

# **“Get It Right First Time”**

## **An Education Strategy for Ballymun**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The physical fabric of Ballymun is being transformed by a world class regeneration programme, but to develop a truly sustainable community that prospers and takes its rightful place as a successful community in one of Europe's wealthiest cities improved educational outcomes for the children and youth of Ballymun are essential. The Board of the Ballymun Partnership is committed to the development of an Education Strategy for Ballymun which helps to deliver that aspiration. The Partnership develops integrated strategies and local action plans in consultation with the local community, state and other relevant agencies across a broad range of areas including Employment/Enterprise, Childcare, Education and Community Capacity Building. Within this context the brief for the Education Strategy focused on the age group of 4 to 18 years of age while recognising that early childhood development and the capacity of parents are the foundations upon which all further investment are built. Therefore the Education Strategy proposes an integrated approach and related structures which involve a wide range sectors with a view to actively integrating their ongoing contribution, strategies and programmes.

The overall trend in the last twenty years has been a reduction in school going population of approximately 1,800 in line with the overall reduction in the Ballymun population. This long term trend will be halted and reversed over the coming decade as the housing stock of Ballymun is increased and the school going population begins to rise again. The present estimated school going population is 4,082 of which 3,524 attend fourteen schools located in or on the periphery of Ballymun and a further 558 attend mostly second level schools outside Ballymun. A sub trend in Ballymun has been the growth of education provided through the medium of Irish with an estimated 561 (14%) of the total school going population attending Gael Scoileanna. There are also an estimated 86 Ballymun traveller children enrolled in local schools, of which the large majority, 77 children are enrolled in St Josephs National Schools.

Challenges facing Ballymun in the educational arena are significant. Many children face extremely difficult family circumstances including homelessness, a drug or alcohol addicted parent, poor nutrition and low priority given to education by their families. Most Ballymun parents (78.2%) mind their own children at home and about 16.4% use a crèche or playgroup demonstrating that there is a very underdeveloped pre-school service for the area. To effectively support literacy and numeracy improvement to match average national levels learning support structures at primary level in Ballymun need to be resourced to a greater degree through the provision of targeted literacy programmes, in-service training & professional development networks and an adequate number of teaching positions. The reading competency of children entering second level education needs to be at a par with average national levels to enable outcomes at second level in Ballymun approaching those of advantaged communities. At present the academic profile of students after the junior secondary cycle is well below the national average and this severely limits participation in the traditional leaving certificate cycle. The retention rate in the traditional leaving certificate cycle in Ballymun based second level schools is approximately 26.5% compared to 74% nationally. Progression to third level education for the cohort attending the second level schools in Ballymun is 6% versus an average of 60% for the highest six advantaged areas in Dublin.

Education cannot be seen as an isolated process whereby the outcomes are the sole responsibility of schools. In reality the outcomes are influenced by many factors including parental and family circumstances, educational resources for schools, early childhood development, pre-school education, health issues, youth recreation & facilities, drug misuse, state services, out-of-school education, second-chance education, income levels, employment and the aspirations of the community. The challenge and opportunity for Ballymun at this stage in its development is to build on the positive work that has taken place in many of these areas, identify weaknesses, integrate activities, identify and implement new solutions and draw in resources to support a better future for our children and young people. The school community is moving more and more towards this '*integrated approach*' and the Department of Education and Science's School Development Planning Initiative exhorts schools to build strong linkages with the wider community encompassing the gamut of community based organisations and statutory service providers. In many areas national education policy is at a crossroads and can now build on preparatory work undertaken over the last decade and start making real inroads in overcoming educational disadvantage. A unique opportunity exists for the Ballymun community in its widest sense to work in partnership with the Department of Education and Science to demonstrate an effective model for achieving successful educational outcomes.

During the consultation process school principals and leaders of local organisations demonstrated a deep commitment to overcoming educational disadvantage and indicated a strong willingness to participate in an area wide initiative to further advance the educational outcomes of Ballymun children. There was a general frustration with educational outcomes and a strong belief that better outcomes could be achieved by Ballymun children if families, schools and local organisations were better supported in trying to achieve that goal.

**The overall goal of the proposed education strategy is to put in place an integrated set of actions which support and enable both families and educators to '*get it right first time*', in other words to enable each child to achieve his or her social and educational potential at each phase of their natural development.** In practical terms this means achieving the same kind of social development and educational outcomes at each of these phases as children in 'advantaged' areas. For example there is an opportunity to make a significant impact on children's educational performance in Ballymun through the expansion and development of pre-school education in collaboration with the childcare sector.

A critical issue that arose during the consultation process was the higher aspirations for their children's education held by parents living in advantaged areas compared to parents living in Ballymun. The consultation process has shown that many parents in Ballymun already hold high aspirations for the success of their children and a clear example is the whole growth and success of Gaelscoileanna. On the other hand many parents who do want what is best for their children have very little sense of how that can be achieved and more fundamentally do not believe that people like them can aspire to or achieve the kind of success that is only there for 'other people' or 'better off people'. There is enough success in Ballymun already to demonstrate to the community that Ballymun people can do anything. For example the children in the St Josephs Band have played before distinguished audiences and their parents know first hand that their children have wonderful talents. This issue is faced head on and is a

core element of the education strategy. The action proposed is to heavily promote local achievement in the community and to get the message out every day in every way that Ballymun children and young people are succeeding and others can follow in their footsteps. This approach is called '*living the dream*' because it allows children, young people and parents to see what is possible and to dream that these possibilities are there for them too.

The approach taken in the Ballymun Education Strategy is to '*build on success*' by supporting and developing local good practice and adopting national and international good practice which is relevant to Ballymun. Following the extensive consultation exercise an Education Strategy and Plan of Action were developed building on seven *pillars for action* which emerged from the process:

- *Get it right first time*
- *Progression interventions*
- *Never give up*
- *Build on success*
- *An integrated approach*
- *Themes for excellence*
- *Living the Dream*

The functions proposed to accomplish the implementation of the Ballymun Education Strategy are:

- Agreeing & Setting Goals
- Joint Fundraising
- Sharing Good Practice
- Programme Development
- Facilitating a Community Wide interface with School Development Planning
- Mobilising & Coordinating Resources in the Area
- Maintaining a Progression Horizon Spanning ages 3 – 21 years
- Enabling a Multi-disciplinary Team which supports Children and Youth
- Facilitating Teacher Networks, Professional Development & Welfare

To carry out these functions a new structure is proposed called the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative made up of members representing the pre-school/childcare, schools and education support, youth, alternative education and training, further and adult education, local development, health/primary care, drugs task force, local authority, community/parental sectors and the regional structures of the Department of Education and Science. The overall outcomes of the proposed Ballymun Education Planning Initiative should be:

- Shared Vision & Goals
- A Ballymun Education Strategy and Action Plan
- Progress Reviews
- Demonstration of improved educational outcomes for pupils

The educational phases from pre-school to completion of second level take over sixteen years for a child to complete which suggests that any plan of a short term

nature, say five years, would not include sufficient actions or be able to confirm outcomes that heralded fundamental and everlasting change. It is proposed a ten year planning horizon be adopted for the Ballymun Education Strategy and that the overall goal of the plan is related to that timescale with specific milestones set to be achieved along the way. An ambitious but achievable ten-year goal is proposed along with milestones to track progress.

### **Ten-Year Goal:**

- **Ballymun educational outcomes to be at a par with national levels by September 2014.**

Outcomes will be measured at each of the following stages:

- ✓ Entering primary
- ✓ At the end of the junior primary cycle
- ✓ Entering second level
- ✓ At the end of the junior second level cycle
- ✓ At the end of second level
- ✓ third level entry rates

### Milestones:

- Children in 1st class at the national average in literacy by July 2007
- Access to an agreed standard of pre-school education for every parent who wants to avail of it by September 2008 by
  - ✓ increasing provision from the existing 7-16% to 75%, i.e. an increase of approximately 600 places from approximately 100 to 700
- Overall second level school completion up from 50% up to 75% and for the traditional leaving certificate from 25% up to 50% by June 2008
- Third level entry up from 6% to 25% by September 2009
- Children entering secondary school with reading competency at national average levels by September 2010
- Ballymun to host an international conference reporting its progress and presenting its learning as a model of excellence in improving educational outcomes in 2012
- School completion rates match national averages for the leaving certificate cycle by 2013

The consultant recommends that the Ballymun Partnership provides a Secretariat for the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative (BEPI) and that it assists the stakeholders identified to set the proposed structures by September 2004. BEPI should adopt a

Strategy and Plan of Action and it is proposed that this report is used as a basis for that process. It should establish relationships with the Department of Education and Science and with potential funders.

The Ballymun Development Group for Children and Young People (BDGCYP), was set up in December 2003 to plan for and identify the resources needed to meet the needs of children and youth in the area and to present funding proposals to the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Departments of Education & Science, Health & Children and Social & Family Affairs. This presents a unique opportunity which could be as fundamental to a successful future for Ballymun as its world class physical regeneration programme. The Atlantic Philanthropies, which has a distinguished record of assisting Ireland in previous funding programmes, has chosen children and youth as a priority area for future funding. It has designated 2004 as a year of research and planning for the children and youth funding priority. The Development Group has proposed six themes to provide a conceptual framework within which to progress their work, namely: Physical Environment, Health, Family, Childcare, Education & Vocational Preparation and Social Development. Within the context of their broader strategy the development of an area wide Ballymun Education Strategy winning support from local and national stakeholders is a fundamental and critical step in informing their deliberations on funding.

A prerequisite to any major change in educational outcomes in Ballymun is a new approach to which all stakeholders can lend their support. The approach must be based on pro-active collaboration between the stakeholders which jointly identifies the issues and challenges to be faced and plans for an integrated solution which supports children, young people and families in all areas that affect their educational progress and achievements, both inside and outside of school. It must enable the investment of additional energies and resources which can be monitored for effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes in an open and transparent manner. It must promote what is best in Ballymun and raise pride and the aspirations of the whole community.

It must allow all stakeholders to share in the success of young people as they complete their education and the collaborative achievement that that represents. It must set out to give children and young people in Ballymun what they deserve, a new approach, which through the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative sets out to '*get it right first time*' and to ensure that they develop to the level of their potential. It will require the best that stakeholders can offer to the process; imagination, commitment, resources, skill, tenacity and a collaborative approach. This new approach is urgently needed and should be pursued without delay. There can be no doubt that it will be worth the effort.

## **2. Brief and Methodology**

The physical fabric of Ballymun is being transformed by a world class regeneration programme which is replacing run down flat blocks with quality new homes and in tandem is developing a new town with modern facilities all of which points towards a bright future for residents old and new. However to develop a truly sustainable community, that prospers and takes its rightful place as a successful community in one of Europe's wealthiest cities, improved educational outcomes for the children and youth of Ballymun are essential. The Board of the Ballymun Partnership is committed to the development of an Education Strategy for Ballymun which helps to deliver that aspiration. The new Education Blueprint will include a clearly defined action plan and implementation strategy designed to win the support and resources necessary to make it a success.

The Ballymun Partnership commissioned the NCI to carry out a study completed in 2003 which examined the Irish education system, the Ballymun educational context and international responses to educational disadvantage. Subsequently the consultant, George Ryan, was engaged in December 2003 to take the process forward to the next stage to result in an Education Strategy and Plan of Action for Ballymun. This would involve a closer engagement with local stakeholders as recommended by the NCI study as part of an integrated movement towards improved educational outcomes.

The methodology adopted involved a close examination of the issues on the ground in Ballymun, what was working and what was not. In-depth interviews were conducted with key personnel in both the formal education system and in a broader range of local organisations with profound experience and knowledge of the issues affecting Ballymun children and youth.

The methodology contrasted the priority goals of the various new policies, initiatives and programmes introduced into the educational system over the last five years with the actual experience in Ballymun<sup>1</sup> schools and drew heavily on the views and knowledge of the fourteen school principals and their combined four hundred years of experience of the Irish education system. The list of school principals consulted is contained in Appendix 2 and the topics covered are outlined in the template in Appendix 1. Issues and anomalies in current education provision were explored and gaps were identified where services could be improved or put in place where they do not already exist. The role of schools outside Ballymun were examined to determine the extent to which they serve Ballymun residents and the need or otherwise to include them in the education strategy. An overview of educational practice in Ballymun was produced to inform the analysis and subsequent proposals.

Recent developments in educational policy were reviewed to see if or to what extent they were impacting on schools in Ballymun e.g. School Development Planning<sup>2</sup>, Whole School Evaluation and the latest findings of the Educational Disadvantage

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<sup>1</sup> Ballymun schools are defined as schools where over ninety percent of pupils they serve are residents of Ballymun wards A, B, C and D.

<sup>2</sup> School Development Planning Initiative – National Progress Report 2002. Department of Education and Science, October 2003.

Committee<sup>3</sup> which has the statutory role of making recommendations to the Minister of Education and Science . These were also reviewed to see if actions and initiatives could be developed which would benefit Ballymun and at the same time further advance or pilot the implementation of Department of Education and Science policies.

Consultation with key personnel in local organisations focused on establishing a *reality baseline* which could inform the education strategy by relating its proposed actions to the actual experience of struggling learners and their families. The interviews also focused on understanding the capacity and the potential of the organisations to contribute to improved social development, better education outcomes and positive progression opportunities for children and youth in Ballymun.

Good practice was identified within Ballymun highlighting areas that deserve continued support and development or broader area wide implementation. Good practice in Ireland was examined where there appeared to be a close fit in terms of relevance and applicability to Ballymun. The consultant was also able to review a number of relevant initiatives from other countries both through desk research and by incorporating visits and reviews during his normal foreign travel itinerary. Actions and initiatives of two broad types were reviewed; those which improve a child's capacity, interest, motivation, skill and disposition to learn and those which produce an immediate measurable learning outcome.

The consultant set out to identify areas where schools and the broader community of stakeholders could work together more effectively to support better educational outcomes. Potential new areas for co-operative approaches were explored such as joint fundraising, sharing good practice, developing multi-disciplinary teams, programme development and the mobilising of state resources. The willingness of local stakeholders to engage in an area wide approach and to participate in new structures to support improved educational outcomes was explored.

An Education Strategy and Plan of Action were developed building on seven *pillars for action* which crystallised during the consultation process. These are;

- *Get it right first time*
- *Progression interventions*
- *Never give up*
- *Build on success*
- *An integrated approach*
- *Themes for excellence*
- *Living the Dream*

A draft version of the Ballymun Education Strategy was circulated to participants in the consultation process for comment before the final version was prepared.

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<sup>3</sup> A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-based Educational Inclusion Measures – Submission to the Minister for Education and Science from the Educational Disadvantage Committee, December 2003.

### **3. Overview of Educational Practice in Ballymun**

This section describes the current provision of education in the school system in Ballymun. It also records examples of existing good practice both within the formal school system and in organisations supporting improved educational outcomes for Ballymun children and youth. It further develops the focus on good practice by including relevant examples of ‘new’ good practice which the consultant believes could benefit Ballymun. These are based on inputs from people involved in the consultation process, extensions of fledgling existing good practice in Ballymun and national and international practices noted in the NCI report. Findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarised throughout the section in italics and along with findings from sections 4 & 5 which examine issues and anomalies in the current education system and opportunities relating to national policy developments serve to inform the proposed education strategy and plan of action.

#### **3.1. Education Provision – Trends and Changes**

In understanding educational practice in Ballymun it is useful to have a clear picture of the structures within which it operates along with the overall trends in school going population and the resultant changes which are taking place. Figure 1 shows the mainstream providers of primary and second level education to over ninety five percent of the school goers in Ballymun and the inflows and outflows from level to level within that structure.

The overall trend in the last twenty years has been a reduction in school going population of approximately 1,800 in line with the overall reduction in the Ballymun population from 21,816<sup>4</sup> in 1981 to 15,229 in 2002. This long term trend will be halted and reversed over the coming decade as the housing stock of Ballymun is increased through the regeneration programme and the school going population begins to rise again. The present estimated<sup>5</sup> school going population is approximately 4,082 of which 3,524 attend the fourteen schools listed in Appendix 2. These schools are regarded as the primary providers of schooling for Ballymun based on the fact that between ninety and one hundred percent of their pupils live in Ballymun wards A, B, C and D. A pictorial overview is shown in Figure 1 below which shows these fourteen schools coloured blue along with an additional eight secondary schools coloured green which are attended by pupils from Ballymun but who draw most of their pupils from other areas typically in their surrounding neighbourhoods.

A sub trend in Ballymun has been the growth of education provided through the medium of Irish with an estimated 561 (14%) of the total school going population of 4,082 attending Gael Scoileanna. The total of 561 is made up of 224 attending Scoil an tSeachtar Loach primary, 187 attending Gael Scoil Bhaile Munna primary and an estimated 150 attending second level Gael Scoileanna. The tradition is deep rooted

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<sup>4</sup> CSO Census Data 1981-2002

<sup>5</sup> This estimate and other estimates given later in this section are based on enrolment figures for the 14 schools listed in Appendix 2 and extrapolations from these enrolment figures to estimate the number of Ballymun school goers attending other second level schools outside the area.

with Scoil an tSeachtar Laoch operating since 1973 and Gael Scoil Bhaile Munna founded in 1994 to meet the growing demand.

The majority of Ballymun second level students, 847 (60%) in number, attended the Ballymun Comprehensive schools in 2003/4 and an estimated 558 (40%) attended other second level schools outside Ballymun. A major change is underway in the delivery of second level education in Ballymun with the planned amalgamation of the three Comprehensive schools. At present the Junior Boys Comprehensive and Junior Girls Comprehensive share a site on the east side of the Ballymun Road while the co-ed Senior Comprehensive is located on a separate site on the other side of the road. The amalgamation will result in a single co-ed secondary school on the present site of the junior schools. The €8.5 million project has progressed through the design stage and the tendering and construction programme is underway with possible completion in time for the school year commencing in September 2005. The implications, challenges and opportunities related to this major change are explored later in the report.

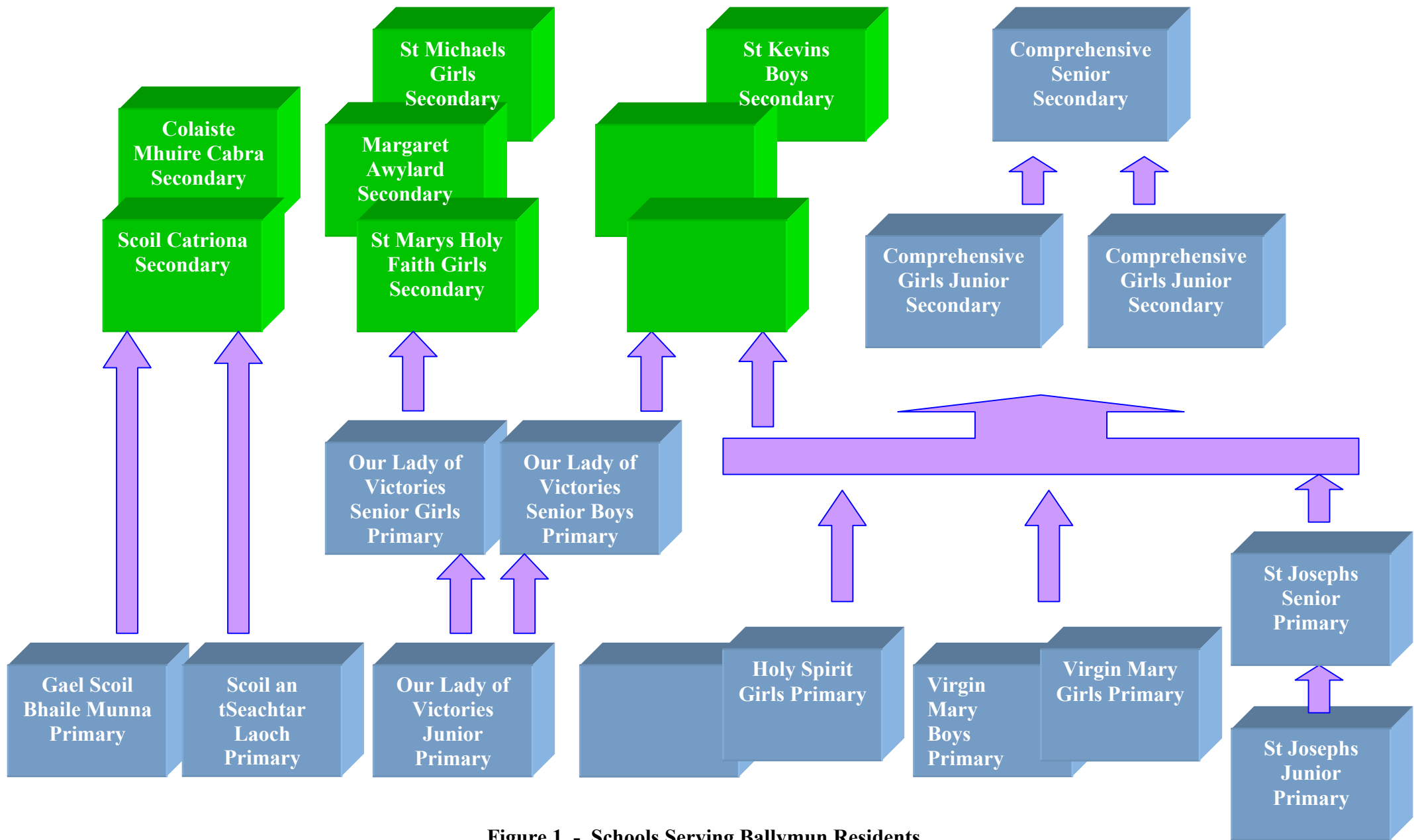
A local factor affecting the provision of primary education is the phasing of the regeneration programme. This is evident in Balcurriss where the St Joseph's junior infant's intake in September 2004 is expected to be about 30 children which is half the number admitted in previous years. The timing of demolition and new build has temporarily reduced the intake numbers and this will result in a reduction in teaching staff in future years until the situation eventually rebalances.

The average annual intake into junior infant classes is 337 children and their early pre-school education and socialisation is a key factor in their capacity to benefit from primary educational provision. Most Ballymun parents (78.2%)<sup>6</sup> mind their own children at home and about 16.4% use a crèche or playgroup. Pre-school education is formally provided by a Department of Education and Science pilot scheme called Early Start. The unit is attached to the Virgin Mary Schools and is staffed by a teacher and a childcare worker and caters for 22 children or about 7% of the junior infant annual intake. It operates two separate two hour sessions, morning and afternoon, which makes it less attractive for parents who can access all-day childcare options. It can cater for up to 30 children so at its current uptake of 22 the demand for the service appears limited given that it can accept children from anywhere in Ballymun not just those intending to progress to Virgin Mary schools.

*It is clear that there is an opportunity to make a significant impact on children's educational performance in Ballymun through the expansion and development of pre-school education in collaboration with the childcare sector.*

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<sup>6</sup> Ballymun Fact File 2003, Part 4 – Ballymun Partnership.



**Figure 1 - Schools Serving Ballymun Residents**

### **3.2. Challenges faced at Primary level in Ballymun**

The key educational issues identified by primary school principals are children's difficulties with language development and subsequently with reading skills. Attendance was also cited as a key issue and this is addressed later in this section. Many children are entering the Ballymun junior primary schools with underdeveloped language skills commonly linked with delayed social development. Many of these children have not benefited from attendance at pre-school or play school which could have helped them to prepare for primary school in the absence of sufficient learning stimuli in the home. In recent years disadvantaged schools have been allowed to add Learning Support Teachers, Home School Liaison Community Teachers and Resource Teachers to their staff complement to help overcome the range of issues facing schools in improving educational outcomes for their pupils and Ballymun schools have benefited from these initiatives.

Learning support teachers typically support groups of children who are below the average reading levels for their age group and they offer this support as needed throughout the primary cycle. In general it was suggested that support for children with reading difficulties needs to be taken further and three primary school principals suggested that more individually targeted reading improvement systems should be introduced such as the Reading Recovery system which is applicable to six to seven year old children and offers an individual child centred approach which sets out to return the child to the reading level of their peer group within a twenty week period. Numeracy was also considered to be of critical importance but in the present system numeracy learning support takes second place to literacy as the permitted number of learning support teaching posts are not sufficient to deal adequately with children's needs in this area.

The establishment of learning support teacher networks was suggested to enable sharing of experience and good practice and to facilitate professional development of teachers. Some principals felt that the current Irish primary curriculum is now very extensive having being extended over the years to include subjects such as Science and SPHE and that this can limit time spent on the development of literacy and numeracy where disadvantaged schools are concerned. An example given was that in the school in question it would be desirable to have a literacy hour and a numeracy hour every day similar to some UK schools but this was not thought to be possible within current Departmental curriculum guidelines.

*Learning support structures need to be resourced to a greater degree through the provision of targeted literacy programmes such as Reading Recovery, in-service training & professional development networks and an adequate number of teaching positions to effectively support literacy and numeracy improvement to match average national levels.*

*The curriculum followed in individual primary schools needs to meet the needs of the cohort of learners in that school and needs to facilitate improved learning outcomes. The approach to this challenge needs to be crafted by using the School Development Planning process which sets these goals as central tenets for the education process.*

A positive aspect of the present system is the improved pupil teacher ratio of 20:1 which is available to disadvantaged junior level schools compared to a pupil teacher ratio of 27:1 at senior primary level. Principals have found that the lower pupil teacher ratio has generally resulted in a much better relationship between teachers and their pupils and has noticeably benefited the children by improving their self-esteem and confidence. However the change of ratio between junior and senior primary cycles is presenting some principals with impossible scenarios as the lower class size moves up to senior primary level and the class size has in theory to be increased for example from 20 to 27 pupils which in practice is almost impossible. This is extremely frustrating for principals and is explored further in section 4.

The principle of giving greater support at junior primary level is not always delivered upon in the present system. For example it is much more difficult to obtain psychological assessments from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for children at junior primary level compared to children at senior primary level and these assessments are necessary to obtain resource teachers to support the learning difficulties of these children. There is evidence that in some junior primary schools there are 60% fewer resource teachers than are granted at senior primary level.

The provision of resource teachers is intended to allow individual teaching support for children with learning difficulties. Psychological assessments evaluate the number of hours of support required for individual children and the Department of Education and Science (DES) authorises a teaching for every 22 hours of required support per week and in some cases partial posts are authorised. It is possible for a school to obtain two to three assessments per year from the NEPS psychologists but this has been considered insufficient to meet the typical needs in Ballymun and some schools fortunate enough to have access to discretionary funds have paid for private assessments. The Mater Child Guidance Clinic operates the Mater Child and Family Centre in the Ballymun shopping centre and is widely regarded as a much respected and highly valued service provider for Ballymun children. It carries out free assessments on children referred by the schools if the learning difficulty is related to an emotional or behavioural problem.

At present the DES are not responding to assessments provided by Ballymun schools and principals have suggested that this is because they are overloaded with assessments from schools nationally and have put responses on hold while they review the system. In the case of one school a response is awaited for two years. Section 5.3 of this report outlines a proposed new system for the allocation of teaching posts for special needs, announced by the Minister for Education and Science in June 2004.

*An interim solution is needed for all Ballymun pupils who need individual support of a type that was up until recently met by the ongoing allocation by the DES of resource teachers. A longer term solution needs to be developed which relates to the DES system that will be put in place after its review process of resource teacher provision.*

Given that language development is a key educational issue in Ballymun the provision of speech therapy and the related assessment process is of major importance. The waiting list for speech therapy assessments is six months long but the sad fact is that

many parents do not keep their child's appointment date and they are then given new appointments dates which adds another six months before the child is seen. One school principal reported that in one particular one year not one parent kept their appointment.

Many children face extremely difficult family circumstances including homelessness, a drug or alcohol addicted parent, very poor nutrition and low priority given to education by their families. Parents often struggle to deal with their own issues and difficulties but they can be co-operative and become engaged with others supporting their child. External support for the needs of these children is of paramount importance and a very highly regarded after school support initiative is the Aisling project which supports children from three different primary schools. This outstanding project will be described later in the good practice section of the report. One principal suggested that a multi-disciplinary team based in the area which offered a range of services would greatly benefit the children in need of support. Other principals when asked thought that this was an excellent idea but held out little hope for such support. A number of principals were aware of or had personal experience of the operation of 'teacher counsellors' which were provided under a pilot scheme by the DES and provided a much needed support for children with behavioural or emotional difficulties. The scheme was not continued due to issues related to professional qualification for this type of work. In the absence of such supports the possibility is always high that these children's behaviour in class becomes disruptive and takes away from the educational experience of other children. The consultant witnessed a number of principals taking time out of their interviews to give support of one form or another to children who needed to come out of the classroom situation and he was struck by the concern the principals obviously felt for the children in question. These children deserve resources to support and sustain them in their struggle to integrate better into the school and the learning experience.

*The possibility of establishing a multi-disciplinary team to support school goes in the area should be pursued. It should include practitioners in the fields of Educational Psychology, Speech Therapy and Social Work. The team should focus not just on assessment but crucially on curative interventions. Links should be established with the Primary Health Care model which is currently being piloted in Ballymun.*

Attendance as noted at the beginning of this chapter is a major problem and is prioritised at a school level. The school completion programme under BEST is pioneering new approaches to combat poor attendance and this is explored more fully later in the report. Schools also report school attendance figures regularly to the Education Welfare Board (EWB) which has statutory responsibility for school attendance. However schools feel they are operating in a system without sanction at present and do their best to reward and encourage good attendance but are powerless to help some children who can have absences records of forty or fifty days but whose parents are not responding to the problem. The official point of intervention for the EWB is twenty days absence in a school year but due to staff shortages little action from the EWB has been evident on the ground over the last two years. This has had a demoralising effect on teachers and principals who know and care about the individual children who are suffering further disadvantage through their absence from school. Thankfully in the May / June 2004 there has been evidence of some action by

the EWB with letters sent to some parents of children with absences over twenty days and contact made with some of the schools.

*The local office of the Education Welfare Board should be invited to link with area based actions to improve attendance and co-ordinate its actions with other agencies.*

Parental involvement varies across primary schools but in general there is difficulty in getting a high level of parental involvement in school related activities. There is willingness at both primary and secondary for parents to come to parent teacher meetings. In most instances there is great difficulty in getting parents to join boards of management or to help with school activities. The consultant is at pains to stress that there are exceptions to this general experience and these are elaborated on in the section on good practice. Home School Community Liaison Teachers have been a tremendous success and this will also be explored later in the report. The issue is that more parental involvement at the level enjoyed by more advantaged schools would improve the educational experience and outcomes for Ballymun children. Despite intergenerational educational disadvantage it has been demonstrated that parents care about the welfare of their children but many are not aware of the importance of education and the culture that supports significant educational achievement. More could be done to help schools get the message across to parents that education is important and that educational successes are achieved by Ballymun children and youth. In fact it's really a much broader issue than educational expectations alone.

*Children and young people's achievements across the spectrum of social, cultural and educational fields need to be promoted by supportive bodies outside of the schools to help start changing the self-esteem and aspirations relating to education of the whole Ballymun community. The spirit and the attitude of the community towards education has to be helped to become more positive focusing more on achievement and self-confidence but schools cannot do this alone. All must rally around this effort and help to raise the expectations that Ballymun parents and the wider community have for their children. The Ballymun community must tell all its children in a thousand different ways what they are capable of achieving and must help them to believe in their own capacity to achieve.*

This could be considered to be a horizontal action directed across the whole community which supports the other vertical actions that focus on helping individual children or cohorts of children at various educational phases of development.

### **3.3. Challenges faced at Secondary level in Ballymun**

The challenges faced at second level vary widely and this section deals specifically with the challenges facing students attending the Ballymun Comprehensive schools as this study does not extend to the cohort who attend second level schools outside the area. Like all students they are of mixed ability but in the case of Ballymun there is also a significant group who cannot be sustained in the normal school system.

The present size of this group in the Ballymun Junior Comprehensive schools is approximately 30 out of a total of 571. In percentage terms at 5% this may not seem very high but in human terms this is a potential tragedy for these young people, their community and their present and future families. This group is largely made up of

young people with severe behavioural or emotional problems whose normal development has not progressed to the maturity typical of their age cohort either due to family environment or individual difficulties.

Anger is frequently the response of these students to school discipline issues and this also demonstrates a huge degree of frustration on their part with the options that appear available to them in their lives. Suspension is almost inevitably the result of continuous behavioural and discipline problems and alternatives progression pathways are extremely limited for these young people especially if they are under 15 years of age. A very small number, six maximum, are offered places in the BEST (Ballymun Educational Support Team) out-of-school group which with very limited resources can only offer a part-time but nevertheless invaluable alternative tailored to their needs. In the age range of fifteen to twenty more alternative progression routes are available including Youthreach and Community Training Workshops.

Absence from school is characteristic of the group discussed above but also of a wider group who can demonstrate normal behaviour and benefit educationally and socially when they do attend school. It is important to understand that there is a continuum of profiles from the young people with the extreme difficulties described above to young people with more normal behavioural profiles but who are at risk of very poor attendance and subsequent educational disadvantage due to family circumstances or negative peer influences. It can be very difficult for a young person if they are the only person in the household getting up in the morning or face other negative circumstances at home such as a drug or alcohol addicted parent. The absence of a learning-supportive environment at home and the low importance and priority given to education by some parents is a pattern that continues right through their children's educational phases. Experience has shown that despite these factors they can achieve good outcomes with the help of outside support and encouragement, through their own resilience and commitment and in some cases with the support of their extended families. Responses to these ongoing challenges have been developed by schools through the School Completion Programme, managed by BEST, and initiatives delivered by BITE (The Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education). The body with statutory responsibility for school attendance is the Education Welfare Board but their activity on the ground with schools in Ballymun has been minimal or non-existent and this issue is explored in a later section.

The biggest educational challenge facing the junior cycle second level schools is the poor level of reading competency of the majority of the incoming students. Limited provision is available for interventions such as learning support teachers and resource teachers. Views were expressed by some principals that an improved teacher ratio would be on the whole a better approach than the present learning support and resource teacher mechanism. The view was also expressed that individual learning plans would benefit students but that resources were not available to facilitate that approach. Figure 2<sup>7</sup> below shows an improved pupil teacher ration of 18.1 to 15.8 at second level and an improvement of 25.8 to 18.4 at primary level over the ten year period 1991/2 to 2001/2. However this has not been sufficient to change the pattern of outcomes in areas such as Ballymun and other disadvantaged areas in Dublin. At present the reading competency of the cohort finishing the junior second level cycle is

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<sup>7</sup> KEY EDUCATION STATISTICS: 1991/92-2001/02 – Department of Education and Science.

well below the national average with approximately one third below the 70 level compared with the national norm represented as 100.

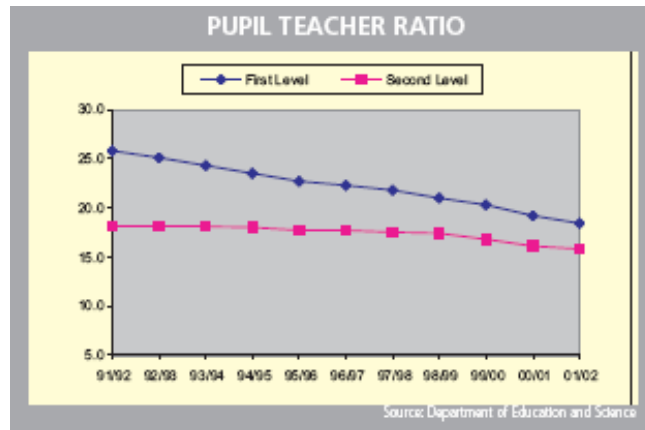


Figure 2 – Trends in Irish Pupil Teacher Ratios

*The reading competency of children entering second level education needs to be at a par with average national levels to enable outcomes at second level in Ballymun approaching those of advantaged communities.*

*Resources should be sought and systems established to enable students to be assisted in developing individual learning plans.*

After three years in the junior secondary cycle the academic capacity of the overall cohort of Ballymun Comprehensive students is very much below the national average and this limits participation in the traditional leaving certificate cycle. The present curriculum for the senior level secondary cycle has evolved considerably over the last ten years. Even though the present curriculum is a great improvement over the traditional one with the addition of the Transition Year, the Leaving Cert Applied and the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme it does not meet the needs of all students and this is more pronounced in an area like Ballymun. The curriculum still makes distinctions and implied value judgements about young people for example by having academically segregated programmes such as traditional leaving certificate and leaving cert applied. Assessment for the traditional leaving certificate is still loaded towards the final exams with little scope for recognition of successes along the way. There is a broad desire for change at a national level<sup>8</sup> with the current curriculum and assessment system in terms of how it meets the needs of the wide range of students entering the senior secondary cycle and these issues and future directions now being planned are discussed in more depth in sections 5 and 6.

The Ballymun Senior Comprehensive School has used the wider options available in the curriculum over the past ten years to help more students to engage in programmes that better meet their needs and assist them in completing the senior second level cycle. The strategy adopted has been twofold. One strand provides the two year Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme for students needing a less academic

<sup>8</sup> Developing Senior Cycle Education – Directions for Development: launched at the NCCA Forum on Senior Cycle Education in September 2003.

curriculum. Although LCA is not on a direct progression route to third level through the CAO system, it is accepted for most PLC courses and most apprenticeships. The other strand provides a three year programme for students pursuing the traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) comprising the Transition Year programme including about 30% leaving certificate content followed by the standard two year leaving certificate curriculum. The status of enrolments on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2004 showed that 150 students had successfully transferred from the secondary junior cycle with 94 participating in Transition Year, 6 in the first year of the traditional Leaving Certificate and 50 participating in first year of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

A particular challenge facing the Senior Comprehensive is the change to a co-ed system at an age which creates maximum distraction for students. This puts extra pressure on students and teachers but this will be alleviated when the three senior comprehensive schools are amalgamated in September 2005 and the co-ed system is in-built from the start of the junior secondary cycle. Amalgamation of the three Comprehensive schools will see other major changes in the way secondary education is provided. A single principal will be appointed and teachers will have an opportunity for further professional development by having an opportunity to teach in both the junior and senior secondary cycles. Transition from the junior to the senior cycle will take place within a less stressful structure and will be much more seamless for students and teaching staff. The three Comprehensive Schools have been through a very difficult time over the last five years as the frustrations over the educational limitations of the present three-school system became even more pronounced as the amalgamation timetable was delayed by four years due to delays in the tendering process.

*All of the partners in education in Ballymun need to support the major change in second level provision to be achieved through the amalgamation of the three Comprehensive Schools in September 2005 to help maximise the opportunity for improving second level education in the area.*

Another factor which is very real in the comprehensive schools is the stress experienced by teachers and the lack of any system to deal with this and to help teachers cope and be fully supported in serving the sometimes testing behaviour and taxing needs of the students. There are systems in place to support employees in other state sectors such as the Employee Assistance Officers available to civil servants.

*Programmes should be developed to give appropriate support to teachers experiencing stress and which respond to their individual circumstances.*

There are no mainstream systems for responding to ongoing psychological difficulties experienced by second level students. Good work is being carried out by the school completion programme in resourcing a Student Welfare Officer<sup>9</sup> in the Junior Comprehensive Schools but this is not seen as an adequate substitute for professional psychological services. Services are more readily available for students in the out-of-school group but this occurs after they have effectively left the formal second level

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<sup>9</sup> The Student Welfare Officer is funded through and managed by the BEST School Completion Programme.

system. Health care for second level students can also be a problem area as they no longer have automatic entitlement to free health services after they leave primary school adding to other stresses which a student may face.

*A multi-disciplinary professional support team would be of great benefit to students by understanding and supporting their individual needs and by facilitating a more supportive environment both in school and at home.*

Senior cycle second level retention rates are often looked at as the barometer of performance of the education system and a reflection of the educational advantage enjoyed by some districts over others. The first Department of Education and Science (DES) analysis<sup>10</sup> of school retention at second level was published in May 2003 and relates to pupils who commenced the junior cycle programme in September 1994 and sat the leaving certificate in June 1999 or June 2000. It showed that of these pupils 78.3% were retained in the senior cycle nationally and 72.9% in Dublin. The highest percentages were recorded for Leitrim at 86.5% and Dublin 6W at 86%. The senior cycle retention rates nationally for males and females were 72.5% and 84.3% and on the basis of the sector of provision were 83.4%, 65.9% and 75.8% for the secondary, vocational and community and comprehensive sectors respectively. The retention rate to the completion of the Junior Certificate Examination ‘Sits’ was 94.3% nationally and 92.8% in Dublin.

So where does Ballymun sit in terms of its senior cycle second level retention rates? The figures for Dublin 9 are given in the DES report and these include Ballymun Comprehensive and some other second level schools attended by Ballymun school goers. They are not broken out by school but nevertheless they do give an insight into where Ballymun sits. The overall senior cycle completion rate for Dublin 9 is 93.1% for Junior Certificate and 73.2% for Leaving Certificate. Figure 3 below is an extract from the DES report and shows a total of 11 schools in Dublin 9.

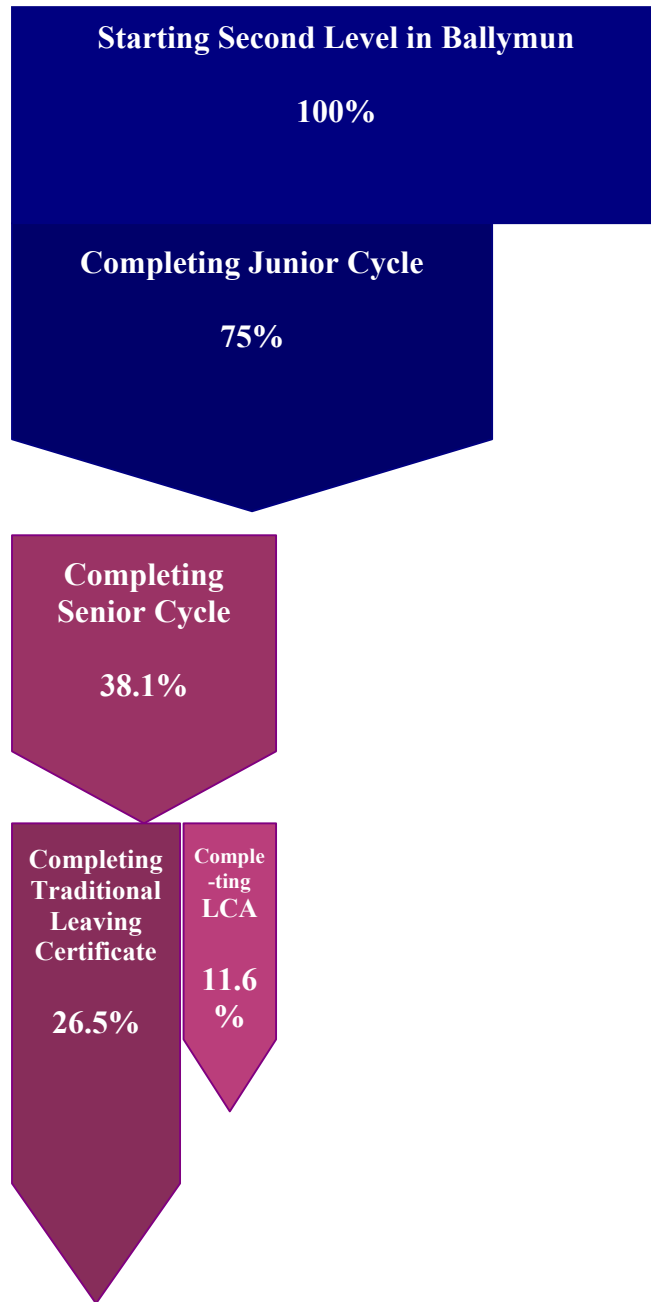
POSTAL DISTRICT	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	JC EXAM 'SITS (%)'	60% OR LESS	61% - 70%	71% - 80%	81% TO 90%	91% OR MORE	SENIOR CYCLE RETENTION (%)	50% OR LESS	51% - 60%	61% - 70%	71% - 80%	81% OR MORE
				1	2	-	8	73.2	3	-	1	3	4
Dublin 9	11	92.1	-	1	2	-	8	73.2	3	-	1	3	4

**Figure 3 - Detailed Retention Rates for 1994 Cohort in County Dublin**

Three schools are shown as having junior cycle retention rates of between 60-80% and senior cycle retention rates of 50% or less and this supports the analysis carried out by the consultant in relation to the Ballymun Comprehensive schools. This shows that retention in the junior cycle is approximately 75% and in the senior cycle lies in the range of 35-45%. However the story does not end there as a true comparison with advantaged areas requires an assessment of retention rates broken down between the

<sup>10</sup> Retention Rates of Pupils in Post-Primary Schools - 1994 cohort. Department of Education and Science, May 2003.

traditional leaving certificate cycle and the leaving certificate applied alternative. This breakdown is illustrated in Figure 4 below which contains rough estimates of the percentage completion for each cycle based on Senior Cycle examination ‘sits’ in June 2004.



**Figure 4 – Retention Rates in Ballymun Second Level Schools**

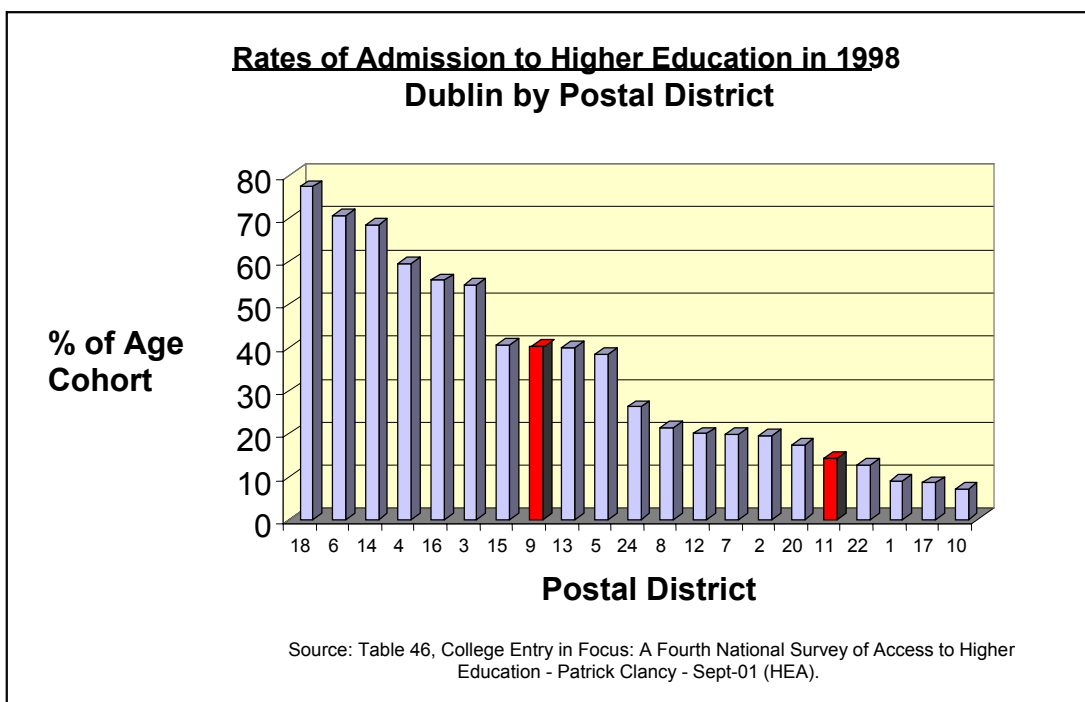
The analysis of retention rates in the Ballymun Comprehensive schools was carried out by the consultant based on the number of students who sat Leaving Certificate examinations in June 2004. There were 57 students who sat the traditional Leaving Certificate and 25 who sat the Leaving Certificate Applied examinations. The consultant estimates the overall retention rate in the Senior Cycle to be 38.1% for the cohort finishing in 2004. The estimated retention rates in the traditional Leaving Certificate cycle were approximately 26.5% with the balance of 11.6% completing the

Leaving Certificate Applied cycle. A comparison relating to the traditional leaving certificate cycle would then be approximately 26.5% for Ballymun versus 74% on a national basis and 26.5% for Ballymun versus 86% compared to the most advantaged areas in Ireland. It would be of benefit to have an annual detailed study carried out to determine the precise completion rates for each cycle in Ballymun so that a more accurate baseline could be established and future improvements could be quantified.

*In conclusion those attending Ballymun Comprehensive second level schools currently have an overall senior cycle retention rate of approximately 38.1% and to put this in a national context it is more informative to examine the retention rate in the traditional leaving certificate cycle for this cohort which is 26.5% in Ballymun compared to 74% nationally and compared to 86% for the most advantaged areas.*

*It is recommended that two separate targets for improvement need to be pursued in relation to improved educational outcomes at second level in Ballymun. One is an improvement in the overall retention rate in the senior cycle and another is an improvement in the retention rate in the traditional leaving certificate cycle.*

This also has an important lesson for those strategies to improve progression rates into third level education from disadvantaged areas. Those entering third level from Ballymun come from the cohort which undertakes the traditional leaving certificate cycle and this cohort is less than one third of the same cohort in advantaged areas i.e. 26.5% for Ballymun Comprehensive versus 74% nationally. Therefore even with much improved supports for third level entrants from Ballymun equality of outcome could never be attained through that approach alone. To move towards equality of participation rates in third level entry a much more fundamental sea change is necessary and this requires greatly improved educational outcomes at each stage of the educational cycles going right back to the pre-school phase which would allow a proportion of Ballymun students similar to the proportion from advantaged areas to successfully undertake the traditional leaving certificate cycle.



**Figure 5 – Rates of Admission to Higher Education**

Rates of admission to higher education are formally analysed<sup>11</sup> by Dublin postal districts as shown in the Figure 5 above. Ballymun wards A, B, C and D are partly in Dublin 11 and partly in Dublin 9 but those postal districts also encompass many other neighbourhoods outside Ballymun. Dublin 11 is ranked 17th and Dublin 9 is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of the 21 Dublin postal districts.

So what is the rate of admission for students from Ballymun wards A, B, C & D? Based on the number of students who progressed to third level from Ballymun Senior Comprehensive School over the last two years and the cohort who started in the first year of the junior secondary cycle the consultant estimated a progression rate to third level of 6%.. This estimate places this cohort alongside Dublin 1 (Inner City), Dublin 17 (incorporating Darndale, Moatview & Priorswood) and Dublin 10 (Ballyfermot and Cherry Orchard) as the lowest progression groups all coming in under 10%.

*Progression to third level education for the cohort attending the Comprehensive second level schools in Ballymun is 6% versus an average of 60% for the highest six advantaged areas in Dublin.*

About 64% of the cohort in Ballymun wards A, B, C and D enter the Comprehensive Schools and 36% enter other second level schools outside the area shown in figure 1 earlier.

*There is no data currently available for the 36% who go to second level schools outside the area and it is recommended that this group is studied to understand their needs and their progression levels to third level education as part of the ongoing assessment of Ballymun outcomes.*

### **3.4. Challenges Facing the Ballymun Traveller Community in Education**

The population of Travellers<sup>12</sup> living in Ballymun is approximately 330 persons. This is made up of approximately 80 Traveller families, the majority living in St. Margaret's Park, which is a fully serviced halting site with a pre-school and community centre. About 8 families live in roadside accommodation with minimal facilities and 6 families live in local authority housing. There are many barriers that affect young Travellers participation and attainment in education and they cannot be seen in isolation from the factors which affect their overall quality of life i.e. inappropriate accommodation, poor health, discrimination etc.

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<sup>11</sup> College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education - Patrick Clancy - Sept-01 (HEA).

<sup>12</sup> The information informing this section was provided by Anne Thornton of the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers.

The following table details the number of Traveller children from Ballymun who were enrolled in educational institutions during the 2003/4 school year.

<b>Educational Institution</b>	<b>Numbers Attending 2003/4</b>
<b>In Ballymun:</b>	
St. Margaret's Pre-school	20
St Joseph's JNS	44
St Joseph's SNS	33
Virgin Mary GNS	4
Virgin Mary BNS	3
Ballymun Boys Junior Comprehensive	-
Ballymun Girls Junior Comprehensive	2
Youthreach	9
<b>Outside Ballymun:</b>	
St Thomas Junior Education centre, Coolock	17

Since September 2004 there are 4 girls enrolled in Ballymun Girls Junior Comprehensive and 1 boy enrolled in the Ballymun Boys Junior Comprehensive. After completing primary school the majority of Traveller children transfer to St. Thomas Junior Education Centre in Coolock which caters for Traveller children between the ages of 12-16. The provision of an alternative segregated second level option discourages parents from choosing a mainstream second level school.

Retention figures are very poor with only 5 children sitting the Junior Certificate examination in the last couple of years. Efforts to improve educational progression include the home work club run by the education sub-committee of the St. Margaret's Traveller Community Group. The programme runs in partnership with St Joseph's schools and involves teachers and parents. An education programme has also been running for the last two years in an attempt to meet the need of parents.

*For Travellers to benefit from the Ballymun Education Strategy they need to be recognised as a minority group. Targets, goals, action plans, evaluations and assessments need to include quality proofing to ensure that Travellers are participating and involved in all aspects of the initiative. Traveller parents or guardians need to be supported in making the choice of any school for their child and every school in Ballymun needs to be supported in integrating that child and meeting their needs.*

### **3.5. General Findings at Primary and Secondary Levels**

*There was a very high level of interest, commitment, collaboration and engagement by school principals with the process of developing strategies to improve educational outcomes in Ballymun as undertaken by the consultant on behalf of the Ballymun Partnership.*

*There was a general frustration with educational outcomes and a strong belief that better outcomes could be achieved by Ballymun children if families, school and local organisations were better supported in trying to achieve that goal.*

*There was a very pragmatic approach by school principals underpinned by a desire to do everything possible to improve prospects for Ballymun children and there was a strong willingness to participate in an area based structure if it could further advance the educational outcomes of Ballymun children.*

### **3.6. Building on Good Practice – Existing and New**

Examples of existing good practice locally, nationally and internationally have been brought to the attention of the consultant during the consultation process with educators and local organisations and these are briefly summarised below. Good practice in Ireland was examined where there appeared to be a close fit in terms of relevance and applicability to Ballymun. The consultant was also able to review a number of relevant initiatives from other countries both through desk research and by incorporating visits and reviews during his normal foreign travel itinerary.

- **Aisling**

The Aisling project is an after-school intervention for children at risk aimed at providing purposeful activity in a caring and secure environment in an attempt to meet their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Members of the local community, school staff and the parish were alarmed about the reality of the severe deprivation in many children's lives and set up Aisling in 1997. It aims to be a haven for children:

- By providing a safe and nurturing environment for the children which gives them real sense of belonging
- By empowering the children with skills to develop their abilities in order to enhance their lives
- By being a place where they are valued so they can value themselves and each other
- By creating a place where there is justice and equality for all.

It has been praised by leaders in education and the community as an excellent initiative which really changes the lives of the children who attend it. It currently caters for sixty children from age eight to twelve years old in three centres. The project runs from 2.30 to 6.00p.m. on Monday to Thursday each week during the school year. These are refurbished flats provided by Dublin City Council located beside St Josephs, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary primary schools. Aisling is also involved in planning for the provision of pre-school places and a related new facility which will be built adjacent to St. Josephs primary school

*The education strategy should support the Aisling initiative in terms of helping it*

*to secure funding and resources to continue its existing activity but also in its aspiration to expand so as to provide access to an Aisling place for every child who needs it in the Ballymun area.*

- **Reading Recovery**

Three primary school principals interviewed suggested that individually targeted reading improvement systems such as ‘Reading Recovery’ should be introduced to help radically improve literacy in early readers who were currently in learning support classes. The Reading Recovery programme was originally developed in New Zealand in 1980 and subsequently implemented in the US, the UK and on a pilot basis in Ireland. The consultant reviewed findings which indicate that the programme has proved very beneficial in returning struggling 6 and 7 year old readers to the average reading level for their age and allowed them to rejoin normal classes after a typical twenty week intervention.

Information<sup>13</sup> was reviewed on the outcomes for more than 6,000 children and more than 800 teachers from 700 schools across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Boys outnumbered girls in the cohort by almost two to one and almost one in two children came from economically disadvantaged homes. Children were monitored three and six months following the end of their programme and, where available, performance in National Assessments was monitored. Those children who completed Reading Recovery in the period under review had an 86% chance of achieving national targets. Given that these were the children making least progress in their classes prior to Reading Recovery this is an exceptional achievement.

Specifically Irish outcomes have also been reported by the Monaghan Education Centre. In September 2000 nine teachers from schools in the border counties of Louth and Monaghan enrolled on the first Irish Reading Recovery Teacher Training Course. This venture was initiated and supported jointly by the Sisters of Mercy and the Department of Education and Science. The most recent results are from the third year of the programme 2002/3 and are impressive. ‘Overall, the 27 teachers working in the Reading Recovery Programme in 2002/3 worked with 211 children and achieved a success rate of 97% of all completed programmes’.

Implementation of the programme involves a high degree of accredited training in the method. Reading Recovery teachers learn to observe, analyze, and interpret the reading and writing behaviors of individual students and to design and implement an individual program to meet each student's needs. At present there are 12 training places available on an annual basis in Ireland provided by the Marino Institute.

*It is recommended that an area wide implementation of Reading Recovery be planned for Ballymun to commence in September 2004 and to be available to every school in September 2005.*

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<sup>13</sup> READING RECOVERY NATIONAL NETWORK; National Monitoring 2002-2003, Annual Report. The Institute of Education, University of London.

- BEST

The Ballymun Educational Support Team (BEST) develops programmes to stimulate the interests of young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years of age with a view to tackling early school leaving. BEST is funded by the Department of Education and Science through its Schools Completion Programme (SCP) initiative. It operates in school support services targeting approximately 100 at risk young people in five primary schools and approximately 150 at risk young people in the three comprehensive second level schools. It also supports over 450 pupils in Early Bird Clubs in seven primary and two junior secondary comprehensive schools. These clubs provide breakfast and encouragement for pupils to come to school and enjoy a positive experience amongst peers and adults prior to school commencing. It also operates an out of school programme which provides an academic and personal / social development programme for six young people between the ages of 13 and 15 years who are completely out of mainstream education. Its programmes are fully described in its Annual Reports containing internal evaluations of each of its programmes as well as external feedback which reflects the high standards of the organisation. BEST has built up considerable expertise in devising and delivering support programmes and has a full time Project Manager, three full-time Project Workers forming a multi-disciplinary team (work 18-20 hours each), three part-time attendance promoters (20 hours each), ten part-time Early Bird Club workers (1 hour per morning) and one part-time administrator. A current innovation is the BEST Tracking System software which supports attendance improvement programmes and is in its pilot phase of development.

In the consultants view BEST has the capacity to continue its innovative approach and to develop new approaches and programmes given appropriate funding support. Many of the innovative approaches deserve additional development and core funding and but with funding tight over the past two years management time and energy has been absorbed that could be better spent developing the programmes.

An example of one programme deserving both developmental and core funding is the out of school programme which currently serves six young people who are not in junior second level school because they have behavioural issues that lead to suspension. They are at high risk in terms of crime and drugs and the out of school service is an important support for them in maintaining stability and assisting them to progress to other alternative education streams which they can access when they reach fifteen years of age e.g. Youthreach. The cohort at risk is approximately thirty young people so the service needs to be expanded. At present it can only provide a half day service to six young people so expansion is not even on the agenda. The consultant visited an out of school service in Slovenia in February 2004, called *Produkijska Sola*, which was funded by their Department of Education. The core funding supported high quality and stable staffing, an excellent building, approximately thirty pupils referred by schools and the capacity to plan for the future. The aim of the Slovenian programme is to return young people to the conventional educational system after one year. This and other such programmes should be reviewed to help inform the future development of the out of school service in Ballymun.

*BEST should be facilitated in developing its programmes and assisted in seeking core funding to support programmes such as the out of school service through the Ballymun Education Strategy.*

- BITE

The Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education (BITE) supports young people in eight primary schools and the three Ballymun Comprehensive Schools and helps them to progress to further education either at university or post leaving certificate (PLC) courses. BITE was started in 1990 and has built up a strong track record and is highly regarded in the area.

BITE funds homework activity clubs for approximately 600 third to sixth class primary school pupils (BITE óg) and these provide teacher support for homework, interesting activities and food / snacks on one afternoon for sixty to ninety minutes. This programme was initially funded by the Ballymun Drugs Task Force and subsequently got mainstream funding which is administered by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB). The clubs need additional funding for equipment to ensure they remain as popular as they are now. At second level there are six homework clubs catering for approximately ninety students in the second level junior cycle.

There is a mentoring programme for first year students involving past pupils who have gone on to third level. Other programmes include Gaeltacht Irish language development scholarships, 'Discovering University' in conjunction with the National College of Ireland, grinds for third and sixth year students through a volunteer programme involving Dublin City University (DCU) and St Patrick's College students, support meetings for parents and students, visits to third level colleges such as DCU and the very successful and popular BITE Scholars Awards.

At third level students are awarded scholarships which partly support their expenses as participants in degree level (currently 47) or PLC level (currently 18). In 2002/3 there were seven progressions to third level and ten to PLC courses and it is hoped that in 2003/4 the third level will increase back up to about eighteen which was the number in 2001/2. This programme is now funded by the DES Millennium fund and administered through the Ballymun Partnership following earlier funding by Urban (EU) and a private donor.

*A key issue identified by BITE is the need for a change in attitude towards education and the development of a more supportive culture around educational achievement in Ballymun. BITE tries to influence this continually by feeding back achievements and possibilities to parents and young people and often does this through the inputs of past pupils who act as role models. An interesting study researching 'What has happened to the students supported during fourteen years of BITE?' is being carried out on a voluntary basis by a retired teacher. The Ballymun Education Strategy should prioritise this as a key area for action going forward.*

- The Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force

The Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force has been instrumental as a catalyst for many of the innovative programmes reviewed through its support for their

developmental phases, its funding of pilot programmes and in some cases the mainstreaming of this funding. Cases in point include Aisling, BEST and BITE. The benefit of this support has been very significant in the opinion of the consultant and demonstrates the key role well thought out funding support can play in improving educational outcomes.

- **Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme / Adult Education**  
The Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme has provided adult literacy and basic education tuition since 1986 through a partnership between volunteers, community organisations and statutory bodies, supported by funding from the City of Dublin VEC. The impact in the area is impressive with 61 tutors supporting 670 adult learners in 2003. The tuition takes place in rooms provided by local organisations including two second level and three primary schools. The scheme aims to develop in people an appetite for lifelong learning and so to enable them to play a more active role in the development of their own and their family's literacy. They provide many different types of courses and one of particular relevance is their 'Read to Succeed' thirteen week course which develops in adult learners the knowledge and understanding of the value and importance of reading books to children and the skills necessary to read and tell stories effectively to them. The overall structure is managed by the Literacy Services Organiser and works closely with a network of Local agencies and community organisations. A number of areas were identified as key to the development of related services which will impact on developing the capacity of parents and guardians.

*The adult literacy service could be further developed by the appointment of Family Learning Co-ordinators working with the different generations in Ballymun.*

*An Adult Education Centre is needed for Ballymun. It should incorporate community education and formal education in a flexible learning environment and incorporate crèche facilities.*

- **Support for Young People and Families**  
A number of organisation play key roles in supporting young people and families and have been named by interviewees as very important in terms of giving badly needed supports which benefit educational outcomes. The Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR) co-ordinates, develops and delivers services for young people in Ballymun. BRYR plays a key role in supporting young people at risk and this is particularly critical when these young people have dropped out or been suspended from school. It is an active collaborator in educational initiatives such as BEST. Ballymun Women's Resource Centre runs programmes which help build the capacity of women to play a full role in their community as active contributors to community development and regeneration programmes, parents, adult learners and participants in the workforce. The impact of women's development is critical to their role as parents nurturing their children's personal, social and educational development.

*Strategies and actions developed in the Ballymun Education Strategy should proactively link with plans and programmes of youth and family support organisations such as BRYR and the Ballymun Women's Resource Centre.*

- Breaking the Cycle is a DES pilot programme offering a pupil teacher ratio of 15:1 a junior primary level and additional financial supports for schools at junior and senior primary level. It was piloted in a number of schools nationally and in St Joseph's Junior and Senior Primary Schools in Ballymun. The Ballymun school principals were strongly supportive of the Breaking the Cycle programme and felt that the impact on children and teachers in classes which benefited from the 15:1 ratio was profound. The relationships between teacher and children improved significantly as teachers could relate more to individual children. There was a marked improvement in the social and personal development of these children.

*It is too early to judge the effect the Breaking the Cycle programme has on educational outcomes as participating children have not yet progressed through the senior primary cycle. The DES is reviewing the pilot as part of its current review of educational disadvantage programmes and the outcome of this review needs to be closely studied when it becomes available to inform the development of the education strategy.*

- **St Josephs Band and Music Programmes**  
St Josephs Senior Primary School initiated highly successful music classes and an outstanding band delivering confidence, application, social and academic skills in the process. The project is so successful that it has already spread to the Junior Girls Comprehensive as past pupils of St Josephs wanted to continue their participation. The principal of St Josephs, Mr Tom Hickey, is actively promoting the benefits of the project and other schools in the area wish to participate in an area wide music initiative. The consultant believes this project has already demonstrated great benefits and has proposed that a 'Music in Ballymun Schools Initiative' be adopted as one of the initial two 'themes for excellence' in the Ballymun Education Strategy as outlined in section 6.1 of the report.
- **Ballymun Youthreach**  
There is one Youthreach centre located in the Virgin Mary School which provides a service for 65 early school leavers with no formal qualifications between the ages of 15 and 20. Youthreach has been operating in Ballymun for thirteen years and has developed its capacity significantly in that time. It now offers a range of development options to meet the needs of the young people who attend the centre. These include the Junior Certificate in six subjects, art & craft programmes and FETAC accredited courses incorporating three core modules and eight elective modules. Progression outcomes have varied over the years and the centre places strong emphasis on empowering young people to make choices regarding further education, training or employment. This year it is anticipated that seven out of twelve will go on to Whitehall College to undertake the Leaving Certificate programme. Ballymun Youthreach operates under the auspices of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) and is a continuously developing and improving programme. This ethos is demonstrated by the Quality Framework Initiative piloted by the CDVEC and in which Ballymun Youthreach is included. It sets out to review current practice at a centre level, prioritise areas for further development and prepare an action plan.

*Ballymun Youthreach is an excellent example of a ‘progression intervention’ and also epitomises the principle proposed in section 6 of this report of ‘never giving up’ on a young person and helping them to make decisions and gain the capacity for a positive next step. The Ballymun Education Strategy should integrate such approaches into its plan and actively support them.*

- The use of ICT in Schools

ICT is widely recognised as a vehicle which can be used to engage with young people and enhance their learning. Ballymun has participated in a number of groundbreaking and successful projects e.g. the Holy Spirit Boys primary school have piloted Empowering Minds involving children in Lego robotics and animation and teachers in a visit to the ‘Future of Learning’ seminar organised by MIT in Mexico. To quote from the article in the Irish Times that featured this project, “It’s more than a commitment to the child” Kelly insists (teacher Mr John Kelly) “ICT has given these kids something they never had before – a new style of learning”. The girls Junior Comprehensive has offered students an opportunity to gain the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) qualification and interested students have commenced and they learn these skills during their lunch time and their other spare time.

The consultant attended an interesting presentation at the EU Innovative Actions Network for Information Societies (IANIS) held this June in Hungary. The presentation was given by the Region of Extra Maduras, a regional authority in Spain and winner of annual award for best ICT initiative in Europe. The presentation outlined how the region significantly improved the educational opportunities for students by installing internet linked PCs on every desk. Each desk is shared by two students and the teachers now ask them to research topics on the internet as part of their everyday learning experience. This has increased the motivation of the students as they are now taking more control of their own learning. This is an example of ICT pedagogy i.e. a method of teaching / learning that uses ICT as part of the learning method.

In the UK schools are more advanced than in Ireland in the use of ICT pedagogies and research<sup>14</sup> has been conducted into the merits of different approaches. The case studies undertaken in the research involved 26 teachers who are already known to be using ICT effectively, drawn from six primary and seven secondary schools in the UK. Findings were that there is extensive evidence of ICT contributing to pupils’ attainment. Using ICT with pupils in pairs, groups or with a whole class, through, for example, the use of an interactive whiteboard, enables teachers to gather extensive feedback from pupils by listening to their explanations. From this, teachers are able to gain deeper insights into pupils’ understanding and progress. Pupils collaborating in pairs or teams using subject-specific ICT resources are able to challenge each other’s understanding and learn from such collaborations.

Research on UK experience by the consultant has also unearthed highly rated educational software that helps children develop writing skills. The product called

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<sup>14</sup> ICT and pedagogy - A review of the research literature. Produced by Becta for the (UK) Department for Education and Skills – 2003.

Clicker won five BETT Awards in the UK – voted by teachers.

The consultant has proposed a ‘Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative’ as one of two initial ‘*themes for excellence*’ to be adopted in the Ballymun Education Strategy, see section 6.1 of the report. The target proposed for the Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative is to become a national leader in ICT Pedagogy.

- Other Examples of Good Practice

*Many other examples of good practice were noted during the consultation process. These should be included in the review and sharing of good practice proposed in the Ballymun Education Strategy.*

- ✓ The Mater Child Guidance centre was often cited as a very supportive and invaluable resource in the area.
- ✓ Parental Involvement has seen some successes in the Holy Spirit (Parents in Education), Virgin Mary (Phonics) and across a range of activities supporting activities in and outside school in tSeachtar Laoch and Gael Scoil Bhaile Munna.
- ✓ A Multi-Disciplinary team (psychology, speech therapy, social work skills etc.) for Ballymun was suggested by a number of principals. This could incorporate the concept of an ‘A Team’ that would identify and support in a co-ordinated way pupils moving into a red zone. This approach is being piloted in Ballyfermot with Urban funding which could provide a suitable model to review for adaptation in Ballymun.
- ✓ Individual Pupil Profiles are developed by The Learning Support and Resource Teachers in the Virgin Mary Boys School outlining their strengths, weaknesses and targets for improvement. Individual Learning Plans could be developed as a support for second level students.
- ✓ EU Green Flag awards for Ballymun Holy Spirit Girls and OLV Senior Boys primary schools generated international interest.
- ✓ The Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the Local Committee has been an undoubted success improving the relationships between schools and parents.
- ✓ St. Margaret’s Traveller Community Group set up a sub-committee to improve educational progression. The programme runs in partnership with St Josephs’ schools and activities include a home work club and an education programme which attempts to meet the needs of parents.
- ✓ The Supply Panel located in St Josephs has provided a very useful replacement teacher service.
- ✓ It was suggested by some principals that local teacher networks would benefit teachers who operate in a common subject or age group setting. The Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) operates has regional structures which facilitating networking and sharing of good practice.
- ✓ Sport has played a major part in many boys’ schools generating strong participation and nurtured by the involvement of role models such as former GAA football stars.

- Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is an innovative project aimed at enhancing the educational

experience of young people in Cork City. It runs from 2001 to 2006. The project aims to "bridge the gap" between the educational opportunities and achievements of pupils in schools in disadvantaged areas of Cork city and those in other areas. The project extends the community mission of University College Cork, and it is directed by Professor Áine Hyland, Professor of Education and Vice-President of UCC. The project is co-ordinated by University College Cork, funded jointly by the Department of Education and Science and by private funding obtained by UCC. Forty-two schools and centres in Cork City are participating in the project. There is a steering group for the project, which includes representatives from the Department of Education and Science, City of Cork VEC, and Mr. Tom Costello, Atlantic Philanthropies.

Areas targeted for support by the initiative were:

- ✓ Professional Development
- ✓ ICT course for project school principals
- ✓ Networks
- ✓ School Based Research
- ✓ Dissemination
- ✓ School and Community Level Interventions
- ✓ Arts: drama and visual arts
- ✓ Arts: Music
- ✓ After-school and homework clubs
- ✓ Language development and reading
- ✓ Curriculum enrichment and learning enhancement
- ✓ Playground project

The project annual report states:

'At this point it is clear that as the Bridging the Gap project reaches the end of its first two-year phase, it has been successful in engaging schools with the aim of promoting a strategic approach to educational inclusion. Considerable achievements have been made in all strands of the project. Excellent examples of practice are emerging, which it is hoped will have long-term impact both in the schools and at national level. The success of the project is due in large measure to the commitment that has been shown by the participating schools, and particularly by the principals. The project team has built up a strong and collegial relationship with schools, and there is a very positive atmosphere within the project as a whole. The work of the project manager in particular has contributed significantly to the efficient operation of the project and to the achievement of its targets.'

*Bridging the Gap, as a successful project operating with a cluster of disadvantaged schools in Cork, has lessons for the Ballymun Education Strategy and should be requested to share its experiences with the proposed Ballymun structures when they are set up.*

## **4. Issues and Anomalies in Current Education Provision**

### **4.1. The Impact of School Development Planning in Ballymun**

School Development Planning (SDP) has been introduced nationally at both primary and secondary level and it is required that school boards carry out this activity as required by the Education Act 1998. The Ballymun primary schools have all been through an initial implementation phase of school development planning and the initial experience was challenging, time consuming and the initial emphasis was typically on policy development. The National Progress Report on the school development planning initiative describes the yardstick by which the process will be judged – School Development Planning must have a positive impact on pupil learning<sup>15</sup> and this has to be evaluated against success criteria. In practice the process has not yet evolved to a point where it can be judged against this standard.

The Ballymun Comprehensive Schools decided to postpone the formal school development planning process<sup>16</sup> until after the amalgamation has taken place and the new board and management structures are established. The full benefits to be derived from the SDP process will be experienced in that new structure and possible in the planning phases leading up to the amalgamation. The setting up of the new board of management will be the catalyst for this activity.

Opportunities to address educational disadvantage are served by this new system which gives a framework for addressing the needs of pupils and engaging with the wider community. This is explored further in the next section.

### **4.2. School Attendance and the Education Welfare Board (EWB)**

The national Education Welfare Board (EWB) was set up in May 2001 to support school attendance. However since then schools in Ballymun have had practically no support on the ground from the EWB due to start up difficulties. This has been demoralising for local principals and staff as explained in the previous section of this report. The opportunity going forward is to link closely with the EWB which now has commenced activity locally and to work closely with the regional office to jointly support improved attendance in Ballymun.

### **4.3. A system for Pupil Teacher Ratios in Primary Schools that does not make sense**

A national factor affecting the provision of primary education is the effect of different pupil teacher ratios in junior versus senior primary classes. Schools with disadvantaged status are allowed a lower pupil teacher ratio of 20:1 for junior infants up to and including 2<sup>nd</sup> class and 27:1 for 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class. The 20:1 ratio was further

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<sup>15</sup> Section 6.1.2: School Development Planning Initiative – National Progress Report 2002. Department of Education and Science, October 2003.

<sup>16</sup> School Development Planning – An Introduction for Second Level Schools. Department of Education and Science 1999.

improved to 15:1 for schools chosen to participate in the pilot scheme, Breaking The Cycle, and St Josephs was the school selected in Ballymun. The issue facing schools is how to manage the class sizes as they transition from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> class. The effect of letting the smaller classes of fifteen or twenty pupils continue through from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> is that the teacher numbers are gradually reduced based on the allowed 27:1 ratio and the school faces the problem in a major way a few years later. One way of increasing class sizes from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> is to start introducing mixed classes e.g. some 3<sup>rd</sup> plus some 4<sup>th</sup> class pupils in the same class, but this has its own challenges. These issues are causing concern in schools in Ballymun and there are no easy answers in the context of the current rules within the education system.

*The anomaly in the pupil teacher ratio between junior and senior primary school level needs to be addressed in the context of improving educational outcomes in Ballymun with a view to seeking a more effective system.*

#### **4.4. The lack of impact of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in Ballymun**

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was set up to provide an educational psychological service to all students in schools at primary and post-primary level. Due to constraints in the level of resources available to NEPS, in Ballymun the service has only provided two or three assessments per school per year. These assessments have been required by the DES before they authorise additional resource teaching hours to assist the children in question. The system is now changing as outlined in the following section and there may be a better opportunity for the NEPS to provide a service to schools which addresses the needs of individual pupils.

*The Ballymun Education Strategy should seek to facilitate links between the regional NEPS service and other services in the area such as the Mater Child Guidance Clinic and the proposed multi-disciplinary team.*

## **5. Education Policy Priorities – Implications and Opportunities**

### **5.1. A System under Review**

The Irish education system has undergone significant change over the last decade with a clear focus on addressing educational disadvantage through the increased allocation of teaching and financial resources. However educational outcomes in Ballymun and areas like it have not yet changed in a significant manner and more needs to be done to move from equality of access to equality of outcome. A characteristic of policy over the last decade has been to initiate pilot programmes to try out new approaches to addressing educational disadvantage. However this approach is now under review and an alternative approach has been proposed by the Educational Disadvantage Committee based on giving schools resources to match their level of disadvantage and asking them to plan locally to develop relevant responses to needs and to plan for improved outcomes. The Educational Disadvantage Committee has a statutory role under Section 32 of the Educational Act, 1998 “to advise the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage”. In December 2003, the Committee made a submission to the Minister in which “a more integrated and effective delivery of school-based educational inclusion measures” was recommended.

There were four main recommendations in this submission:

- Improving the methods of identification and selection in order to ensure the appropriate targeting of resources for schools most in need
- More effective targeting and deployment of financial and teaching resources by moving, to a substantial degree, from the current programme-based approach to a more flexible, planned and integrated response to meeting identified needs at local level
- The delivery of a range of supports to teachers and schools in understanding and serving the needs of disadvantaged communities and in planning, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of educational inclusion measures in order to ensure a real and sustainable impact on the students and schools targeted
- The development of a transition plan by the Department of Education and Science to plan and manage transition to the new integrated delivery model.

The implementation of the above recommendations as well as a number of other evolving policy areas are examined to give a sense of the direction of evolving education policy and the opportunities these changes present for Ballymun.

### **5.2. Review of the Second Level Curriculum**

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is engaged in a wide ranging consultation process<sup>17</sup> on the future shape of the senior cycle education. It is currently formulating recommendations for a new senior cycle curriculum which is likely to involve some fundamental change, not just tinkering with subject enhancements. The direction is more towards unitisation of subject curricula into

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<sup>17</sup> Developing Senior Cycle Education – Directions for Development: launched at the NCCA Forum on Senior Cycle Education in September 2003.

blocks or units each of which can be completed separately and be recognised and accredited on its own merit.

Directions proposed for developments are:

- Towards a different school culture for senior cycle students
- Towards a re-structured learning experience at senior cycle
- Towards a rebalanced curriculum at senior cycle
- Towards different assessment arrangements and a new certificate for senior cycle

*The proposed elements in a new senior cycle curriculum have particular relevance for Ballymun and could have a significant impact in improving educational outcomes. Ballymun could prove to be a valuable pilot site for implementing a new senior cycle curriculum and this should be actively pursued as part of the Ballymun Education Strategy.*

### **5.3. Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Primary Schools**

The effectiveness of current initiatives are under review by the DES and September 2004 will likely see the results and new proposals to further improve educational outcomes. Already we are seeing some new policy responses most recently on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2004 when the Minister for Education and Science issued a press release advising of a new approach to the provision of resources for children with special needs at primary level. It is essential to closely follow these developments and to assess the effect they will have on Ballymun. Are they providing an opportunity to improve outcomes and do they give access to additional resources or is there a danger of a Ballymun school losing resources as new systems take effect? The announcement of the 18<sup>th</sup> June is shown in the box below.

Press release 18<sup>th</sup> June 2004

The Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey T.D., has approved the allocation of an additional 350 teaching posts for special needs and a new system for the allocation of resources for special needs in primary schools.

The new system will involve a general weighted allocation for all primary schools to cater for pupils with higher incidence special needs, those with learning support needs, borderline mild and mild general learning disability and dyslexia. It will also allow for individual allocations in respect of pupils with more acute needs.

The general weighted allocation system will greatly reduce the need for individual applications and supporting psychological assessments and will put resources in place on a more systematic basis, thereby giving schools more certainty over their resource levels. This will allow for better planning in schools, greater flexibility in identifying and intervening earlier with regard to pupils' special needs, as well as making the posts more attractive to qualified teachers.

The previous allocation system placed significant demands on principals, teachers and psychologists. It has also proven to be time-consuming, thereby delaying the

allocation of resources for special needs. “We had to take action to reform the system and I believe that the model we are now introducing will, over time, significantly improve the capacity of the system to cater for children with special needs in a speedier, more effective way,” said Minister Dempsey. “The revised system will reduce the administrative burden on schools and allow them to concentrate on the delivery of services to pupils with special needs. It will also allow psychologists to devote more time to advising teachers on planning for individual children and for whole school provision,” added the Minister.

The revised system will have regard to the fact that there appears to be a greater incidence of disabilities in boys. It is also weighted in favour of the most disadvantaged schools. It will mean that every school will be given an allocation for pupils in the higher incidence disability categories without having to submit individual applications. As has been practice hitherto in relation to learning support teachers, the Department will be clustering small schools together to enable the allocation of full-time posts.

In the most disadvantaged schools (over 240 schools), a teacher of pupils with special needs will be allocated for every 80 pupils to cater for the subset of pupils with higher incidence special needs. In all boys schools, the ratio will be one teacher for every 140 pupils, in mixed schools one for every 150 pupils and in all girls schools one for every 200 pupils. In addition, all schools will be able to apply for separate specific allocations in respect of pupils with lower incidence disabilities.

The Department of Education and Science will now communicate with schools in relation to their allocations. Permission will be given to fill all specific allocations immediately. The general weighted allocations will be filled following the determination of clustering and reallocation arrangements. To ease the transition to the new system, the Department has already agreed not to redeploy teachers from full-time posts via the panel redeployment process.

#### **5.4. Supporting Continuous Change and Improvement**

The implications and opportunities for Ballymun with respect to the new weighed allocation system outlined above can best be understood in the context of the area as a whole. Each school is in a difficult situation as an individual unit trying to understand the implications that changing Department of Education and Science policy has for their school. Will they lose out because they gained some additional resource in the past and will this now be taken back under a new system? Sometimes schools feel that they have received additional resources in the past through a ‘grace and favour’ approach from DES. If this was the case there is always the fear in the back of school principal’s mind that they could lose that extra resource.

The policy approach of the DES in recent years has been to try to move away from piecemeal solutions and to move from pilot programmes towards a structured approach based on clearly stated criteria. Traditionally there has been a culture in the education system which is reflected by the adage quoted informally about the way the

education system in Ireland works. Roughly translated from its Irish language form it states *'set no precedents and break no principles'*. This probably reflects the perceived 'grace and favour' approach whereby in the past the DES has been perceived to give some additional resource to a school but that this is not 'fully official' in that it does not sit within a specific policy framework and therefore is not applicable to every school in a similar situation in the nation. The fear then is as explained earlier that the favour could be taken back but the likelihood of this happening is not high reflecting another perceived approach of DES that *'you hold what you have'* in relation to extra resources given to address educational disadvantage.

The criteria used by the DES in the future could reflect the recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee which propose a ranking of each school based on the level of disadvantage experienced by its pupils and the provision of additional teaching and financial resources to reflect the rank they hold. On the other hand the *'general weighted allocation system'* announced by Minister Dempsey in the press release above uses a somewhat broader brush approach to the criteria issue in that the approximately 240 schools with disadvantaged status are all given the same ratio of one teacher for special educational needs for every 80 pupils versus the 1:140, 1:150 and 1:200 ratios applying to other schools. There is also the proviso 'In addition, all schools will be able to apply for separate specific allocations in respect of pupils with lower incidence disabilities' which suggests a degree of flexibility for schools with greater needs. Perhaps the Minister or his senior officials feel that the ranking approach is excessively complicated or that it will need to be put firmly in place before such a criteria could be used in practice. The view expressed by the Irish National Teachers Association (INTO) in response to the Ministers announcement is as follows 'The INTO believes that, while the new system represents a step in the right direction, the ratios arrived at are far too high to provide a proper service for all pupils with SEN (special educational needs), and therefore further posts must be available in the coming year to allow for proper implementation of the new system'. The INTO also stated that the new system will not be fully in effect until September 2005.

*Educational policy seems to be trying to move towards more transparent criteria and systems for allocating resources and this could provide an opportunity for Ballymun to use to its advantage primarily because a more transparent system provides a firmer basis for planning for educational improvement.*

At face value the new *'general weighted allocation system'* appears to address problems with the current system especially the difficulties experienced by Ballymun schools in getting sufficient psychological assessments from the NEPS and the delay or lack of response from the DES to applications made for resource teachers following assessment by NEPS. An analysis carried out by the consultant showed that the approximate number of resource and learning support teachers in the eleven Ballymun primary schools at present is 38. The automatic right to an allocation of teaching posts for special needs should assist five Ballymun primary schools in getting additional resources quickly, two will neither gain nor lose and four may lose teaching posts for special needs under the new system.

The overall number of such positions that would be allocated using the new system would be 33.5 resulting in an possible overall loss of 4.5 posts. However the schools affected may be able to retain positions under threat by making application under the proviso; ‘In addition, all schools will be able to apply for separate specific allocations in respect of pupils with lower incidence disabilities’ or another possibility is that schools will ‘hold what they have’. The worst possible outcome would be to further demoralisation of everyone involved as they struggled to come to terms with the latest system of allocating resources on top of the existing pressures on school boards and teaching staff, children in need of additional support and their families.

*The consultant suggests that an area wide approach is a strategy that can positively address this environment of changing education policy. A constructive approach should be taken by looking at the implications for the whole Ballymun area, sharing the issues and problems faced by schools and other stakeholders with a view to establishing a clearer understanding of the issues and planning for the required level of resources that are needed to change educational outcomes for Ballymun children.*

The example examined above is illustrative of a wider issue. Policy is at a crossroads at all levels in the education system and each new policy announcement will have implications for Ballymun. Ballymun has to find a way to ‘*get up off its knees*’ in terms of educational outcomes and constructively engage with change. In general an area approach can improve understanding, keep morale high among stakeholders, provide a structure for reflection, promote constructive engagement with change as an opportunity to benefit locally and facilitate planning for improved educational outcomes and specifically for planning to ensure that resources are sought to meet the needs of the area.

## 5.5. Opportunities arising from Policy Development

The School Development Planning Initiative and the Whole School Evaluation approach herald a new era in education but it is an era that will probably take a decade to become fully established as the changes resulting from these key interlinked policies gradually work their way into the system. The key elements of School Development Planning (SDP) are:

- A collaborative whole-school planning process that involves staff members and all partners in education
- A means of identifying pupils' needs and responding appropriately to them
- A means of quality enhancement
- A strategy for improving learning outcomes for all pupils

The progress report<sup>18</sup> on School Development Planning stated that 'attention must be directed to the core issue of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Schools must be enabled to incorporate enhanced pupil learning as one of the outcomes of all of their development planning activities.' The report stated that schools should clearly identify necessary developments, identify success criteria, put in place action plans to reach these criteria and establish clearer criteria for the evaluation of the impact of the school development plan on pupil learning outcomes. The following extract from the submission<sup>19</sup> of the Educational Disadvantage Committee to the Minister for Education and Science gives a clear insight into the potential of the two policy instruments in addressing educational disadvantage:

### **Extract from the Educational Disadvantage Committee recommendations to the Minister of Education and Science– December 2003**

Measurement and evaluation of the effectiveness of a school's delivery of improvements in educational inclusion are critically dependent on the development of integrated school planning and associated needs analysis. The capacity of individual schools to develop appropriate planning and evaluation mechanisms would be facilitated through the School Development Planning initiative and the work developed under the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) process.

It is recommended that a framework/template be developed to help the school and the community it serves to deliver and evaluate the effectiveness of educational inclusion interventions. The development of this framework would be informed by a working group of the Educational Disadvantage Committee. It is envisaged that planning criteria would be developed under this framework/template requiring, for example, that School Plans should demonstrate certain characteristics, such as:

- Being responsive to local needs
- Centrally involving parents
- Being flexible and innovative

<sup>18</sup> School Development Planning Initiative- National Progress Report 2002. Department of Education and Science, October 2003

<sup>19</sup> A more integrated and effective delivery of school-based educational inclusion measures – Educational Disadvantage Committee, December 2003.

- Showing integration and partnership
- Mobilising all resources and targeting them effectively
- Setting and monitoring targets
- Planning and creating short term wins
- Institutionalising new approaches.

Plans, which should be available in the school for inspection, should address key areas such as:

- Early childhood education
- Parental involvement
- Targeted support for the provision of school books
- School attendance monitoring
- Extra curricular programmes and connections to youth service provision within the area
- Transition from Primary to Post-primary
- Collaboration with other agencies, service providers and local structures
- Links with second chance education services in the area.

Self-evaluation methods would be employed at school level to monitor and evaluate the impact of additional provision in meeting pre-set targets and performance indicators.

*The Ballymun Education Strategy should embrace School Development Planning as a strong vehicle for improving educational outcomes, linking schools to the wider community and in planning for an integrated approach to addressing educational disadvantage.*

*A wider view has to be taken beyond that which applies in any one school. The impact of difficulties faced by an individual school and the outcomes for individual children are felt by other higher level schools, by alternative education & training providers and by the wider community at an economic, social and behavioural level. The stakeholders in education have to be prepared to come together to pro-actively plan for better outcomes taking the view that children and young people need to be helped throughout all their educational phases. Their success at the end is not 'owned' by any one stakeholders but is a shared achievement and one in which everyone involved can take pride in.*

## **6. An Education Strategy to Meet the Demands of a New Town and Growing Population**

### **6.1. Pillars for Action underpinning an Effective Education Strategy**

The context for the Ballymun Education Strategy is the kind of the society we have in Ireland today and the one we are rapidly evolving towards in the future. Europe is evolving into a knowledge economy and in parallel a knowledge society. The European Union has set the goal of becoming the world's leading knowledge economy by the year 2010 and although it is unlikely to reach that goal at its current rate of progress it is possible that Ireland could outpace its European neighbours and become a leading knowledge economy by that time. As an economy with one of the worlds highest ratios of international versus domestic trade components Ireland is driven by global growth opportunities and these occur predominantly in knowledge driven areas like ICT and research and development dependent sectors such as pharmaceuticals and biotechnology.

The knowledge economy will result in much more rapid change as new knowledge drives change in all sectors, not just the high tech ones, at a much quicker pace than we experienced in the twentieth century. If the key economic asset is now knowledge then the key skill of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is clearly the ability to learn. The knowledge society will demand a highly developed capacity to learn and lifelong learning will become less of an aspiration and more of a necessity for avoiding poverty, sustaining employability & income growth and assisting social integration. Key skills identified by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment in their document 'Developing Senior Cycle Education'<sup>20</sup> include learning to learn, information processing, personal effectiveness, communication, critical thinking and working with others. The Ballymun Education Strategy should aim to achieve knowledge in the hands of our young people at a competitive level and a developed learning motivation and skill set which equips them for lifelong learning. How can we do this?

A number of concepts have crystallised during the consultation process which the consultant felt were necessary to capture. They espouse both high standards and aspirations but also a practical and a caring approach which seeks to do its best for all Ballymun children and youth today, tomorrow and in the future.

#### **Get It Right First Time:**

The overall goal of the education strategy should be to put in place an integrated set of actions which support and enable both families and educators to '*get it right first time*', in other words to enable each child to achieve his or her social and educational potential at each phase of their natural development. In practical terms this means achieving the same kind of social development and educational outcomes at each of these phases as children in 'advantaged' areas in Ireland. It is not enough to look only at outcomes at the end of the second level school system. If Ballymun is to reach a position whereby its second level students match the outcomes of students from advantaged areas it must implement the necessary improvement actions at pre-school

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<sup>20</sup> Developing Senior Cycle Education – Directions for Development: launched at the NCCA Forum on Senior Cycle Education in September 2003.

and primary levels. The children coming out of the primary level must attain the same reading and general educational competencies as children from advantaged areas. Each phase must incorporate good practice and have enabling solutions for families and educators to allow children to reach their potential.

When we talk about ‘*getting it right first time*’ we cannot ignore children’s experiences in the early years of childhood. Neuroscience is revealing that learning is profound in the first six/seven years of life but especially in the first three years. Many preschools find themselves operating a recovery service even at this stage of a child’s life and it is the primary schools that have to deal with the consequences when the ‘early years’ sector is ignored, underdeveloped and under resourced. A child needs to interact with an environment which supports optimum early physical, cognitive, language and social development. Central to this are high quality adult-child interactions<sup>21</sup>. One of the challenges is to up-skill adults that young children come into contact with – parents/guardians, childminders and practitioners. The OECD in its major new report<sup>22</sup> calls for increased resources to bring the Irish early childhood sector into line with standards in other European countries. It also says that all pre-school children from disadvantaged areas should have a full day provision through an extension of the Early Start programme.

Only a ‘*get it right first time*’ strategy will result in profound and everlasting change in the medium and longer term.

#### **Progression Interventions:**

An improved future for children and youth who are struggling in our education system today cannot be put on hold while we construct the enabling solutions that get it ‘right first time’ for the next cohort of school goers. The Education Strategy must recognise the need for and the value of ‘*progression interventions*’ which support positive and sustainable social and educational development for children and young people who are experiencing social and educational problems today. It must identify immediate actions that can be taken to support improved educational outcomes and help children and young people return to and benefit from the formal education system. Progression interventions should be characterised by their capacity to impart knowledge, to assist social development, to develop learning skills and critically to help the learners to advance to the next stage of learning whether that is in the formal education system or outside it.

#### **Never Give Up:**

The strategy must also incorporate a ‘*never give up*’ ethos which inspires and supports a range of progression pathways which recognise the future potential of all children and youth even those who have been extremely disadvantaged in their social and educational development.

#### **Build on Success:**

The strategy and proposed actions must be highly relevant to the Ballymun area and maximise the effectiveness of existing resources and new investments. Section 3 of the report examined the challenges facing Ballymun and noted examples of existing

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<sup>21</sup> Towards a Framework for Early Learning – NCCA 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy – OECD September 2004

and new good practice that has relevance for Ballymun. The approach taken should be to ‘*build on success*’ by supporting and developing local good practice and adopting national and international good practice which the report identifies as relevant to Ballymun.

**Integrated Approach:**

Education cannot be seen as an isolated process whereby the outcomes are the sole responsibility of schools. In reality the outcomes are influenced by many factors including parental and family circumstances, educational resources for schools, early childhood development, pre-school education, health issues, youth recreation & facilities, drug misuse, state services, out-of-school education, second-chance education, income levels, employment and the aspirations of the community. The challenge and opportunity for Ballymun at this crossroads in its development is to build on the positive work that has taken place in many of these areas, identify weaknesses, integrate activities, identify and implement new solutions and draw in resources to support a better future for our children and young people. The school community is moving more and more towards this ‘*integrated approach*’ and the School Development Planning Initiative exhorts schools to build strong linkages with the wider community encompassing the gamut of community based organisations and statutory service providers. Schools often express difficulties in getting parents involved in school related activities but the challenge for schools is to become more relevant to parents and the general community. This will require schools to become more pro-active in making their facilities available to the wider community and creating more relevance as schools are seen more as resources for adults as well as children and young people. All stakeholders have to be involved and committed to this process if significant change is to be achieved.

**Themes for Excellence:**

The challenge at all levels in Ballymun is to assist and facilitate the development of children and young people as whole persons allowing them to develop their personal and social skills in tandem with their academic progression. Individual accomplishment should be encouraged and reinforced building towards a community wide culture of achievement and excellence. It is recommended that two or three initial ‘*themes for excellence*’ are selected building on existing local examples and that they are championed in the education strategy. Themes should be chosen that can be applied at all educational levels and that position Ballymun as a leader through the activities of its children and young people. They should reinforce personal and social development and key skills areas<sup>23</sup> such as learning to learn, information processing, personal effectiveness, communication, critical thinking and working with others. Bearing the above points in mind the consultant proposes two initial themes; the ‘*Music in Ballymun Schools Initiative*’ and the ‘*Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative*’. Other thematic areas that should be included are sport and drama building on the initial successes.

St. Josephs Senior Primary School has already placed music in Ballymun schools on the map through its band which started in the primary school and has now spread to include past pupils who now attend the Junior Comprehensive School. Wider

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<sup>23</sup> Developing Senior Cycle Education – Directions for Development: launched at the NCCA Forum on Senior Cycle Education in September 2003.

activities include music lessons and efforts to spread the benefits of music to all Ballymun schools. The principal of St. Josephs Senior Primary School, Mr Tom Hickey, who has pioneered the musical activities has press articles and photographs of the band prominently displayed on school corridors reminding every child and parent who visit that the children have accomplished wonderful things through their excellence at music. This *'theme for excellence'* particularly reinforces the skills of learning to learn, personal effectiveness and working with others but is even more holistic in its essence by helping to develop both personal and social skills. A challenge for the education strategy is to champion this 'Music in Ballymun Schools Initiative' and to help find a way to support it on an ongoing basis.

The second proposed *'theme for excellence'*, the Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative, builds on good practice as demonstrated by the Holy Spirit Boys Primary school through its robotics and animation projects. To quote from the article in the Irish Times that featured this project, "It's more than a commitment to the child" Kelly insists (teacher Mr John Kelly) "ICT has given these kids something they never had before – a new style of learning". Following this approach the proposed Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative should not just impart ICT skills in the narrow sense but should focus on ICT as a learning tool for students and a teaching tool for teachers, often referred to in policy as 'ICT Pedagogy'. Learning to learn is a survival skill for the future and the way we learn is changing. The future both in education and employment will demand more self directed learning and ICT can facilitate that through fluency in internet related skills. The future is less about knowing everything and more about knowing where to find the knowledge you need at a particular time for a particular purpose. IT literacy is also a fundamental skill<sup>24</sup> that is necessary to participate in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society. At second level one of the challenges is to build bridges to the wider world and in particular the further education sector and the world of work and this theme could have particular relevance in this regard and in the light of the opportunity presented by the amalgamation of the Ballymun Comprehensive schools. The target set for the Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative should be to become a national leader in ICT Pedagogy.

### **Living the Dream:**

An issue that kept raising its head during the consultation process was the higher aspirations for their children's education held by parents living in advantaged areas compared to parents living in Ballymun. These aspirations are passed on to their children and play a big part in forming the motivation and drive that influences educational achievement or underachievement. We have probably all heard stories personally or on television of successful people who came from poor families that had very few resources, maybe in a rural situation, but that their parents wanted them to succeed and they shared that desire and used education as a means to achieve this success or at least to get them on the first rung of the ladder. Some people conclude that parents in communities like Ballymun are not ambitious for their children or do not want them to stretch themselves to get the best education they can. This view is not shared by the consultant but it is one that is possible to understand as there is an element of reality encapsulated in it.

The consultation process has shown that many parents in Ballymun already hold high aspirations for the success of their children. One clear example is the whole growth

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<sup>24</sup> Literacy is IT – Hibernian Consulting, Clondalkin Partnership 2003

and success of Gaelscoileanna. On the other hand many parents who do want what is best for their children have very little sense of how that can be achieved and more fundamentally do not believe that people like them can aspire to or achieve the kind of success that is only there for ‘other people’ or ‘better off people’. This is a crucial issue and probably is a ‘make or break’ issue in terms of how we address it in the Ballymun Education Strategy and its resultant level of success. If this is not pro-actively addressed it then there is a risk of a situation in which all other actions and investments are fighting against the tide and will not deliver the kind of educational outcomes that children and youth enjoy in advantaged areas. This issue must be faced head on and actions to address it must be a core element of the education strategy. Although this is challenging addressing it successfully could do more to help children and youth than any other action taken.

The approach should be to address the fundamental issues and therefore to give more parents a very real sense of how success can be achieved and convince them that their children can achieve great things. This is already happening in Ballymun but it needs to be taken up and by all organisations and supported as a strategic action across the community. Here are some examples. BITE organises for students at third level who live in Ballymun to come and talk to school goers and they fuel a belief in the younger people that they too could go on to third level. The children in the St Josephs Band have played before a distinguished audience and their parents know first hand that their children have wonderful talents. The consultant is going to call this approach ‘*living the dream*’ because it allows children, young people and parents to see what is possible and to dream that these possibilities are there for them too. There is enough success in Ballymun already to demonstrate to the community that Ballymun people can do anything. This element of the Education Strategy should be based on heavily promoting local achievement in the community and getting the message out every day in every way that Ballymun children and young people are succeeding and others can follow in their footsteps. The aspirations of parents and of the whole community will increase significantly if this can be done successfully. What is needed is the commitment, the resources, the co-ordination and the dedication to do this and to keep doing it.

In summary the seven ‘*pillars for action*’ which have crystallised out of the consultation process and should underpin the Ballymun Education Strategy are:

- *Get it right first time*
- *Progression interventions*
- *Never give up*
- *Build on success*
- *An integrated approach*
- *Themes for excellence*
- *Living the Dream*

## **6.2. Structures to implement an Effective Education Strategy**

A critical aspect of any structure to implement the Ballymun Education Strategy is that it is needed, is effective and can add value. There is no point in developing a new structure if an existing structure can carry out the task. The functions proposed to accomplish the implementation of the Ballymun Education Strategy are:

- Agreeing & Setting Goals
- Joint Fundraising
- Sharing Good Practice
- Programme Development
- Facilitating a Community Wide interface with School Development Planning
- Mobilising & Co-ordinating Resources in the Area
- Maintaining a Progression Horizon Spanning ages 3 – 21 years
- Enabling a Multi-disciplinary Team which supports Children and Youth
- Facilitating Teacher Networks, Professional Development & Welfare

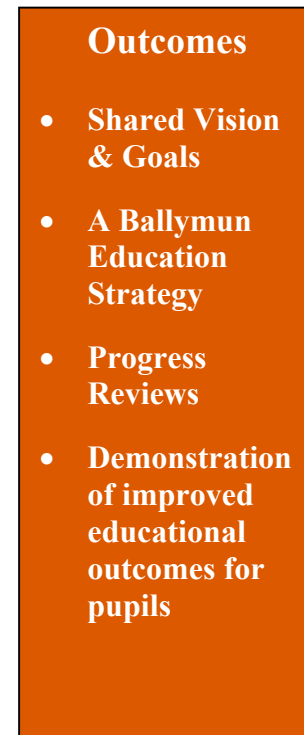
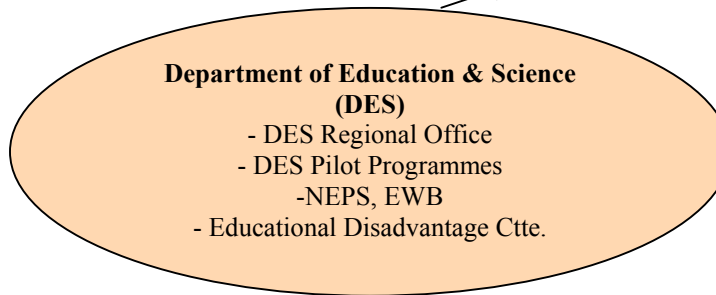
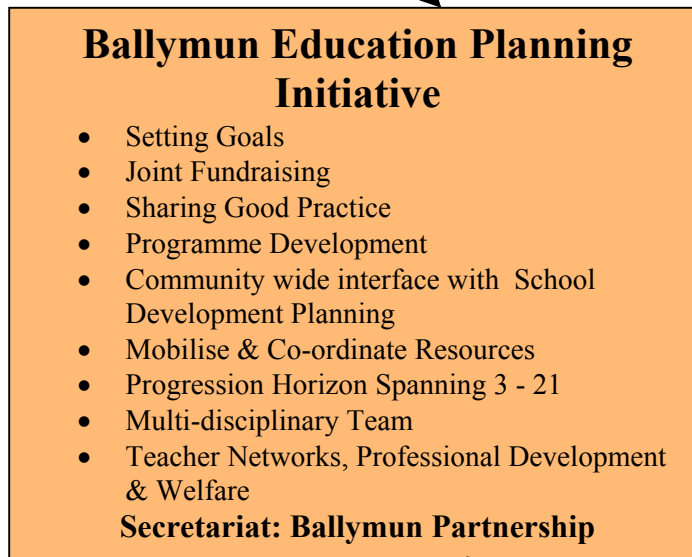
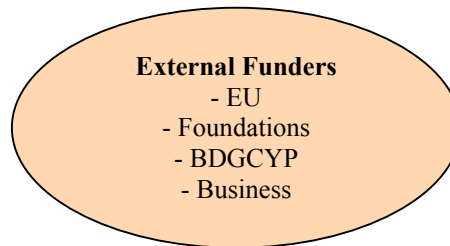
Having reviewed existing local structures the consultant's opinion is that they are very effective for the implementation of the tasks they are setting out to achieve and that some also need additional resources to enable them to develop and fulfil their mission as it already exists. They are not designed to implement an ambitious area wide Ballymun Education Strategy but are important elements and vehicles for improved educational outcomes.

A structure is needed to concentrate on higher level activities. This is not to say that the other activities already carried out are less important. That is not the case and in fact the most important of all activities in the process are the interactions between families and children and teachers and children. Higher level activities include issues such as co-ordinating all stakeholder inputs and pursuing additional external resources. The key point is that form must follow function and to carry out the functions listed a new structure is proposed called the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative.

The Ballymun Education Planning Initiative should draw members from the following sectors to form a representative board:-

1. The Pre-School and Childcare Sector
2. The Primary Schools Sector
3. The Post-Primary Schools Sector
4. The alternative Education and Training Streams e.g. Youthreach, CTW and the Ballymun Job Centre
5. Third Level, Further Education and Adult Education.
6. Local Development Sector: The Ballymun Partnership, RAPID, etc
7. Initiatives supporting improved educational outcomes e.g. BEST, BITE, Aisling and the Home School Community Liaison Local Committee
8. Youth Sector: BRYR/ other initiatives
9. The Health Board and Primary Care structure
10. The Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force
11. Dublin City Council and Ballymun Regeneration Limited
12. Community: Parents and Young People, Women's Resource Centre, etc

Figure 6 below shows an overview of the proposed membership, functions, external relationships and outputs of the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative.



**Figure 6 – Proposed Structure to implement the Ballymun Education Strategy**

The board should meet on a monthly basis and carry out its business in a formal manner by having a pre-set agenda, minutes and agreement adopted through formal proposing and seconding of motions. The board should consider holding plenary sessions where all organizations represented are invited to attend.

The board should maintain relationships with potential funders and local committees linked to funders. Potential funders are the EU Commission and its programme officials, business, grant giving bodies (e.g. Dormant Accounts Fund) and foundations. The Ballymun Development Group for Children and Young People (BDGCYP), currently chaired by Noreen Hayes, was set up in December 2003 to plan for and identify the resources needed to meet the needs of children and youth in the area and to present funding proposals to the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Departments of Education & Science, Health & Children and Social & Family Affairs. This presents a unique opportunity which could be as fundamental to a successful future for Ballymun as its world class physical regeneration programme. The Atlantic Philanthropies, which has a distinguished record of assisting Ireland in previous funding programmes, has chosen children and youth as a priority area for future funding. It has designated 2004 as a year of research and planning for the children and youth funding priority. The development of an area wide Ballymun Education Strategy winning support from local and national stakeholders is a fundamental and critical step in informing their deliberations on funding.

The Ballymun Education Planning Initiative should ideally have representation from the Department of Education and Science and its various sections including the DES Regional Office, the DES Pilot Programme personnel, the local office of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the local office of the Educational Welfare Board EWB and the national Educational Disadvantage Committee.

The overall outcomes of the proposed Planning Initiative should be:

- Shared Vision & Goals
- Ballymun Education Strategy and Action Plan
- Progress Reviews
- Demonstration of improved educational outcomes for pupils

The findings, conclusions, recommendations, proposed strategy and action plan contained in this report could facilitate adoption by the proposed Ballymun Education Planning Initiative of its initial shared vision, strategy and goals.

## **7. A Plan of Action**

### **7.1. Ambitious but Realistic Targets**

The term of the action plan should relate to the cycles that apply in a child's educational development. Starting at the earliest stages of formal education the duration of these phases are; pre-school - two and a half years, primary - eight years and second level - six years. In total this amounts to sixteen and a half years which suggests that any plan of a short term nature, say five years, would not represent a planning horizon to take sufficient actions and confirm outcomes that herald fundamental and everlasting change. It is proposed that the planning horizon be ten years and that the overall goal of the plan relates to that timescale with specific milestones set to be achieved along the way.

The key approach proposed in the strategy is to '*get it right first time*', If this was implemented without other strategies it could take up to twenty years to get Ballymun up to national levels in terms of educational outcomes. The consultant proposes a more ambitious and stretching timescale which aims to bring Ballymun educational outcomes up to national level in a period of ten years. This will require a range of strategies to be implemented in parallel to support new entrants to the education system and to maximise the opportunities for existing participants at all stages in the process. These were outlined in the previous section and are reiterated here:

- *Get it right first time*
- *Progression interventions*
- *Never give up*
- *Build on success*
- *An integrated approach*
- *Themes for excellence*
- *Living the Dream*

This entails pursuing the fundamental action of supporting children to achieve the same outcomes as children from advantaged areas at each stage and critically at pre-school and junior primary while at the same time taking a range of actions to help children, teachers, families and the community to improve educational outcomes on a continuous basis and to deliver on an ethos of never giving up on any child or young person.

## **7.2. Goals for a Ten Year Plan**

An overriding ten-year goal is proposed along with milestones for targeting progress throughout the plan period. Supportive actions to be taken in the first year are also proposed with a view to ‘kick starting’ the implementation of the strategy.

### **Ten-Year Goal:**

- **Ballymun educational outcomes to be at a par with national levels by September 2014.**

Outcomes will be measured at each of the following stages:

- ✓ Entering primary
- ✓ At the end of the junior primary cycle
- ✓ Entering second level
- ✓ At the end of the junior second level cycle
- ✓ At the end of second level
- ✓ third level entry rates

### **Milestones:**

- **Children in 1st class at the national average in literacy by July 2007**
- **Access to an agreed standard of pre-school education for every parent who wants to avail of it by September 2008 by**
  - ✓ increasing provision from the existing 7-16% to 75%, i.e. an increase of approximately 600 places from approximately 100 to 700
- **Overall second level school completion up from 50% up to 75% and for the traditional leaving certificate from 25% up to 50% by June 2008**
- **Third level entry up from 6% to 25% by September 2009**
- **Children entering secondary school with reading competency at national average levels by September 2010**
- **Ballymun to host an international conference reporting its progress and presenting its learning as a model of excellence in improving educational outcomes in 2012**
- **School completion rates match national averages for the traditional leaving certificate cycle by 2013**

### **Supportive Actions to be taken in the first year:**

- **Support the initial themes for excellence**
  - ✓ Resources ‘ring fenced’ to fund the Music in Ballymun Schools Initiative
  - ✓ An implementation plan to be adopted for the Ballymun Schools ICT Initiative
- **Establish an integrated multi-disciplinary support team**
- **Initiate a Reading Recovery programme and plan for its availability area wide by September 2005**
- **Implement a strong community wide Education Promotion Programme**
  - ✓ Endorsing the achievements of local Ballymun children and youth and presenting them as role models who personify the ‘new’ aspirations of the community to be as good as any other area in terms of achievement both educationally and in other fields.

The findings and recommendations for action contained in section 6 should be prioritised in the overall set of actions undertaken under the seven pillars for action, namely:

- *Get it right first time*
- *Progression interventions*
- *Never give up*
- *Build on success*
- *An integrated approach*
- *Themes for excellence*
- *Living the Dream*

## **8. Next Steps**

The consultant recommends that the Ballymun Partnership provides a Secretariat for the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative (BEPI) and assists the stakeholders identified to set it up by September 2004. The Ballymun Partnership will need to find the means to resource the secretariat and the related set-up and ongoing development activities. It is estimated that to carry out these functions effectively three staff would need to be employed and that they would need to be fully experienced and qualified to carry out the type of co-ordination, programme management and administration roles that this challenging undertaking would involve.

BEPI should adopt a Strategy and Plan of Action and it is proposed that this report is used as a basis for that process. It should establish relationships with the Department of Education and Science and with potential funders.

As a priority it should collaborate with the Atlantic Philanthropies through the local Ballymun based committee, the Ballymun Development Group for Children and Young People (BDGCYP). The Ballymun Development Group for Children and Young People (BDGCYP), was set up in December 2003 to plan for and identify the resources needed to meet the needs of children and youth in the area and to present funding proposals to the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Departments of Education & Science, Health & Children and Social & Family Affairs. This presents a unique opportunity which could be as fundamental to a successful future for Ballymun as its world class physical regeneration programme.

## **9. Assessment and Review Process**

Ongoing review and evaluation will be critical to the continuing effectiveness of the Ballymun Education Strategy. A number of levels of review and evaluation are proposed to assist in achieving a high level of effectiveness. These are:

- An independent professional resource should be appointed by the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative to carry out an ongoing formative evaluation and to provide **Annual Evaluation Reports** to the board and external funders.
- **An Interim Review** should be carried out in collaboration with external funders commencing in late 2007 following three full years of operation of the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative. A joint steering group should be set up to agree the terms of reference and to appoint the independent professional evaluators. They should not be the same entity that has carried out the ongoing formative evaluation. The results of the interim review should be provided to the board and to external funders in June 2008.
- **An Evaluation of Progress** should be carried out in collaboration with external funders to assess progress achieved and to capture the learning and to present successes achieved in the framework of model of excellence. A joint steering group should be set up to agree the terms of reference and to appoint the independent professional evaluators. This should commence in October 2011 and be completed in early 2012 to support the international conference proposed for 2012.
- **A Full Term Review** should be carried out in collaboration with external funders commencing in January 2014. They should not be the same entity that has carried out the ongoing formative evaluation. The results of the full term review should be provided to the board and to external funders.

All of the above should contain core sections on improved educational outcomes and benchmark improvements against the goals set out in the education strategy. The full term review should make recommendations to the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative and funders on how it can develop Ballymun to be a leader in Ireland and internationally in terms of excellence in educational outcomes.

## **10. Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

The findings, conclusions and recommendations from earlier sections of the report are summarised below and formed the basis for the proposed strategy, goals and actions.

- (1) *It is clear that there is an opportunity to make a significant impact on children's educational performance in Ballymun through the expansion and development of pre-school education in collaboration with the childcare sector.*
- (2) *The curriculum followed in individual primary schools needs to meet the needs of the cohort of learners in that school and needs to facilitate improved learning outcomes. The approach to this challenge needs to be crafted by using the School Development Planning process which sets these goals as central tenets for the education process.*
- (3) *Learning support structures need to be resourced to a greater degree through the provision of targeted literacy programmes such as Reading Recovery, in-service training & professional development networks and an adequate number of teaching positions to effectively support literacy and numeracy improvement to match average national levels.*
- (4) *An interim solution is needed for all Ballymun pupils who need individual support of a type that was up until recently met by the ongoing allocation by the DES of resource teachers. A longer term solution needs to be developed which relates to the DES system that will be put in place after its review process of resource teacher provision.*
- (5) *The reading competency of children entering second level education needs to be at a par with average national levels to enable outcomes at second level in Ballymun approaching those of advantaged communities.*
- (6) *The local office of the Education Welfare Board should be invited to link with area based actions to improve attendance and co-ordinate its actions with other agencies.*
- (7) *The possibility of establishing a multi-disciplinary team to support school goers in the area should be pursued. It should include practitioners in the fields of Educational Psychology, Speech Therapy and Social Work. The team should focus not just on assessment but crucially on curative interventions. Links should be established with the Primary Health Care model which is currently being piloted in Ballymun.*
- (8) *All of the partners in education in Ballymun need to support the major change in second level provision to be achieved through the amalgamation of the three Comprehensive Schools in September 2005 to help maximise the opportunity for improving second level education in the area.*

- (9) *Those attending Ballymun Comprehensive second level schools currently have an overall senior cycle retention rate of approximately 38.1% and to put this in a national context it is more informative to examine the retention rate in the traditional leaving certificate cycle for this cohort which is 26.5% in Ballymun compared to 74% nationally and 86% for the most advantaged areas. It is recommended that two separate targets for improvement need to be pursued in relation to improved educational outcomes at second level in Ballymun. One is an improvement in the overall retention rate in the senior cycle and another is an improvement in the retention rate in the traditional leaving certificate cycle.*
- (10) *Resources should be sought and systems established to enable second level students to be assisted in developing individual learning plans.*
- (11) *Programmes should be developed to give appropriate support to teachers experiencing stress and which respond to their individual circumstances.*
- (12) *Children and young people's achievements across the spectrum of social, cultural and educational fields need to be promoted by supportive bodies outside of the schools to help start changing the self-esteem and aspirations relating to education of the whole Ballymun community. The spirit and the attitude of the community towards education has to be helped to become more positive focusing more on achievement and self-confidence but schools cannot do this alone. All must rally around this effort and help to raise the expectations that Ballymun parents and the wider community have for their children. The Ballymun community must tell all its children in a thousand different ways what they are capable of achieving and must help them to believe in their own capacity to achieve.*
- (13) *The education strategy should support the Aisling initiative in terms of helping it to secure funding and resources to continue its existing activity but also in its aspiration to expand so as to provide access to an Aisling place for every child who needs it in the Ballymun area.*
- (14) *It is recommended that an area wide implementation of Reading Recovery be planned for Ballymun to commence in September 2004 and to be available to every school in September 2005.*
- (15) *The anomaly in the pupil teacher ratio between junior and senior primary school level needs to be addressed in the context of improving educational outcomes in Ballymun with a view to seeking a more effective system.*
- (16) *The Ballymun Education Strategy should seek to facilitate links between the regional NEPS service and other services in the area such as the Mater Child Guidance Clinic and the proposed multi-disciplinary team.*
- (17) *BEST should be facilitated in developing its programmes and assisted in seeking core funding to support programmes such as the out of school service through the Ballymun Education Strategy.*

- (18) *A key issue identified by BITE is the need for a change in attitude towards education and the development of a more supportive culture around educational achievement in Ballymun. BITE tries to influence this continually by feeding back achievements and possibilities to parents and young people and often does this through the inputs of past pupils who act as role models. An interesting study researching ‘What has happened to the students supported during fourteen years of BITE?’ is being carried out on a voluntary basis by a retired teacher. The Ballymun Education Strategy should prioritise this as a key area for action going forward.*
- (19) *Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme, the adult literacy and basic education service, could be further developed by the appointment of Family Learning Co-ordinators working with the different generations in Ballymun.*
- (20) *An Adult Education Centre is needed for Ballymun. It should incorporate community education and formal education in a flexible learning environment and incorporate crèche facilities.*
- (21) *Strategies and actions developed in the Ballymun Education Strategy should pro-actively link with plans and programmes of youth and family support organisations such as BRYR and the Ballymun Women’s Resource Centre.*
- (22) *It is too early to judge the effect the Breaking the Cycle programme has on educational outcomes as participating children have not yet progressed through the senior primary cycle. The DES is reviewing the pilot as part of its current review of educational disadvantage programmes and the outcome of this review needs to be closely studied when it becomes available to inform the development of the education strategy.*
- (23) *Ballymun Youthreach is an excellent example of a ‘progression intervention’ and also epitomises the principle proposed in section 6 of this report of ‘never giving up’ on a young person and helping them to make decisions and gain the capacity for a positive next step. The Ballymun Education Strategy should integrate such approaches into its plan and actively support them.*
- (24) *For Travellers to benefit from the Ballymun Education Strategy they need to be recognised as a minority group. Targets, goals, action plans, evaluations and assessments need to include quality proofing to ensure that Travellers are participating and involved in all aspects of the initiative. Traveller parents or guardians need to be supported in making the choice of any school for their child and every school in Ballymun needs to be supported in integrating that child and meeting their needs.*
- (25) *Many examples of good practice are listed in section 3.6 of this report. They should be included in the review and sharing of good practice proposed in the Ballymun Education Strategy.*
- (26) *Bridging the Gap, as a successful project operating with a cluster of disadvantaged schools in Cork, has lessons for the Ballymun Education*

*Strategy and should be requested to share its experiences with the proposed Ballymun structures when they are set up.*

- (27) The proposed elements in a new senior cycle curriculum have particular relevance for Ballymun and could have a significant impact in improving educational outcomes. Ballymun could prove to be a valuable pilot site for implementing a new senior cycle curriculum and this should be actively pursued as part of the Ballymun Education Strategy.*
- (28) Educational policy seems to be trying to move towards more transparent criteria and systems for allocating resources and this could provide an opportunity for Ballymun to use to its advantage primarily because a more transparent system provides a firmer basis for planning for educational improvement.*
- (29) The consultant suggests that an area wide approach is a strategy that can positively address the current environment of changing education policy. A constructive approach should be taken by looking at the implications for the whole Ballymun area, sharing the issues and problems faced by schools and other stakeholders with a view to establishing a clearer understanding of the issues and planning for the required level of resources that are needed to change educational outcomes for Ballymun children.*
- (30) The Ballymun Education Strategy should embrace School Development Planning as a strong vehicle for improving educational outcomes, linking schools to the wider community and in planning for an integrated approach to addressing educational disadvantage.*
- (31) A wider view has to be taken beyond that which applies in any one school. The impact of difficulties faced by an individual school and the outcomes for individual children are felt by other higher level schools, by alternative education & training providers and by the wider community at an economic, social and behavioural level. The stakeholders in education have to be prepared to come together to pro-actively plan for better outcomes taking the view that children and young people need to be helped throughout all their educational phases. Their success at the end is not 'owned' by any one stakeholders but is a shared achievement and one in which everyone involved can take pride in.*

## **11. Concluding Remarks**

The European Union has set the goal of becoming the world's leading knowledge economy by the year 2010 and although it is unlikely to reach that goal at its current rate of progress it is possible that Ireland could outpace its European neighbours and become a leading knowledge economy by that time. Ballymun needs to outpace advantaged communities in Ireland and start to catch up and to achieve similar educational outcomes so that its children and young people can benefit from these bright future prospects.

Key skills identified as essential for this new future by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment in their document 'Developing Senior Cycle Education' include learning to learn, information processing, personal effectiveness, communication, critical thinking and working with others.

What the Ballymun Education Strategy seeks to achieve is knowledge in the hands of our young people at a competitive level and a developed learning motivation and skill set which equips them for a level of success which matches their inherent potential and the capacity for sustaining that success in the future through an orientation towards lifelong learning. This can only be achieved through a new approach.

A prerequisite to any major change in educational outcomes in Ballymun is a new approach to which all stakeholders can lend their support. The approach must be based on pro-active collaboration between the stakeholders which jointly identifies the issues and challenges to be faced and plans for an integrated solution which supports children, young people and families in all areas that affect their educational progress and achievements, both inside and outside of school. It must enable the investment of additional energies and resources which can be monitored for effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes in an open and transparent manner. It must promote what is best in Ballymun and raise pride and the aspirations of the whole community.

It must allow all stakeholders to share in the success of young people as they complete their education and the collaborative achievement that that represents. It must set out to give children and young people in Ballymun what they deserve, a new approach, which through the Ballymun Education Planning Initiative sets out to '*get it right first time*' and to ensure that they develop to the level of their potential. It will require the best that stakeholders can offer to the process; imagination, commitment, resources, skill, tenacity and a collaborative approach. This new approach is urgently needed and should be pursued without delay. There can be no doubt that it will be worth the effort.

## Appendix 1 - Interview Template for School Principals

### Interview with School Principals

Enrolled							
Teachers		Principal	Class Teacher	Resource Teacher	Learning Support	Home Sch. Liaison	Career Guidance
Other							

<p>1. What in your view are the educational priorities and issues for your school in the context of the Ballymun area?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">a. In addressing these priorities and issues what deficiencies are there in existing provision?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">b. How do you view your own school's internal capacity, strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">c. What Department of Education programmes to assist disadvantaged schools are you aware of and what has been your experience of those your school has accessed?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">d. What types of collaborations are there with other schools and what has been your experience of the benefits or limitations?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">e. Are you aware of examples of best practice that might be</p>	
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relevant to your school and are there practices within your school that you feel could benefit other schools?

- f. What is the structure of your Board of Management?
- g. What has been your experience regarding parent / student participation?
- h. What schools do your pupils come from / go on to?

2. What has been your school's experience of School Development Planning (SDP) and what were the priorities selected in the plan?

- a. What issues arise in your view in realising the following aspiration: *'The ultimate objective of school planning is to identify students' needs and to respond appropriately to them.'*
- b. Does the SDP process need to be further developed to address improvements in learner outcomes in disadvantaged schools?
- c. What demands does SDP place on teachers, principals, boards of management, parents and students?
- d. What is your view on the Educational Disadvantage Committee recommendation for inclusion of the following in plans for disadvantaged schools?
  - ✓ *early childhood education*
  - ✓ *parental involvement*
  - ✓ *targeted support for the provision of school books*
  - ✓ *school attendance monitoring*

- ✓ *extra curricular programmes and connections to youth service provision within the area*
  - ✓ *transition from Primary to Post-primary*
  - ✓ *collaboration with other agencies, service providers and local structures*
  - ✓ *links with second chance education services in the area*
- e. Was your school involved in the pilot of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) or recent inspections in the new format? What is your view of the benefits and challenges in adopting this process?

3. What is your view of the current recommendations made by the Educational Disadvantage Committee (December 2003)?

**Recommendation 1:**

Improving the methods of identification and selection in order to ensure the appropriate targeting of resources for schools most in need.

**Recommendation 2:**

More effective targeting and deployment of financial and teaching resources by moving, to a substantial degree, from the current programme-based approach to a more flexible, planned and integrated response to meeting identified needs at local level.

*‘We recommend that a single agreed level of additional financial support, calculated on a per capita basis, should be made available to disadvantaged schools, with a reducing proportion of this level being made available to schools, scaled on the basis of rank order.’*

**Recommendation 3:**

The delivery of a range of supports to teachers and schools in understanding and serving the needs of disadvantaged communities and in planning, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of educational inclusion measures in order to ensure a real and sustainable impact on the students and schools targeted.

**Recommendation 4:**

The development of a Transition Plan by the Department to plan and manage transition to the new integrated delivery model.

*‘In essence, greater levels of resources will be available to the most disadvantaged schools, to be deployed on the basis of an approved school plan.’*

4. How would you view participation in an integrated area based structure to support improvements in education in Ballymun? Which of the following possible functions would you prioritise and what others would you suggest?
- a. Mobilise and Co-ordinate Resources (Schools, Youth Initiatives, Education Initiatives, Partnership, Health Board, Second Chance Education Initiatives, Other Agencies)
  - b. Support and Share Best Practice
  - c. Support School Development Planning e.g. collaboration & linkages

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>d. Joint Fundraising</li><li>e. Pilot Programme / Initiative Development</li><li>f. Development of a multi-disciplinary team for the Ballymun area incorporating the following competencies:- Educational Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Social Worker etc.</li><li>g. Other suggestions?</li></ul> |  |
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## Appendix 2 - List of School Principals Interviewed

No.	School	Type	Principal	Address
1	Comprehensive, Boys	Secondary Junior	Frank Byrne	Ballymun Rd., D9
2	Comprehensive, Girls	Secondary Junior	Mary Downey	Ballymun Rd., D9
3	Comprehensive, Senior	Secondary Senior	Angela Murray	Ballymun Rd., D9
4	Gael Scoil Bhaile Munna	Primary	Ray Dempsey	Coultry Rd, D9
5	Holy Spirit Boys	Primary	Paddy Fitzgerald	Sillogue Rd., D11
6	Holy Spirit Girls	Primary	Marian Hackett	Sillogue Rd., D11
7	Our Lady of Victories Junior	Primary	Ann Carthy	Ballymun Rd., D9
8	Our Lady of Victories Senior Girls	Primary	Maura O'Halloran	Ballymun Rd., D9
9	Our Lady of Victories Senior Boys	Primary	Marcus O'Philbin	Ballymun Rd., D9
10	Scoil an tSeachtar Laoch	Primary	Donal O'Loinsigh	Ballymun Rd., D9
11	St Josephs Junior	Primary	Marie O'Brien	Balcurris Rd., D11
12	St Josephs Senior	Primary	Tom Hickey	Balcurris Rd., D11
13	Virgin Mary Boys	Primary	Des Deegan	Shangan Rd., D9
14	Virgin Mary Girls	Primary	Eileen Marrinan	Shangan Rd., D9

### **Appendix 3 - List of Leaders of Ballymun Organisations Interviewed**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	Jacqui Caulfield	Ballymun Youthreach	Co-ordinator
2	Peter Davitt	Ballymun Partnership	Chairperson
3	Sr. Malen DeValle	The Aisling Project	Co-ordinator
4	Declan Dunne	Ballymun Partnership	CEO
5	Hugh Greaves	Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force	Co-ordinator
6	Paula Heenan	The Ballymun Educational Support Team (BEST)	Project Manager
7	Donnacadh Hurley	Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYP)	Project Manager
8	Emma Kiernan	Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education	Programme Director
9	Mary Love	Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme	Co-ordinator

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