A survey of the socioeconomic profile of all primary schools in 2014 in the context of developing a new resource allocation model to support children with special educational needs

Report to the Department of Education and Skills / National Council for Special Education

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2015

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Background

In June 2014, a National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Working Group published a report aimed at improving how schools are resourced in their efforts to support students with special educational needs (see '*A Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs*' at www.ncse.ie).

The proposal consists of a baseline component designed to provide a certain allocation of teaching resources in line with a school's total enrolment, and ensuring a minimum allocation of resources to all schools. In addition, the model includes a number of other components to ensure that additional teacher posts are allocated to schools on the basis of each individual school's need for support. Based on national and international research, the Working Group has identified a set of criteria that indicate a school's need for additional teaching resources. These include *(i)* the number of enrolled students with very complex special educational needs, *(ii)* the number of enrolled students with low levels of academic achievement, and *(iii)* the school's socio-economic context. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) asked the Educational Research Centre (ERC) to assist in the collection of data in relation to the third of these.

In August 2014, the ERC began the process of gathering the information required to develop the new model. As part of this process, a social context survey was developed at the ERC for distribution to all primary and post-primary schools. Questionnaires focusing largely on the socioeconomic characteristics of families served by schools were posted to all primary and post-primary schools nationwide in August 2014[1]. The data gathered were used to assist in the development of an educational profile for each school along with information already held by the DES and the NCSE.

Following the processing of all data from the surveys, a model of resource allocation was developed in line with the recommendations of the Working Group. This involved using survey data and other data provided by the DES / NCSE in different combinations and with different weightings to explore various allocation formulae. The model that resulted from this exercise will be piloted by the DES in a limited number of schools in 2015/16 with a view to assessing its workability and refining it if necessary. In the

[1] Originally, the survey of primary schools had been planned for the spring of 2014. Due to an administrative error, the DES sent out a number of surveys prematurely in June 2014, 19 of which were completed and returned and are included in the analyses reported here.

meantime, the ERC is using the survey data to further explore interrelationships between the social context of schools and a range of other variables. Work is ongoing, for example, to assess the extent to which certain characteristics (e.g., disadvantage, special education needs of various kinds) are dispersed or clustered within schools. The purpose of the current paper is to describe some of the main outcomes of the survey at primary level. Its purpose is also to investigate some issues of significance in relation to the future identification of schools for additional resources to address disadvantage. The survey method will be compared with one available area-based measure of socioeconomic status to assess levels of disadvantage in schools. The analyses will include the use of comparative data from a similar survey in 2005 that was used to rank order schools on level of disadvantage for consideration for inclusion in DEIS[2]. A parallel report is being prepared on the survey of schools in 2014 at post-primary level (Weir & Denner, forthcoming).

The administration of the survey and response rates

The survey format and its constituent items followed closely those used in the earlier survey in 2005. This was primarily done for reasons of expediency (there was very limited time available to prepare for the exercise), but more importantly, for purposes of comparability with data from the previous survey and other sources. Also, no evidence had emerged in the meantime to suggest that preferable indicators existed. However, due to changes in administrative practices in the DES, one of the indicators used in the index in 2005 (the percentage of pupils on whose behalf the school received a book grant) was no longer useful as it did not depend on principals' estimates of the number of pupils from poor households. To approximate the data previously derived from the former source, two additional survey items were included in 2014 which asked about the percentage of families dependent on social welfare, and likely to be in receipt of supplementary welfare allowances as a result of having low incomes from employment (see Q3h-i in the survey in Appendix 1). Both of these were involved in the assessment of a school's eligibility for book grants in previous years. While a detailed description of survey items is beyond the scope of the current exercise, the choice of indicators in 2005 (and thus, most in 2014) is available separately (see Archer and Sofroniou, 2008).

The survey was sent to 3,139 primary schools in August 2014 (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the instrument). Ultimately, 3,027[3] surveys were returned, giving an overall response rate of 96.4%. This is very similar, but marginally below, the comparable figure for the survey carried out in 2005 in which 3,061 out of 3,155 schools (97.0%) returned surveys. Response rates on what could be considered *key*

[2] For more details of the DEIS programme see www.education.ie.
[3] One principal contacted the ERC in July 2015 to ask for her school's data to be retracted. This reduced the true response total to 3,026 schools.

items in the 2014 survey (those that were likely to contribute to an overall index of disadvantage) were lower than the overall response rate, ranging from 96.2% for the number of pupils from the Traveller community to 71.7% for the percentage of pupils' families with medical cards. Table 1 shows the percentage of missing responses on the key items both in the 2005 and 2009 surveys, with the six variables above the thick line being common to both surveys.

Table 1. Percentages of principals who skipped key questions in the primary survey in 2005 and percentages of principals skipping similar questions in the 2014 survey.

Variable	Primary returns 2005 (*N*=3,061)	Primary returns 2014 (*N*=3,026)
Unemployment	3.0%	14.7%
Local Authority housing	4.2%	19.6%
Medical cards	11.7%	28.1%
Lone-parent families	2.0%	9.6%
Large families	1.9%	6.5%
Travellers	1.2%	4.8%
Free book grant	4.0%	-
Dependent on SW	-	19.3%
Low income family	-	21.5%

As the table shows, there were higher rates of missing responses in 2014 in the case of all variables than had been the case for the same variables in 2005. In 2005, the average percentage of missing responses on the six common items was 4% and in 2014 it was considerably higher at almost 14%. (It should be noted, however, that previously missing data was sometimes sought from principals as part of quality assurance and appeals processes associated with the 2005 survey, but because those activities did not take place in 2014, the same opportunities were not available to principals in 2014). Table 1 also shows that medical card possession had the greatest rate of missing data on both occasions, and although it was the variable with the highest skipping rate at 11.7% in 2005, it had risen and more than doubled to 28.1% in 2014. Ultimately, what had been judged in 2005 to be a sufficiently high rate of non-response to preclude its involvement in the model was greatly exceeded in 2014, by which time principals were more than twice as likely to leave the question blank. The more easily determined characteristics (e.g., large families, membership of the Travelling community) were the least likely to be skipped by respondents on both occasions.

Socioeconomic characteristics of schools in 2005 and 2014

Table 2 shows the average percentages for all schools on six socioeconomic variables in 2005 and 2014. The values in 2014 were higher than those in 2005 in all cases except large family size which

reduced slightly from 9.2% in 2005 to 7.7% in 2014. The largest increase was in the percentage unemployed (up 12.1%), followed by the percentage of medical cards (up 9%), the percentage of lone-parent families (up 3.9%) and the percentage resident in local authority housing (up 2.9%). The percentage of students from Traveller families, although representing a tiny proportion of the total population of students, increased slightly by 0.6%.

Table 2. Mean percentages and standard deviations on each of six socioeconomic characteristics in the 2005 and 2014 surveys.

	Survey 2005			**Survey 2014**		
	N	Mean %	Std. Deviation	*N*	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Unemployed	2,968	17.3%	19.2	2,593	29.4%	21.8
Holds a Medical Card	2,701	28.1%	23.2	2,182	37.1%	24.7
Lives in Local Authority accommodation	2,932	18.4%	22.7	2,443	25.6%	24.8
Lives in a lone parent family	2,999	14.2%	13.3	2,746	18.1%	14.9
In a family with 5 or more children	3,002	9.2%	8.8	2,841	7.7%	8.3
Children from Irish Traveller Community	3,024	1.2%	4.1	2,896	1.8%	5.0

Overall, the differences are in line with what would be expected in an economy that had experienced a recession that began subsequent to the survey in 2005. The major impact seems to have been on levels of unemployment and medical card possession among families of school-going children, although more moderate effects were experienced in other areas.

Both the surveys in 2005 and in 2014 required principals to indicate the location of their school by ticking one of 7 responses describing its location (see Question 1 in the survey in Appendix 1). Based on their responses, they were divided into a dichotomous 'urban / rural' category. The data from 2014 were used to categorise schools into either group for analyses described here. However, where data on location were missing, they were replaced with data from 2005 where it existed. Averages are reported separately for urban and rural schools in 2014 in Table 3. Overall levels of assessed poverty were greater in urban than in rural areas in 2014. However, in interpreting the data in Table 3 it should be noted that there are more rural schools than urban schools involved (about 1,700 vs 1,100). This has the effect of somewhat 'diluting' the rural averages to a greater extent than is the case in urban schools. In the case of all variables, the averages for urban schools are higher than for rural schools, although the degree of discrepancy varies between indicators. For example, the finding that the urban rate of Local authority housing was two and a half times that in rural areas is not surprising as such housing is regarded as a largely urban phenomenon. The percentage of students from lone

parent families in urban schools was twice the average percentage (25.9%) of that in rural schools (12.6%). The difference in rates of unemployment and medical card possession were much less. Family size varied little on the basis of location, although urban schools reported having slightly more students from large families enrolled. The overall percentage of students from the Travelling community was tiny in both locations, although in proportional terms, urban schools reported having more than four times as many Traveller children enrolled than did rural schools.

Table 3. Mean percentages and standard deviations on each of six socioeconomic characteristics in the 2005 and 2014 surveys.

	Urban 2014			**Rural 2014**		
	N	Mean %	Std. Deviation	*N*	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Unemployed	1,048	37.4%	23.7	1,544	24.0%	18.6
Holds a Medical Card	917	44.9%	26.4	1,264	31.4%	21.7
Lives in Local Authority accommodation	1,006	40.8%	28.3	1,436	14.9%	14.3
Lives in a lone parent family	1,106	25.9%	17.6	1,639	12.6%	9.7
In a family with 5 or more children	1,136	8.6%	9.0	1,704	7.1%	7.8
Children from Irish Traveller Community	1,172	3.3%	7.0	1,723	0.7%	2.5

Overall stability between 2005 and 2014

It is not surprising that the survey in 2014 showed higher rates of unemployment than in 2005 (at 29.4% and 17.3% respectively) given that the economic downturn began in 2007. However, examining the average values for various indicators on two occasions does not tell us whether the economic changes have impacted all schools more or less equally, or had a disproportionate impact on some schools. One way of estimating the degree of change (or stability) over time is to examine the correlation between assessed levels of disadvantage using the set of six variables common to both surveys. While it is acknowledged that missing data are problematic, it is still a useful exercise. Pupils in each of the following six categories were used to produce a total score: in a family in which the breadwinner is unemployed, in a family with a medical card, in a family resident in local authority housing, in a lone-parent family, in a family with 5 or more children; and in a family from the Travelling community. The missing variables for both years were recoded to '0' and the percentages of pupils in each category in each school were computed and summed. The correlation between the total points computed in this way in 2005 and 2014 was .72 (*N*=2,818). This correlation is high, indicating a good degree of stability between 2004 and 2014. However, the correlation is by no means perfect, so it is also worth examining the correlations between individual variables on both occasions. This should provide an indication of the level of stability over time of individual socio-economic characteristics.

Stability of individual socioeconomic characteristics between 2005 and 2014

Table 4 shows the correlations between six socioeconomic variables in 2005 and 2014[4]. By looking at the values of correlations along the shaded diagonal it is possible to judge the extent of stability or change among the six key variables. It appears that the most stable characteristic at school level is the percentage of pupils living in local authority housing (*r*= .779) followed by the percentage of Traveller children enrolled (*r*= .744). These are fairly closely followed by the percentage unemployed (*r*= .618) and the percentage of lone-parent families (*r*= .613). The percentage of medical cards is slightly lower (*r*= .610), possibly reflecting an uncertainty regarding medical card possession among principals, some of whom contacted the ERC during the survey to indicate that this characteristic presented difficulties because it was less visible than some of the others. The correlation between the percentage of large families in 2005 and 2014, predictably, was the lowest of all (*r*= .312). One might expect this characteristic to be less stable than the others, as the strength and nature of its relationship with the other variables in Table 4 is different (ranging from *r*= .156 in the case of lone-parents to a maximum of *r*= .298 in the case of medical card).

Table 4. Correlations between six key survey variables in 2005 and 2014 **(***N*=2,649).

	% Unemployed 2005	% One Parent Family 2005	% Local Authority Housing 2005	% 5 or more children 2005	% Medical Card 2005	% Travelling Community 2005
% Unemployed 2014	.618** (*N*=2,339)	.539** (*N*=2,364)	.625** (*N*=2,314)	.289** (*N*=2,362)	.603** (*N*=2,138)	.293** (*N*=2,372)
% One Parent Family 2014	.506** (*N*=2,473)	.613** (*N*=2,502)	.641** (*N*=2,447)	.156** (*N*=2,499)	.461** (*N*=2,250)	.216** (*N*=2,513)
% Local Authority Housing 2014	.598** (*N*=2,204)	.687** (*N*=2,221)	.779** (*N*=2,175)	.242** (*N*=2,217)	.550** (*N*=2,011)	.372** (*N*=2,230)
% 5 or more children 2014	.270** (*N*=2,560)	.199** (*N*=2,591)	.277** (*N*=2,533)	.312** (*N*=2,589	.292** (*N*=2,326)	.256** (*N*=2,606)
% Medical Card 2014	.600** (*N*=1,962)	.507** (*N*=1,980)	.597** (*N*=1,944)	.298** (*N*=1,976)	.610** (*N*=1,801)	.278** (*N*=1,986)
% Travelling Community 2014	.300** (*N*=2,601)	.262** (*N*=2,629)	.385** (*N*=2,569)	.242** (*N*=2,631)	.257** (*N*=2,361)	.744** (*N*=2,649)

**p<.001

[4]In 2005 3,061 primary schools supplied data and in 2014 3,026 schools did so. Due to the nature of the analysis, Table 4 only includes cases with data on both occasions.

Stability of socioeconomic characteristics between 2005 and 2014 in urban and rural schools

As noted in the previous section, small rural schools tend to be less stable in their socioeconomic profile than their larger urban counterparts. The correlation between assessed levels of disadvantage (total survey points based on all key variables) in 2005 and 2014 already reported is *r*= .72 for the total population of schools. Table 5, which gives the correlations overall and separately for urban and rural schools, suggests that the socioeconomic profiles of rural schools were, indeed, less stable than their urban counterparts, with a correlation of *r*= .484 for rural school compared with *r*= .777 for urban schools.

Table 5. Correlation between total points in the surveys in 2005 and 2014 in urban and rural schools.

	r
All	.717
Urban	.777
Rural	.484

***p*<.001

Tables 6 and 7 show the correlations between 2005 and 2014 by location on the key variables. What is immediately apparent is that the correlations between the variables in urban schools are all higher than their rural equivalents. This provides further support for the idea that school characteristics are more stable in urban areas. Of the set of socioeconomic variables, local authority housing and percentage of Traveller children enrolled are the most stable in urban areas, followed by unemployment and medical card possession. The variable relating to family size has the lowest correlation in both locations.

Table 6. Correlations between six key survey variables in urban schools in 2005 and 2014.

	% Unemployed 2005	% One Parent Family 2005	% Local Authority Housing 2005	% 5 or more children 2005	% Medical Card 2005	% Travelling Community 2005
% Unemployed 2014	.682** (*N*=896)	.614** (*N*=906)	.705** (*N*=883)	.525** (*N*=903)	.684** (*N*=827)	.320** (*N*=911)
% One Parent Family 2014	.581** (*N*=942)	.603** (*N*=954)	.614** (*N*=932)	.354** (*N*=951)	.566** (*N*=863)	.135** (*N*=961)
% Local Authority Housing 2014	.705** (*N*=859)	.668** (*N*=868)	.763** (*N*=847)	.498** (*N*=864)	.696** (*N*=789)	.318** (*N*=872)
% 5 or more children 2014	.363** (*N*=967)	.286** (*N*=980)	.376** (*N*=957)	.450** (*N*=978)	.396** (*N*=885)	.379** (*N*=989)
% Medical Card 2014	.646** (*N*=784)	.581** (*N*=789)	.683** (*N*=774)	.489** (*N*=786)	.655** (*N*=722)	.306** (*N*=791)
% Travelling Community 2014	.351** (*N*=992)	.183** (*N*=1,005)	.336** (*N*=980)	.444** (*N*=1,005)	.328** (*N*=904)	.777** (*N*=1,016)

Table 7. Correlations between six key survey variables in rural schools in 2005 and 2014.

	% Unemployed 2005	% One Parent Family 2005	% Local Authority housing 2005	% 5 or more children 2005	% Medical Card 2005	% Travelling Community 2005
% Unemployed 2014	.466** (*N*=1,443)	.251** (*N*=1,458)	.368** (*N*=1,431)	.173** (*N*=1,459)	.468** (*N*=1,311)	.064* (*N*=1,461)
% One Parent Family 2014	.256** (*N*=1,531)	.310** (*N*=1,548)	.362** (*N*=1,515)	.057* (*N*=1,548)	.248** (*N*=1,387)	0.048 (*N*=1,552)
% Local Authority housing 2014	.296** (*N*=1,345)	.341** (*N*=1,353)	.485** (*N*=1,328)	.138** (*N*=1,353)	.296** (*N*=1,222)	.120** (*N*=1,358)
% 5 or more children 2014	.153** (*N*=1,593)	0.038 (*N*=1,611)	.112** (*N*=1,576)	.236** (*N*=1,611)	.176** (*N*=1,441)	.049* (*N*=1,617)
% Medical Card 2014	.472** (*N*=1,178)	.237** (*N*=1,191)	.360** (*N*=1,170)	.206** (*N*=1,190)	.512** (*N*=1,079)	0.052 (*N*=1,195)
% Travelling Community 2014	0.027 (*N*=1,609)	.085** (*N*=1,624)	.132** (*N*=1,589)	.086** (*N*=1,626)	0.018 (*N*=1,457)	.453** (*N*=1,633)

As well as examining the overall correlations between survey variables, stability may be examined among schools with differing levels of disadvantage. First, urban and rural schools were ranked separately on their assessed level of disadvantage in the surveys in 2005 and 2014 (i.e., on their summed responses to the six key items common to both surveys). Then their membership of categories based on these rankings were crosstabulated according to four categories in the case of urban schools, and five categories in the case of rural schools (Tables 8 and 9). Urban schools were divided into fewer categories because there are fewer urban than rural schools nationally. As a comparison of data in the tables shows, based on our (albeit, fairly arbitrary, categories), the percentage of schools remaining in the top category of disadvantage from 2005 to 2014 is greater in urban schools than in rural (69.9% urban vs 50.6% rural). At the other extreme, urban schools assessed as having the lowest levels of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014 also fairly appeared stable at 66.7%, but their rural counterparts were a lot less so, with only 25.9% occupying the category containing schools with the lowest levels of assessed disadvantage on both occasions.

Table 8. Crosstabulation of urban schools in four categories based on level of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014.

		Category based on rank according to level of disadvantage in 2005				
		1 to 300 (most disadv.)	301 to 600	601 to 900	901 to 1,086 (least disadv.)	Total
Category based on ranked level of disadvantage in urban schools in 2014	1 to 300 (most disadv.)	188 69.9%	69 25.0%	20 7.1%	0 0.0%	277 25.5%
	301 to 600	60 22.3%	135 48.9%	61 21.8%	17 6.5%	273 25.1%
	601 to 900	11 4.1%	50 18.1%	120 42.9%	70 26.8%	251 23.1%
	901 to 1,086 (least disadv.)	10 3.7%	22 8.0%	79 28.2%	174 66.7%	285 26.2%
Total		269 100.0%	276 100.0%	280 100.0%	261 100.0%	1,086 100.0%

Table 9. Crosstabulation of rural schools in five categories based on level of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014.

		Category based on rank according to level of disadvantage in 2005					
		1 to 350 (most disadv.)	351 to 700	701 to 1,100	1,101 to 1,500	1,501 to 1,732 (least disadv.)	Total
Category based on ranked level of disadvantage in rural schools in 2014	1 to 350 (most disadv.)	159 50.6%	88 27.7%	47 12.7%	25 6.8%	17 4.7%	336 19.4%
	351 to 700	64 20.4%	81 25.5%	86 23.2%	57 15.4%	44 12.3%	332 19.2%
	701 to 1,100	42 13.4%	65 20.4%	91 24.5%	100 27.0%	89 24.8%	387 22.3%
	1,101 to 1,500	28 8.9%	53 16.7%	76 20.5%	115 31.1%	116 32.3%	388 22.4%
	1,501 to 1,732 (least disadv.)	21 6.7%	31 9.7%	71 19.1%	73 19.7%	93 25.9%	289 16.7%
Total		314 100.0%	318 100.0%	371 100.0%	370 100.0%	359 100.0%	1,732 100.0%

Another way of estimating the extent of stability by location is by comparing the percentage of schools that remained in their categories from 2005 to 2014. This may be done by adding schools along the diagonal (shaded cells) and dividing by the total number of schools. In the case of urban schools, 56.8% of schools remained in their category, while only 31.1% of rural schools did so. If a less stringent

measure of stability is used, which includes schools that remained in their category or moved either up or down to an adjacent category, the percentages increase to 92.6% in urban schools and to 69.3% in rural schools. Therefore, regardless of the methods used, the socioeconomic profile of schools in urban areas appears to be more stable than in rural areas.

As already described, the outcome of the survey in 2005 ultimately dictated the inclusion or not of schools in the DEIS programme. To examine the extent to which the same schools would have been included if the survey in 2014 had been used to assess levels of disadvantage, a number of steps were taken. First, using questions common to both years, a points total for 2005 and points total for 2014 were computed separately by summing percentages on the following six variables: Unemployment, Medical card possession, Local authority housing, Lone parent families, 5 or more children, and families from the Traveller Community. To establish the overlap between the 333 schools in DEIS urban in 2005 and the most disadvantaged 333 schools in 2014, if the school was classified in DEIS urban in 2005 it was assigned to the first category "Most disadvantaged'. The remaining urban schools were ranked (using the total points created above) and coded into three other categories. These were then crosstabulated with schools using the same categories as 2014 (Table 10). As the table shows, using this method, 71% of DEIS urban schools remained in the top 333 schools in 2014. About one-fifth of schools dropped to the next category, and very small percentages dropped further down the rankings. While a change in levels of disadvantage may account for some movement of schools between categories, it is likely that missing data accounts for some of the migration. This is because, for purposes of producing the scale used here, missing values were counted as zero and it is unlikely that any school that was in DEIS urban in 2005 had no pupils in any of the six key areas surveyed. This factor is almost certainly implicated in the extreme discrepancies in Table 10. It should be noted also, that the variables in the index used to rank schools for the current exercise are different to those used to rank schools in 2005, and that may also account for some of the repositioning of schools.

Table 10. Crosstabulation of urban schools in four categories (including DEIS urban) based on level of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014.

		Category based on rank according to level of disadvantage (first 333 schools in DEIS urban) in 2005				
		1 to 333 DEIS Urban 2005	334 to 600	601 to 900	901 to 1,104 (least disadv.)	Total
Category based on ranked level of disadvantage in urban schools in 2014	1 to 333 (most disadv.)	228 71.0%	61 27.1%	29 10.4%	1 0.4%	319 28.9%
	334 to 600	70 21.8%	99 44.0%	61 21.9%	17 6.1%	247 22.4%
	601 to 900	12 3.7%	44 19.6%	115 41.2%	81 29.0%	252 22.8%
	901 to 1,104 (least disadv.)	11 3.4%	21 9.3%	74 26.5%	180 64.5%	286 25.9%
Total		321 100.0%	225 100.0%	279 100.0%	279 100.0%	1,104 100.0%

A similar exercise was done with urban schools that were in DEIS Band 1 (the most disadvantaged schools according to the survey in 2005). The same process was used, with Band 1 schools being allocated to category 1, and the remaining schools ranked and coded into four other categories (Table 11). As before, urban schools in 2014 were ranked (using the total points for 2014 above) and coded using the same categories as was used for 2005. As the table shows, the pattern for Band 1 schools is similar to that among urban DEIS schools overall, with almost 70% remaining in the top 193 in 2014, and almost 20% moving down a category.

An examination of the re-categorisation of DEIS rural schools in 2014 revealed that just over half remained in the most disadvantaged category in 2014 (Table 12). Not only were there fewer rural schools in the top category, but those that moved category tended to be more dispersed than was the case for urban schools. For example, 13.8% of rural schools that had been assessed as most disadvantaged in 2005, had moved to categories that placed them above a rank of 1,100. This is consistent with other analyses that show rural schools to be less stable in terms of their social profile. It is likely, however, that the missing data and different scale also contributed to the re-categorisation of schools in some cases.

Table 11. Crosstabulation of urban schools in five categories (including DEIS Band 1) based on level of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014.

		Category based on rank according to level of disadvantage (first 193 schools in DEIS Band 1 urban) in 2005					
		1 to 193 (most disadv.) Band 1 Urban	194 to 450	451 to 700	701 to 1,000	1,001 to 1,096 (least disadv.)	Total
Category based on ranked level of disadvantage in urban schools in 2014	1 to 193 (most disadv.) Band 1 Urban	129 69.7%	37 16.8%	14 6.0%	2 0.7%	0 0.0%	182 16.6%
	194 to 450	35 18.9%	115 52.3%	71 30.5%	14 4.9%	3 1.7%	238 21.7%
	451 to 700	12 6.5%	50 22.7%	84 36.1%	66 23.2%	13 7.5%	225 20.5%
	701 to 1,000	3 1.6%	13 5.9%	41 17.6%	129 45.4%	69 39.7%	255 23.3%
	1,001 to 1,096 (least disadv.)	6 3.2%	5 2.3%	23 9.9%	73 25.7%	89 51.1%	196 17.9%
Total		185 100.0%	220 100.0%	233 100.0%	284 100.0%	174 100.0%	1,096 100.0%

Table 12. Crosstabulation of rural schools in five categories (including DEIS rural) based on level of disadvantage in 2005 and 2014.

		Category based on ranked level of disadvantage (first 322 schools in DEIS rural) in 2005					
		1 to 322 most disadv.) Rural DEIS	323 thru 700	701 to 1,100	1101 to 1,500	1,501 to 1,740 (least disadv.)	Total
Category based on ranked level of disadvantage in rural schools in 2014	1 to 322 most disadv.) Rural DEIS	157 52.9%	81 23.8%	38 10.3%	19 5.2%	17 4.6%	312 17.9%
	323 to 700	62 20.9%	98 28.8%	97 26.3%	60 16.3%	45 12.3%	362 20.8%
	701 to 1,100	37 12.5%	70 20.6%	90 24.4%	102 27.7%	89 24.3%	388 22.3%
	1,101 to1500	21 7.1%	60 17.6%	75 20.3%	113 30.7%	119 32.5%	388 22.3%
	1,501 to 1,740 (least disadv.)	20 6.7%	31 9.1%	69 18.7%	74 20.1%	96 26.2%	290 16.7%
Total		297 100.0%	340 100.0%	369 100.0%	368 100.0%	366 100.0%	1,740 100.0%

Correlations between variables in the 2014 survey and educational outcomes

In this section, the way in which the survey variables relate to each other and to educational outcomes is examined. This is done by presenting a matrix showing the correlations between all of the socioeconomic variables in the survey in 2014 with measures of reading and mathematics achievement data returned by all primary schools in the state in the same year. Achievement data were provided to the ERC by the DES, having been collected from schools as part of their annual returns under the requirements of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy (DES, 2011). Among other things, the strategy requires schools to supply the DES with records of the numbers of pupils scoring in Stens 1-10 in reading and mathematics at 2nd, 4th and 6th class levels. For the purpose of our analyses, each student in each school received a score of 1 if they were in Sten 1, 2 if they were in Sten 2, 3 if they were in Sten 3 and so on up to Sten 10. These were added together to produce an average Sten score based on the total number of pupils. As raw test scores were not available, the overall average on this pseudo 'scale' was used as an indicator of achievement in each grade level in each school, and was the measure used in Tables 13 to 15.

There are several sets of interrelationships of interest in Table 13. The first concerns the relationships between the socioeconomic variables themselves. As each of these variables is intended to represent a single aspect of the same thing (in this case, the social profile or socioeconomic backgrounds of students in a school), one would expect all of these variables to correlate with each other. As the correlations in the bottom right hand section of the matrix in Table 13 show, this is indeed the case. Levels of unemployment, medical card possession, and residence in local authority housing are all very highly intercorrelated as might be expected (ranging from r= 0.755 to r= 0.844). Intercorrelations relating to low income and the former variables are somewhat lower in all cases, and family size and the percentage of Traveller children enrolled are lower again. However, all correlations may be regarded as substantial and are statistically significant, which is consistent with the idea that they are assessing different aspects of the same issue.

The second set of correlations of interest are those concerning student achievement. The fact that all correlations in Table 13 relating to achievement (see the upper left hand corner of the matrix) are significant suggests, for example, that if student achievement is high in 2nd class in a school, it is also likely to be high in 4th and 6th class. Within grade levels, the correlations between English and mathematics test scores are higher still (ranging from r= 0.718 to r= 0.741) depending on grade level. This is not surprising, as the same students provided both sets of scores and students who perform well in one area tend to perform well in others. However, the magnitude of the correlations found also serves to provide some validation for the use of our admittedly crude scale in the current analyses.

The third set of interrelationships is probably the most interesting, and concerns the association between students' home background factors and achievement. As Table 13 shows, all of the socioeconomic variables are negatively and significantly related to all of the educational outcome variables. This means that students from poorer home backgrounds tend to perform more poorly in reading and mathematics tests. Furthermore, some variables (e.g,. local authority housing) are particularly strongly related to educational outcome data. The relationship between achievement and home background appears to be consistently stronger in reading than in mathematics (i.e., it is found for all of the individual survey variables). When the individual variables are combined into an overall index, the correlations increase, suggesting that the index relates better to achievement than the constituent variables on their own.

Table 13. Correlations (all schools) between key survey variables in 2014 and English and mathematics achievement data* at three grade levels in 2014 (*N*=2,979).

	% Overall sten math 4th	% Overall sten math 2nd	% Overall sten Eng 6th	% Overall sten Eng 4th	% Overall sten Eng 2nd	% Unemp. 2014	% Med. Card 2014	% Local Auth. housing 2014	% Low Income 2014	% 5 or more children 2014	% Travs 2014	Overall Index
% Overall sten math 6th	.477**	.326**	.741**	.417**	.337**	-.315**	-.312**	-.405**	-.165**	-.163**	-.216**	-.367**
% Overall sten math 4th		.385**	.409**	.718**	.383**	-.298**	-.279**	-.379**	-.170**	-.147**	-.236**	-.330**
% Overall sten math 2nd			.300**	.352**	.723**	-.291**	-.267**	-.359**	-.165**	-.146**	-.230**	-.329**
% Overall sten Eng 6th				.509**	.363**	-.361**	-.366**	-.449**	-.223**	-.219**	-.255**	-.418**
% Overall sten Eng 4th					.434**	-.335**	-.318**	-.436**	-.191**	-.187**	-.281**	-.382**
% Overall sten Eng 2nd						-.377**	-.350**	-.429**	-.229**	-.179**	-.283**	-.405**
% Unemp. 2014							.844**	.782**	.503**	.395**	.349**	.903**
% Medical Card 2014								.755**	.533**	.399**	.315**	.895**
% Local Auth. Housing 2014									.447**	.351**	.415**	.904**
% Low Income 2014										.249**	.159**	.505**
% 5 or more children 2014											.336**	.488**
% Travellers 2014												.441**

*Data are based on standardised test results returned to the DES in 2014 from the administration of either the Drumcondra tests (DPRT and DPMT) developed at the ERC, or the Micra-t / Sigma-t tests developed at Mary Immaculate College.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Previous research in Ireland has shown home background and achievement to be more closely related in urban than in rural areas (Weir, 1999; Weir & Archer, 2005; Weir, Errity, & McAvinue 2015). With this in mind, a separate matrix of correlations was done for urban and rural schools. Table 14 shows that the pattern of correlations in urban schools is very similar to the overall pattern, but that the urban correlations are of a larger magnitude than those for schools overall, indicating stronger associations between all variables.

Table 14. Correlations in urban schools between key survey variables in 2014 and English and mathematics achievement data* at three grade levels in 2014 (*N*=1,136).

	% Overall sten math 4th	% Overal sten math 2nd	% Overall sten Eng 6th	% Overall sten Eng 4th	% Overall sten Eng 2nd	% Unemp. 2014	% Med. Card 2014	% Local Auth. housing 2014	% Low Income 2014	% 5 or more children 2014	% Travs 2014	Overall Index
% Overall sten math 6th	.633**	.541**	.799**	.596**	.555**	-.520**	-.493**	-.563**	-.318**	-.315**	-.286**	-.568**
% Overall sten math 4th		.562**	.587**	.767**	.577**	-.446**	-.423**	-.474**	-.262**	-.267**	-.267**	-.486**
% Overall sten math 2nd			.507**	.527**	.780**	-.419**	-.401**	-.453**	-.243**	-.243**	-.285**	-.473**
% Overall sten Eng 6th				.719**	.622**	-.579**	-.560**	-.617**	-.362**	-.396**	-.331**	-.623**
% Overall sten Eng 4th					.666**	-.540**	-.529**	-.585**	-.320**	-.334**	-.340**	-.591**
% Overall sten Eng 2nd						-.529**	-.525**	-.570**	-.324**	-.334**	-.367**	-.582**
% Unemp. 2014							.865**	.862**	.477**	.495**	.385**	.923**
% Medical Card 2014								.866**	.494**	.478**	.357**	.925**
% Local Auth. Housing 2014									.459**	.466**	.362**	.931**
% Low Income 2014										.275**	.155**	.478**
% 5 or more children 2014											.443**	.579**
% Travellers 2014												.447**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

This applies to the intercorrelations between all socioeconomic variables (bottom right hand corner), with the interrelationship between unemployment, medical card possession and local authority housing all approaching a correlation of *r*= 0.9. Furthermore, family size, and the percentage of Travellers enrolled

are more closely associated with the other background variables in urban settings. The intercorrelations involving outcome data (top left hand corner) are higher in urban schools also, suggesting a greater similarity between students on the basis of their achievements in urban schools than in schools generally. In terms of the relationship between home background factors and educational outcomes, local authority housing has the highest correlations (ranging from *r*= -.617 for 6th class English reading to *r*= -.453 for 2nd class mathematics). This is fairly closely followed by unemployment and medical card possession, both of which are closely associated with achievement levels. As was the case in the analysis involving all schools regardless of location, in all cases background variables are more closely related to achievement in reading than in mathematics. Again, the overall index is more highly correlated with achievement than are individual variables, although the local authority housing variable is a close second.

The final set of correlations involves rural schools, representing almost 2,000 schools nationally (Table 15). As Table 15 shows, the pattern is similar to those in the previous two tables. The associations between home background variables including unemployment, medical card possession, and local authority housing are strong (with correlations ranging from 0.587 to 0.795), although slightly lower than those in urban settings. The low income variable is also closely related to the former variables, and the correlations resemble those in urban settings. The correlations between the other survey variables concerning large families and the percentage of Traveller children enrolled are much lower in rural schools than in urban schools, but are, nonetheless, statistically significant in all cases. By far the largest differences between urban and rural schools manifest themselves in the correlations involving home background variables and achievement. Correlations between home background variables and those relating to educational outcomes are of a much smaller magnitude in rural schools than in schools overall, and particularly in comparison with urban schools. Correlations involving achievement data and unemployment, medical card possession and local authority housing, while all are negative, are of a very small magnitude (ranging from *r*= -.070 to a maximum of *r*= -.189). This compares to an equivalent range of correlations among urban schools of *r*= -.401 to a maximum of *r*=-.617). The association between student outcomes and the low income variable in rural schools is weaker still, with correlations ranging from *r*= 0.018 to *r*= -.102. Indeed, the latter is the only individual correlation to reach statistical significance. Finally, family size and percentage of Travellers enrolled are only very weakly related to student outcomes in rural schools. The correlations between the overall index and the educational outcome measures, while statistically significant in all cases, are of a small magnitude. In rural areas, unlike in urban areas, a knowledge of students' background characteristics is not a good predictor of their achievement levels.

Table 15. Correlations in rural schools between key survey variables in 2014 and English and mathematics achievement data* at three grade levels in 2014 (*N*=1,843).

	% Overall sten math 4th	% Overal sten math 2nd	% Overall sten Eng 6th	% Overall sten Eng 4th	% Overall sten Eng 2nd	% Unemp. 2014	% Med. Card 2014	% Local Auth. housing 2014	% Low Income 2014	% 5 or more children 2014	% Travs 2014	Overall Index
% Overall sten math 6th	.347**	.170**	.684**	.261**	.171**	-.070**	-.085**	-.096**	0.018	-0.041	-0.034	-.088**
% Overall sten math 4th		.259**	.253**	.671**	.240**	-.104**	-.088**	-.159**	-0.037	-0.047	-.146**	-.109**
% Overall sten math 2nd			.139**	.217**	.674**	-.120**	-.095**	-.150**	-0.051	-.071**	-.111**	-.131**
% Overall sten Eng 6th				.331**	.165**	-.096**	-.122**	-.102**	-0.045	-.082**	-.055*	-.119**
% Overall sten Eng 4th					.264**	-.084**	-.064*	-.135**	-0.019	-.064**	-.147**	-.093**
% Overall sten Eng 2nd						-.189**	-.149**	-.177**	-.102**	-.064**	-.125**	-.176**
% Unemp. 2014							.795**	.641**	.479**	.278**	.133**	.879**
% Medical Card 2014								.587**	.532**	.299**	.091**	.872**
% Local Auth. Housing 2014									.369**	.184**	.238**	.786**
% Low Income 2014										.195**	0.049	.496**
% 5 or more children 2014											.163**	.403**
% Travellers 2014												.226**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The limitations of the survey approach has sometimes led to the proposal that centrally available area-based socioeconomic data could be used as an alternative (or better) way of identifying schools for additional resources. A problem with this approach is that schools, to a greater or lesser extent, do not take all of their pupils from the area in which the school is located. Therefore, the area characteristics may be quite misleading in schools that take large numbers of students from outside their immediate catchment area. This phenomenon has been documented at post-primary level by Hannan, Smyth, McCullagh, O'Leary & McMahon, (1996), who reported that 50% of post-primary students did not attend the closest post-primary school. While, this is also an issue at primary level, there are no published data. However, data held by the ERC collected as part of the Study of Achievement in the

Irish Language (SAIL) study in 2002 may be used to get an estimate at primary level. In a school questionnaire, principals in a nationally representative sample of 211 schools that participated in the study were asked to 'estimate the percentage of pupils currently on roll in the school who attend your school rather than another school closer to their homes'. Among the 86 urban schools (that were not Gaelscoileanna) that provided a response, an average of 19.2% of pupils were thus classified. In rural areas, the propensity for pupils to enrol in a school that is not the closest to their home was found to be less than half of that in urban areas at 8.1%. In only one school, it was not an issue at all (the principal indicated that no pupils enrolled lived closer to another school). However, in another school, the principal indicated that 90% of pupils were in this category, while 15 principals put the figure at between 50 and 90%. This means that area-based measures alone, particularly in urban areas, will not accurately assess the socioeconomic characteristics of pupils enrolled in schools. Given that some features of the survey method are perceived as unsatisfactory (and likely to become even more so in future) it is important that alternative methods of assessing levels of disadvantage in schools are explored. The DES is currently examining alternatives to the survey methodology in the context of the review of the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (DES, 2005). One possibility involves the use of area-based data. This was considered in previous attempts to assess levels of disadvantage but rejected because many children attend schools outside the areas in which they live.

Summary and conclusion

There was a very high overall response rate of 96.4% to the survey. This is marginally below, but comparable with, the overall response rate of 97.0% for a similar survey of principals carried out in 2005. Responses to individual items in the questionnaire, however, were lower in 2014 than in 2005. On average, the percentage of missing responses was 4% in 2005 and 14% in 2014. On both occasions, medical card possession was the variable with which respondents experienced most difficulty, reflected in missing data rates of 11.7% and 28.1% in 2005 and 2014 respectively. While the quality assurance and appeals process following the survey in 2005 allowed principals to provide previously missing data after their initial submission, this would only account for a tiny amount of the disparity in missing values on single indicators between the two surveys.

There are several reasons why response rates to individual items reduced in 2014. For example, concerns generally about data protection issues have been increasing. In the period when the survey was being completed in schools, the ERC received calls from principals in which they reported a reluctance to ask about, or to survey, parents on personal issues such as medical card possession. Some pointed out that it was much more difficult to know in recessionary times who was in receipt of supports such as medical cards and unemployment benefit, because families that had been better off

in previous times were now also experiencing hardship. Many reported that they felt it was intrusive to seek out the information even if it would ultimately benefit the school. Whether a family was resident in local authority housing (in fact, more correctly, in housing supported by the state) was certainly less visible in 2014 than in 2005. Such housing now takes many forms, including families receiving rent allowance towards payment for rented accommodation, as well as residence in hotel, hostel, bed and breakfast, and direct provision accommodation.

Unsurprisingly, all but one of the averages on the socioeconomic variables increased between 2005 and 2014, the exception being the percentage of children from large families which decreased marginally. According to principals, unemployment increased among families served by schools from 17.3% to 29.4%, medical card possession rose from 28.1% to 37.1%, and residence in local authority housing rose from 18.4% to 25.6%. Factors which might not be expected to vary as much as the former indicators as a result of the economic downturn increased to a much lesser extent. For example, the percentages of lone-parent families and Traveller children increased only very slightly between 2005 and 2014.

In general, the survey values are in line with what would be expected based on data from other sources. For example, CSO data indicate that the percentage of the population from the Traveller community is 0.6% (CSO, 2012a). Our survey finding was somewhat higher at 1.6%, but that may be partly attributable to the fact that our data are aggregated to school level and relate only to families with primary school-going children. Similarly, the incidence of one-parent families in the general population is 18.3% (CSO, 2012b). The average percentage of such families according to the survey in 2014 is very similar at 18.1%. Data from the Key Trends in Health in Ireland report (Department of Health, 2014) indicated that 40.3% of the population had medical cards in 2013. Of those that provided a response to the item in the survey (and recall that this variable had the highest level of missing data), the average percentage of medical cards across all primary schools surveyed was not hugely different at 36.8%.

Levels of unemployment are much higher in our survey than in the population as a whole, according to independent data sources on the issue. According to our survey, the average school-level percentage of families in which the main breadwinner was unemployed in 2013/2104 was 29%. This is more than twice as high as the national figure of 12.3% published by the CSO for January 2014 (CSO, 2014). There is, however, evidence of higher unemployment rates among younger people (some of whom might be likely to have children attending primary school). Among those aged 15-19 the national average unemployment rate was 43% and for those aged 20-24 it was 26%, with the rate dropping to 14.5% for those aged 25-34. In light of these data, it is clear that the survey rate is still well above the

official rate, and indicates overestimation on the part of principals. Questions then arise about the reason for the discrepancy. A number of factors may be involved: a lack of knowledge on the part of principals; an inadvertent overestimation based on a very pessimistic or negative view of the economy as a whole; a deliberate attempt to inflate estimates; or a combination of some or all of these factors. However, without further data collection involving a detailed examination of returns from schools, it is not possible to say.

Urban schools had higher averages than rural schools on all indicators, with the biggest differences evident in the percentages of families resident in local authority housing and the percentage of lone-parent families. This is not surprising, as local authority housing, in particular, is often regarded as a more urban than rural characteristic (Weir & Archer, 2005). The use of lone-parent families as an indicator in rural areas has also been shown to be problematic (Weir, 1999). A further complication is the presence in the system of greater numbers of rural than urban primary schools. Almost 60% (59.5%) of surveyed schools surveyed in 2014 were located in rural areas compared with 40.5% in urban areas. This means that the reported averages are based on a greater number of small schools, although the absolute number of pupils in these schools is smaller than in urban schools. The ratio of pupils in rural to urban schools in our sample is approximately 2:1, with 332,634 pupils enrolled in schools in our urban sample compared with 178,585 pupils enrolled in schools in our rural sample.

Although there was a gap of nine years between the two surveys, there was a high degree of stability in terms of schools' socioeconomic profiles. Overall, the correlation between the combined six key background variables common to both surveys was $r = .72$. However, the correlation is higher when restricted to urban schools ($r = .78$), and much lower ($r = .48$) in smaller rural schools, presumably because the latter may be unduly impacted by the arrival or departure of families with particular socioeconomic profiles. When stability is examined according to whether schools were categorised into groups based on their level of disadvantage, almost two-thirds of schools were found to remain in the most disadvantaged category in 2014, and this pattern was even more pronounced for urban schools. Rural schools, on the other hand, were more likely to change their category, both at the most and least disadvantaged extremes. Urban schools in DEIS largely retained their place at the top of the rank order in 2014 (about 70% would have been identified as the most disadvantaged using the 2014 survey), but predictably there was more movement in the categorisation of rural schools. While some of the change in the rural and urban rank orders is due to changing socioeconomic profile, some is undoubtedly due to differences in the scale used in the current analyses and the impact of how missing data were treated. Further examination of returns from schools would be necessary to shed

light on the reasons for the changes, particularly those involving very discrepant categories on both occasions.

There were high correlations also between schools' data on individual survey variables in 2005 and 2014. In schools overall, residence in local authority housing was the most stable characteristic at *r*= .779 and large family size experiencing most change (*r*= .31). The magnitude of the correlations between individual variables was much greater in urban than in rural schools. For example, the most stable characteristic in both urban and rural schools between 2005 and 2014 was the percentage of Traveller children enrolled in schools. However, while the correlation in urban schools was *r*= .77, the rural equivalent was only *r*= .45.

The enduring relationship between home background factors and educational outcomes has been well documented. Previous studies in Ireland have described the close relationship between pupil outcomes and home background as measured by characteristics such as those featuring in our survey. Work on the evaluation of the DEIS programme has confirmed the strong relationship between socioeconomic background and outcomes in reading and mathematics (Weir & Denner, 2013) and the investigation of urban and rural differences in DEIS schools has described qualitative and quantitative differences in disadvantage based on location (Weir, Archer & Millar, 2009; Weir, Errity, & McAvinue, 2015). Analyses undertaken here confirm these findings, and indicate that the relationships between socioeconomic characteristics in the 2014 survey themselves are much weaker in rural than in urban schools, the relationship between educational outcomes in different areas and at different grade levels are much weaker in rural than in urban schools, and, most importantly, the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and student achievement is much weaker in rural than in urban schools.

For the last few decades, debates have surrounded the methods used to establish which schools had sufficiently high concentrations of disadvantage to warrant inclusion in schemes (e.g., Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2004; Kellaghan, Weir, ÓhUallachain, & Morgan, 1995; Weir, 1999; Weir & Archer, 2005). The absence of centrally held data on socioeconomic variables for primary schools (e.g., the number of medical card holders) has meant that it was necessary to rely on information supplied by schools using an application form, as in the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle in the 1990s, or by surveys of all schools (Giving Children an Even Break in 2000, and DEIS in 2005). In 2003, the Educational Disadvantage Committee noted "that information on socioeconomic indicators such as medical card possession is not readily available in most schools and that, as a result, many school principals are forced to estimate/guess the number of pupils in the relevant category. There is a

suspicion that some principals 'err on the side of caution'; while other principals do the opposite" (p.3).

Other issues that have featured in the debate include: the advantages of using more than one socioeconomic indicator; possible differences between the meaning of indicators in urban and rural settings as discussed earlier; differences in approaches to identification of schools at primary and post-primary levels; the difficulties created by the use of cut-off points (rather than sliding scales) in deciding whether a school is or is not allocated significant additional resources; and the arguments for and against using educational as well as socioeconomic measures in the assessment of disadvantage. One consistent outcome of the debate is agreement that using principals' estimates of socioeconomic indicators is probably an unsatisfactory method of identifying schools, but that it was less unsatisfactory than any other methods available.

While weaknesses in the survey method are acknowledged, it should be noted that despite them, the 2014 survey seemed to largely succeed in assessing student characteristics at school level. Even though response rates were not as high as hoped on individual items, the collective mass of data is useful in providing an overview of the social profile of schools, their relative position in relation to each other, and the relative stability of the indicators over time. The individual indicators behave as expected in terms of the way they are associated with educational outcome data, and in replicating patterns previously observed in urban and rural areas. In particular, the analyses involving outcome measures serve to validate the survey methodology in the sense that they each relate in very predicable ways to the individual survey items, and reflect previously noted differences by location.

A similar survey was conducted with post-primary schools at the same time as the primary one took place (Weir & Denner, forthcoming). More robust outcome data are available at post-primary level, and it will be possible to assess the strength of the home background and achievement relationship further using those data. An advantage of the data at second level is that there is a socioeconomic indicator (medical card possession) provided independently for all schools which can be used, among other things, to assess the validity of the survey data.

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Appendix 1

(Questionnaire)

Primary School Profile Questionnaire 2014

School Name _____ Roll Number _____

School Address _____

Principal _____

Contact Numbers Landline:_____ Mobile:_____

Chair of Board of Management_____

Dear Principal,

As the accompanying letter from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) explains, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) has been asked to carry out a survey of all primary and post-primary schools to collect data pertaining to the social context of each school. These data will assist in the development of an educational profile for each school, which may be used by the DES Special Education Section to inform future decisions regarding resource allocation.

The survey contains 4 questions. Questions 1 and 2 pertain to basic information about your school. Questions 3 and 4 seek estimates of the socioeconomic characteristics of your students and levels of parental involvement respectively. Please note that your responses to **Questions 3 and 4** should be based on the students enrolled in **the previous school year (2013-2014).** Furthermore, the particular students to whom you should refer varies depending on the size of your school.

- **If the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was fewer than 160 students**, you should base your answers to Questions 3 and 4 on ***all of these students.***

- **If the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was 160 students or more,** please base your answers to Questions 3 and 4 on the ***students enrolled in second class at that time*** **or if there were no second class students in your school in September 2013, pupils in the *next most junior class in the school.***

We appreciate that information about the socioeconomic characteristics of students' families is not always readily available. However, as outlined in the accompanying letter from the DES, it may be important in establishing schools' levels of need. We are confident that you will make every effort to supply the most accurate estimate possible. In making decisions about students and their characteristics, you may wish to consult school records and talk to teachers and perhaps others in the community. We ask that you retain all notes, records, lists etc. that you use when completing the questionnaire in anonymised form. While we do not want students' names returned, you may be asked to produce any lists used as part of a more detailed examination of your return.

Please note that it is important that we receive a completed questionnaire from every school in order to ensure that the appropriate resource allocation is made. Upon completion of the questionnaire, please return it in the prepaid envelope provided by **Friday, 26th September, 2014.** Should you have any queries, contact information is available on the final page. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Archer

1. What is the location of your school? ***(Tick one only)***

NOTE: Location categories are based on those used by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

(a) The city of Dublin or its suburbs, or the cities of Cork, Galway, Waterford or Limerick	❑
(b) A city or large town – apart from those specified above (population of 10,000 or more)	❑
(c) A town (population 5,000 to 9,999)	❑
(d) A town (population 1,500 to 4,999)	❑
(e) A village or rural community (population 1,000 to 1,499)	❑
(f) A village or rural community (population 500 to 999)	❑
(g) A village or rural community (population under 500)	❑

2.

(a)	**What was the total enrolment of your school on September 30th, 2013?** *Please note that if your total enrolment in September 2013 was fewer than 160 students, this figure will be used as the denominator for the purposes of calculating percentages for Questions 3 & 4.*	**Students**
(b)	**How many of these students were in 2nd class (or if there was no 2nd class in your school in September 2013, in the next most junior class)?** *Please note that if your total enrolment in September 2013 was 160 students or greater, this figure will be used as the denominator for all parts of your answers to Question 3.*	**Students**
(c)	**If your responses are NOT based on all students in the school or in 2nd class, please specify the grade level used.**	**Grade Level**

3. In questions 3(a-i), your estimates of the socioeconomic characteristics of the students in your school are sought. *Please remember that if the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was fewer than 160 students, you should base your answers to the following questions on* ***all students enrolled in the school at that time****. If the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was 160 students or more, please base your answers on the* ***students who were in second class*** *(or in the grade specified in Q2c)* ***at that time.*** *For each characteristic, please indicate as accurately as possible the number of students with the specified characteristic.*

Of the total number of students enrolled in your school (or in second class or the grade specified in Q2) in September 2013, how many	**Number of students**
(a) live in a family in which the main breadwinner is unemployed? *(If none, enter '0')*	
(b) live in a one-parent family? (This includes one parent, separated and widowed families.) *(If none, enter '0')*	
(c) live in a family that has a full medical card? *(If none, enter '0')* **NOTE:** Count only those who have a full medical card and not those with a 'GP only' medical card.	
(d) live in local authority accommodation/housing? *(If none, enter '0')* **NOTE:** It may be impossible to distinguish between local authority tenants and families that have acquired their home under a local authority tenant purchase scheme and, therefore, you should not try to do so. However, families that purchased their home from a tenant purchaser should not be counted, where such families can be identified. Some Local Authorities purchase houses in private housing estates and offer these houses to families on their waiting list. Such families should be counted. Families living in private rented accommodation, but who are in receipt of rent allowance, should be counted.	

(e) are in a family with five or more children? *(If none, enter '0')*		
(f) live in a family that is dependent mainly on social welfare payments? *(If none, enter '0')*		
(g) live in a family with low income *(e.g., those likely to be in receipt of supplementary welfare benefits such as Family Income Supplement, Farm Assist, or Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance)? (If none, enter '0')* **NOTE**: Please exclude those students counted in (f).		
(h) are members of the Travelling Community? *(If none, enter '0')*		
(i) have English as an additional language (EAL)? *(If none, enter '0')*		
If possible, please indicate how many of these are at Levels 0, A1 and A2 of English as measured by the primary and post-primary assessment kits available on the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie)? **NOTE:** If you do not have the information, please write NA in the '**Number'** column.	**Level**	**Number**
	0	
	A1	
	A2	

4. In questions 4(a-d), your estimates of the characteristics of students and levels of parental involvement in your school are sought. *Please remember that if the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was fewer than 160 students, you should base your answers to the following questions on **all students enrolled in the school at that time**. If the total enrolment of your school in September 2013 was 160 students or more, please base your answers on the **students who were in second class** (or in the grade specified in Q2c) **at that time.** For each characteristic, please indicate as accurately as possible the percentage of students with the specified characteristic.*

Of the students enrolled in your school (or in second class or the grade specified in Q2) in September 2013:	**Percentage of students**
(a) What percentage of students was unable to participate fully or effectively in school through a combination of any of the following factors: regularly came to school late, without adequate nutrition, without books/materials for class, too tired to take part in school? *(If none, enter '0')*	**%**
(b) For what percentage of students did at least one parent or guardian take an active part in their child's education by attending parent-teacher meetings regularly? *(If none, enter '0')*	**%**
(c) For what percentage of students did at least one parent or guardian support the school by, for example, volunteering to take part in after school activities, volunteering to be involved in the work of the school such as assisting in classrooms, helping with the library, or showing an active interest in the school's parent council and/or board of management? *(If none, enter '0')*	**%**
(d) For what percentage of students did at least one parent or guardian show evidence of engaging in their child's learning at home by supporting their child with homework and/or providing and encouraging learning-related activities? *(If none, enter '0')*	**%**

Please use this space if you wish to comment on the process of completing this questionnaire, and/or any difficulties you may have encountered.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Signature of Principal: _____

Please return by 26th September, 2014
using the prepaid envelope supplied to:

Educational Research Centre
St Patrick's College, Dublin 9

CONTACT INFORMATION:

For queries, please call **Bridget Dooley** on either **(01) 8065233** or **(01) 8065242.**

These are dedicated phone lines which are open from 1st-26th September.

Alternatively, send an email to **sesp@erc.ie** and we will respond as soon as possible.

In the event that the above dedicated phone lines are busy, please contact either

Darina Errity on (01) 8065209 or **Eva Moran on (01) 8065219**.

Thank you for the time and effort spent on completing this questionnaire.