. This is really about managing change. A change management toolkit could be used in tandem with the role out of the initiative or



indeed even before the adaption process. Depending on the type of initiative being adapted, a range of people should be involved, such as policy makers (who tend to be also the funders), school leaders, teachers, parents and teacher educators. Everyone needs to have an open and positive attitude towards the possibility of change. The adaption needs to be led by a team of committed people who are clear and focussed on why this initiative should be adapted. This implementation team should be given the task to investigate the possibilities to adapt, potential pitfalls etc. It is also important that the implementation team oversees the management (and governance) of the initiative and that a working team oversee the day to day operation of the initiative, and report back to the implementation team at regular intervals.

A careful review of the original initiative needs to be carried out, and this includes investigating key outcomes and a thorough analysis of reports and evaluations on the initiative etc. Ideally, consultation with key personnel who are working in the initiative in the original country should be a priority. Indeed, it would be a good idea if they were brought as consultants as they have first hand knowledge of what works, problems that occurred at the planning stage etc. It would also be essential to visit the country and see the initiative in operation and talk to the key stakeholders. This will give the implementation team a good overview of the possibility of successful adaption. Also an analysis of the development of the initiative needs to be undertaken. For instance, DEIS is founded upon almost 40 years of projects that were targeted at disadvantaged communities. That is not easily adapted in another country!

Successful adaptations can occur by taking element of an initiative, which could be an easy and immediate win. This could encourage more radical change later on. For instance, taking an element of DEIS such as the school completion project and trialing it in a small local area and if successful (after consulting those who were involved), the adaption could then be scaled up and expanded upon. Small and steady steps, where all people are brought along together tend to be more successful. This would also encourage people who are more hesitant when adapting or implementing a new initiative.

Another crucial element is proper resourcing. Adapting initiatives require funding and human resourcing. There must be a willingness on the part of the key actors to invest time and money into adapting the initiative and carrying out research and evaluations on the adaption process. There must be long term buy-in from policy makers. The process of adaption may require upskilling and the provision of additional formal qualification for teachers etc. Time must be devoted to track its progress and to consult with people on the ground (research and evaluation). For instance, if it is an initiative that is targeted at parents, they must be consulted about the initiative – what is working, what additional supports would enhance your engagement with the initiative etc.). If possible they should be involved in the process of adaption.

A long term view needs to be considered, changing mindsets and ways of working can take time and often times, funding is reduced or removed from an initiative before the positive results are evident.



The adaption process needs to be carefully monitored so research and evaluation must be built into the adaption process. The research gleaned from the adaption can go onto influence future adaptations. Monitoring the initiative being adapted is important to ensure value for money. If the initiative is costing a lot of money and extra resources and there seems to be few or no positive outcomes, that needs to be identified very early into the adaption.

A review of current initiatives that are already in operation needs to be carried out. Will the adaption interfere with any native initiative, can the adaption be added to a native initiative for instance. Caution needs to be exercised when adapting an initiative to ensure that it adds to current positive practice and not alienate the people it should support.

It is also a good idea to consider a pilot of the initiative being implemented. A pilot could be initiated in a local area and closely monitored over a sustained period. This should highlight any potential issues etc. and give time to alter aspects of the initiative and thereby enable the upscaling to be implemented more successfully.

[How long do you think change and tangible results take in practice?](#)

It really depends on the type and scale of the initiative. However, most initiatives can demonstrate change within a year. It is important that initiatives are monitored carefully and adapted or changed if it is evident that some aspects are not working. It is very useful to carry out real time research and quarterly evaluations of the initiative, particularly if there is a lot of public money invested in the initiative. Clear targets need to be established at the beginning and tracked as the initiative is being rolled out. There also needs to be a clear focus on the core group that the initiative is targeted at, and after a year has it made any positive change for that group.

[How can those involved be sensitised? How can the right dialogue and cooperation be established, especially with regard to parents?](#)

Teacher education is absolutely crucial. We need teachers who are well qualified – knowledge (subject knowledge and pedagogy content knowledge), and competent (teaching methodologies) to be good teachers. However, they also need to have positive attitudes and dispositions to teach all children, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They need to have intercultural competence, particularly if they are teaching children from Traveller backgrounds and migrant families. They need to have high expectations for their children. I have highlighted in the last section some of the challenges that confront teachers who are teaching children with SEN. Teachers need to establish respectful relationships with parents and enable both parents and children to have a voice within the school setting.



Teachers need to be continually updating their knowledge and work with other teachers in communities of practice to share good practice etc. particularly in relation to building relationships with parents. Parents and families need to feel welcomed in the school and that the school cares about them.

Other policy reform projects highlighted that the success of change in the education sector is influenced by three main factors: quality of the trust among stakeholders, allocating enough time to let change happen and capacity building of leaders. What do you think about this? Can you relate the changes that happened in your country to these factors? What was the key for success in these fields in your country?

Initiatives or interventions targeted at disadvantaged communities require strong partnerships between schools and outside agencies because families often require a multidisciplinary response. Therefore, building strong relationship between partners facilitates quick responses to issues. Strong partnerships also enable people to come together to discuss idea and future planning. It also enables a joined- up approach to disadvantage by linking health, education and other societal issues together. When people know each other and have established trust, they are more likely to come together and work on projects etc. together. It creates an ethos of working for the betterment of children and their families.

This was very evident during lockdown when schools and agencies came together to provide virtual services to the families. The DEIS initiative is based very much on a partnership approach and bringing agencies together to discuss and respond to family issues. Over the last twenty years, agencies increasingly work within the school and this has been more effective in targeting children who may have been less likely to attend an outside agency for support (speech and language support, for instance). The TED project based at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) was established in 1998 and is a strategic partnership between MIC and DEIS schools and statutory and voluntary agencies. Over that period, those partners have worked together on a wide range of initiatives targeted at disadvantaged communities. The aim of this partnership is to improve and enhance the education outcomes of children, and build partnership and trust between parents and teachers. Another interesting project that is founded upon strong partnership model is the Bedford Row Family project, which is based in Limerick Prison. It supports families affected by imprisonment and is focussed in particular on the children whose parents may be in prison. The majority of those children attend DEIS schools. The children have access to counselling, social workers and DEIS school link with the project, to ensure continuity of care. A recent evaluation of the Bedford Row project has demonstrated that it has been effective in ensuring that children have been supported while their parent has been imprisoned and most importantly has not impacted upon their education engagement.



Partnerships require time to build and in some cases, such as the Limerick DEIS primary schools Literacy initiative requires a lot of trust between people. In this partnership, teachers from different DEIS schools worked with the Department of Education and Mary Immaculate College to improve their literacy instruction skills and open their classrooms to observations. Long term this led to the development of a strong community of practice between the schools which developed into a numeracy community of practice. Partnerships develop when people are willing to move outside their own comfort zone and specific agency or school agenda and focus on broader issues that impact on families and children and what is best for those children, families and communities.

What results are you proud of regarding inclusion in your country?

Inclusion in education is a relatively new concept in Ireland. Indeed, it is only since the 1990s following legal actions by parents seeking educational rights for their children with severe disabilities has there been a shift towards inclusive education and inclusive schools. Up that point special and general education developed separately. There were very few children with SEN in general education so the system was quite segregated. Like many countries, Ireland has been moving towards shifting provision for children with SEN to mainstream schools. It is also worth noting that the number of children identified with special education needs has increased quite dramatically and now make up approximately a quarter of the school population. Developments in the 1990s such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and national policy development led to a rights-based approach to educational provision for all children. While there has been a lot of mistakes along the way (discussed above), there is genuine commitment to the principle of inclusion amongst schools and educationalists. It is important that children see and interact in the classroom and in the school yard, with children who are different to themselves as otherwise, future generations will continue to “other” the person who is different to themselves. A lot of positive developments have been initiated via the new Inclusive Education Framework and the development of an inclusion model for the pre-school sector, both are now detailed below.

We have a new Inclusive Education Framework which is based on the principle of providing a continuum of support for children who have special needs (from mild to more complex) within the mainstream school setting. It takes the form of a triangle and is based on the idea that some supports can be transient and for some children are more long term. There are three steps to support children/young people: Identify needs, meet the needs and monitor and report on progress. There is a big emphasis on in-class support as children do not like being withdrawn from the class (stigma and not wanting other children to know they have difficulties) so where possible the school support for some would occur in class. It is also based on the idea of progress, that with intervention a child can progress from having a lot of intervention to just class teacher support. It is essentially based on the idea that some children only need support from the teacher, some need support from the teacher and possibly the SE teacher or others in the school, whilst a small number will also require specialist help from



outside the school (educational psychologists, speech and language therapy, counselling etc.). Parents and children are involved at all three stages. For children that require school support, an individual learning plan is drawn up for the child and this allows for individualised support. We are moving away from special schools and also special classes. Our current framework has three levels of support: whole-school and classroom supports for all, school support for and school support plus. It is based on the premise that all supports and agencies are integrated within the school.