

The DEIS Grant: Additional Funding or Keeping up with the Joneses? An Analysis of DEIS School Funding in the Context of Voluntary Contributions

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Submitted: May 2022

This thesis is submitted to the school of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Social Policy and Practice.

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Abstract

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provides targeted supports to schools serving disadvantaged communities, including an additional financial allocation known as the DEIS grant. The rationale behind this grant is that additional resources are necessary for schools in disadvantaged communities to achieve similar outcomes to their non-DEIS counterparts. This research examines the degree to which this grant does in fact represent additional resources for DEIS schools, when we account for the family donations requested by schools to supplement their income, commonly referred to as voluntary contributions. Taking post-primary schools in South Dublin as a case study, this research presents a digital documentary analysis of publicly available data, finding that non-DEIS schools have a significantly greater capacity to raise funds through voluntary contributions when compared to schools with DEIS status, even controlling for payment rates. This phenomenon is compounded by state tax relief offered to schools with the highest voluntary contributions, which this research has shown are more likely to have non-DEIS status. The study concludes that the DEIS grant can more accurately be considered a policy tool which seeks to mitigate the significant financial resources available to non-DEIS schools, rather than one which puts DEIS schools ahead financially.

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Chapter One - Introduction and Overview

1.1. Introduction

The manner in which schools are funded has been called complex and opaque (Darmody and Smyth, 2013; Fleming and Harford, 2021). Repeated calls for additional research and examination of policy in this area have only become more pertinent in the context of the increased human and financial resources allocated to schools across Ireland by the Department of Education (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston, 2015). The research presented in this dissertation addresses these themes while paying particular attention to the additional funding allocated to schools in Ireland through a targeted policy initiative known as the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) programme. Under the scheme, additional funding is provided to schools serving disadvantaged communities (DES, 2005), however little attention has been paid to the adequacy of this funding, particularly in the context of non-DEIS schools private fundraising capacity, specifically through means such as family donations requested by schools, commonly referred to as voluntary contributions (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

With this in mind, this chapter lays out an overview of this dissertation, an examination of school funding in what can be called state sponsored or public post-primary schools, or alternatively, non-fee-paying secondary schools. In doing so, this research particularly examines secondary schools based in disadvantaged geographical areas serving communities with lower socio-economic backgrounds as designated and defined by the Department of Education's Delivering Equality in Schools programme (DES, 2005). Importantly, it considers the additional financial resources allocated under the DEIS programme alongside the private fundraising capacity available to schools in the form of voluntary contributions, these monetary gifts/donations requested from the parents of school pupils. In the first instance, this chapter introduces the DEIS programme and lays out other relevant policy in the education landscape (1.2). It then explains the rationale behind the undertaking to complete this research (1.3), before outlining the research question in detail (1.4) and finally summarising the remaining dissertation.

1.2. DEIS, Relevant Policy and Context

Secondary schools in Ireland can be separated into three distinctive categories depending on their governance structure (DES, 2004). These structures influence the manner in which non-

fee-paying secondary schools receive funding from the Department of Education with the allocation of funding depending on the individual schools' ownership, organisation, and management structure (Darmody and Smyth 2013). Voluntary secondary schools, as they are known, are generally privately owned and managed, for example by religious organisations such as the Edmund Rice Schools Trust or other private patrons such as Educate Together (DES, 2004). Vocational schools are considered to be those under direct control and management of the state. In practice this means that the state's national network of local Education and Training Boards undertake to manage schools under their legislated responsibility to support the education and training sector in Ireland (Ireland, 2013). Finally, community and comprehensive schools could be considered to be a combination of the aforementioned with representatives from private organisations, local community groups and state bodies commonly involved in the governance of such schools (DES, 2004). As stated, these schools are each funded under a different mechanism. Darmody and Smyth (2013), have outlined the details of each of these mechanisms in their work. Namely, voluntary schools are funded on a per capita basis in relation to the number of students enrolled, vocational schools are allocated an annual block grant from the state while community and comprehensive schools submit a requested budget directly to the Department of Education.

Additional funding is also allocated to schools which serve communities considered disadvantaged. Under this policy the DEIS programme was established in 2005 to identify and support such schools with an ambitious series of interventions to combat educational disadvantage. The programme amalgamated many of the earlier measures taken at the individual and school level. Since the 1960s education policy in Ireland has moved towards addressing educational disadvantage (Fleming and Harford, 2014), with an explicit mention and goal to support greater equality in our education system since the Education Act in 1998. From this point on successive governments, through the Department of Education, recognised that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds needed additional support to overcome the barriers they faced in education at both an individual level and at the school level. For that reason, as part of the DEIS programme, additional resources were directed towards schools serving disadvantaged communities, as identified by the Department of Education. At its origin, specifically the programme translated into an additional €40 million investment, exclusively ringfenced for schools serving disadvantaged communities, with this

constituting a combination of greater financial and human resource supports (DES, 2005). Specifically, it included an additional cash grant allocated on a per capita basis, beyond the core funding provided through the three mechanisms outlined above. In the earliest tranche of funding €1 million was ringfenced for this purpose for the 150 secondary schools selected to be part of the programme (DES, 2005). An analyse of the global numbers from the initial scheme gives an indication as to the financial resources provided on a per capita basis. €1 million was ringfenced for additional financial support for schools taking part in the programme in addition to the other measures implemented such as establishing additional career guidance posts and lower student teacher ratios.

$$\frac{\text{Funding}}{\text{No. Schools}} \div \text{Average number of pupils per school} \sim \text{Funding per student}$$

$$\frac{\text{€1 Million}}{125 \text{ schools}} \div 453 \text{ pupils}^* = \text{€17.66 per student}$$

* Mean average of Post - Primary Schools for the 2005/2006 School Year (DES, 2006)

It must be acknowledged that this figure only represents one specific part of the funding allocated under the DEIS scheme, the additional financial resources available to schools to fund projects at their own discretion. There are of course additional benefits provided under the programme, as outlined in chapter 2.2, such as enhanced guidance provision, access to the schoolbooks scheme and other human resource supports. However, the additional funding aspect of the programme has been identified by both academics and practitioners as important (Weir et al., 2014). In the first instance, the additional funding component of the programme is the most widely utilised by schools. Weir et al. (2014) point out that not all schools engage with every element of the programme, except for in the case of additional funding. In a survey conducted as part of this research, principals also identified this funding as one of the most important aspects of the programme, second only to the schoolbook scheme.

Despite the significant investment in the programme and continued backing from policymakers and government as seen by the programmes recent expansion (DES, 2022), little

attention has been paid to the actual resourcing of the DEIS plan with critics arguing that the resourcing has been insufficient (Fleming and Harford, 2022). Specifically, academics such as Fleming (2020), have argued the topic of funding has never been adequately addressed by policymakers with the question remaining as to whether DEIS schools are provided with the level of funding necessary to significantly address educational disadvantage. This question is especially pertinent given the mixed results and limited success of the programme described within the literature (McAvinue and Weir, 2015; Gilleece et al., 2020). In fact, it has been explicitly criticised by evaluators of the programme, finding a lack of consideration as to potential costs and funding necessary to achieve the plan's objectives (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

This discussion has been especially limited in the context of voluntary contributions in non-fee-paying schools. In recent years schools have been able to capitalise on their own private fundraising capacity, increasingly in the form of such contributions (Darmody and Smyth, 2013; O'Halloran, 2019). Under such school policies, parents are asked to make a financial contribution towards the cost of their child's education. However, it must be noted that there is a statutory obligation on schools to highlight that such a contribution is indeed voluntary and that this fact is explicitly stated in their formal admission policy (Ireland, 2018). Notwithstanding the latter, this feature of the Irish education system has made comparisons in school funding even more difficult, due to differences in the level of contributions requested and the varying successful collection rates found across schools as demonstrated by Darmody and Smyth (2013). Although they focus their attention on the variation across schools based on governance structures, they also point to differences across DEIS and non-DEIS schools. With this work suggesting that non-DEIS schools have a greater capacity to fundraise through the mechanism of voluntary contributions, it further raises the question as to whether the additional funding allocated to schools in disadvantaged communities is adequate and to what degree DEIS schools actually have additional financial resources at their disposal, as envisaged by the original programme policy (DES, 2005).

1.3. Rationale

That question, around the adequacy or otherwise of DEIS funding in the context of voluntary contributions, forms a large part of the rationale behind this research. DEIS schools receive more funding in recognition of the additional challenges faced by individual pupils and schools

in disadvantaged communities, however, the existing literature suggests that DEIS schools are at a disadvantage in terms of their own fundraising capacity due to their locality. Such schools, scholars argue, are less likely to seek voluntary contributions and where they do so, they receive smaller donations from fewer families (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). Smyth, McCoy and Kingston (2015) have stated that this is the case due to a lack of financial and social resources in the communities served by such schools.

Furthermore, authors have found the manner in which schools are funded generally to be lacking in transparency (Fleming and Harford, 2021). The issue has been considered by policymakers for some years now with an internal structure established within the Department of Education to analyse the states approach to school funding (Blackstock, 1999). The recommendations of this group, widely seen as mechanisms to create greater transparency and fairness, were never implemented (Darmody and Smyth 2013; Fleming and Harford, 2021). As has already been mentioned and will be further discussed throughout chapter 2, this lack of transparency continued into the formation of the DEIS policy.

Additionally, there are a number of gaps in the literature on the topics DEIS funding, and voluntary contributions (Smyth, McCoy and Kinston, 2015). The discussion on whether or not the DEIS policy is adequately resourced has been limited in an academic context. Similarly, the extent to which voluntary contributions are used by schools to raise funds and the degree to which such contributions vary is also in need of further attention (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). Specifically, there has been little research completed linking the topics of DEIS funding and voluntary contributions. This fact has been lamented by scholars, with specific recommendations given in the evaluation of the programme, to investigate school funding from this perspective (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). This dissertation hopes to contribute towards filling that gap in the literature.

1.4. The Research Question

With that goal in mind, this research dissertation will seek to explore the question, 'accounting for voluntary contributions in non-fee-paying secondary schools, to what degree can DEIS school funding be considered to constitute additional resources?'. In doing so, it aims to contribute towards the social policy literature on the topics of educational disadvantage, DEIS policy, and school funding models, as well as providing policy makers with an insight into these topics with a new, evidence-based perspective. The question as to whether school

funding is adequate generally, particularly with regard to the DEIS programme, has been somewhat discussed in the literature already (Fleming, 2020). However, in the context of mixed results from the policy intervention (McAvinue and Weir, 2015; Gilleece et al., 2020), it is important to also ask, to what extent this additional funding provided under the programme, is in fact additional, as described in policy discourse (DES, 2005).

Taking the geographical sample of post-primary secondary schools in South Dublin (n=69), this research employs a desk based quantitative approach, collating data from publicly available sources, school websites, published policies and online payment portals. In doing so it will examine the extent to which voluntary contributions are employed by secondary schools as a mechanism to raise funds, and as such it will analyse the variation found between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in order to compare the level of funding available to schools across these two groups.

In addressing the above question, this dissertation has been divided into a number of structured chapters. These chapters include the following.

Chapter two situates the research question in the wider body of current literature. An extensive literature review has framed this study, providing context and influencing the methodology employed.

Chapter three describes that methodology, outlining the research design used, ethical considerations and identifying the limitations of the approach used.

Chapter four then presents the results and findings of the study, analysing both the DEIS grant, voluntary contributions, and the differences in such contributions across DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

Chapter five then offers a discussion of these findings, relating them to both the original research question and the existing literature.

Finally, chapter six concludes this dissertation by offering a reflection on these findings and the research process more generally, while presenting a series of policy recommendations emanating from this study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

It is important to place the above research question within the context of the existing academic literature on the topic. For that reason, this chapter outlines findings from an extensive literature review covering the topics of state school funding, educational inequality, and the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) Programme. Firstly, the chapter outlines the wider policy context of this research (2.1.), presenting a brief overview of the development of education policy in Ireland. Attention is then paid to providing a deeper analysis of the origins and delivery of policy as it relates to educational disadvantage and specifically the DEIS programme (2.2.). It then summarises the background and rationale behind the programme as presented by policymakers and academics in the literature (2.3.). Finally, it reviews educational policy as it pertains to school funding and analyses the existing literature on fundraising through school-based voluntary contributions, relating the findings to the DEIS school programme (2.4.).

2.2. The Policy Context

Fleming and Harford (2021) have noted that a large proportion of the existing education policy literature has attempted to document and trace the history of significant policy developments (Coolahan, 1981; O'Connor, 1986; Clancy, 1999). However, it has become more common for the attention of scholars to turn towards evaluating and critiquing specific policy interventions (Weir, Mills and Ryan, 2002; Smyth, McCoy & Kingston, 2015; Gilleece et al., 2020). For example, there is a large body of evidence, which will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter, highlighting the prevalence of educational disadvantage at both the individual and, school or community level, finding that the responding policies have had mixed success to date in addressing this inequality. Many scholars have, at least in part, pointed to a lack of resourcing in explaining these results. More generally, beyond specific interventions, school funding models have been criticised by academics for their lack of transparency and consistency (Fleming and Harford, 2021). This is especially the case when we expand the discussion to include school voluntary contributions (Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

It could be said that the original architecture of the Irish Education system was inherited from the British administration, with the catholic church retaining a prominent and influential role

throughout this transition (O’Buachalla, 1985). Even with the forming of a new Irish constitution in 1937, education remained to be seen as largely within the domain of the church, with the state’s role in assisting rather than providing education (Fleming, 2020). It was not until many years later that this changed. In fact, for this reason the 1960s have been characterised as one of the most transformative periods in Irish educational policy (O’Connor, 1986). For post-primary schools in particular, it represented a watershed moment with the manifestation of greater strategy and state involvement (Fleming and Harford, 2014). One of the most significant milestones in this development was the introduction of the free education scheme in 1967 by Minister O’Malley, which saw the widening of educational opportunity beyond those that could afford it (O’Connor, 1986).

Just as this period has been celebrated, the elimination of third level fees in 1995 was similarly seen as an important step towards greater access to education. Then in 1998 the Irish state committed itself to greater equality in our education system with the enactment of the Education Act, seeking to meet the needs of students from all backgrounds, irrespective of social class and other factors (Ireland, 1998). Importantly, it specifically recognised the role that educational disadvantage plays and its negative cyclical impacts. The espoused goal of greater equality in education was then later manifested in other policy developments, including in international treaties and agreements, for example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN General Assembly, 2015). The equality objective remains central in educational, political, and policy discourse, as similar commitments have since been made in the most recent Programme for Government (2020), and indeed with the recent announcement from the Department of Education expanding supports for schools operating in areas of educational disadvantage (DES, 2022).

Two specific periods are worth noting due to their significant impact on the context of educational policy. In the first instance, the financial crisis of 2008 was a tumultuous time for education in Ireland (Faller, 2008). The resulting recession and austerity policies had many effects, including widening inequalities (Dukleow and Considine, 2017; Doorley, Callan, and Savage, 2021). It meant that those already experiencing educational disadvantage were likely to be facing greater barriers due to loss of income, unemployment, and cuts to social transfer payments (Watson et al., 2014; Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). Schools also faced challenges, as all publicly funded institutions and organisations came under pressure to reduce costs. There

was a need for the State to operate on a reduced budget. This has had lasting impacts to the point where many of the more recent ‘increases’ in educational funding have been characterised by academics and in particular, education practitioners as restorative rather than additional (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

The second, more recent period, has been the COVID-19 pandemic. It saw the longest mandated school closures in the history of the state and has had profound impacts on the educational landscape and young people more generally (Darmody, Smyth, and Russell, 2020). The effect on teaching and learning through staff and student absence, school closures, and online learning has been significant (Devitt et al., 2020; Growing Up in Ireland, 2021). It has meant that many of the inequalities in our education system have been exacerbated with scholars finding that DEIS schools were harder hit by school closures and distance learning (Mohan et al., 2020). This was the case due to both the digital divide and access to adequate technology (Devitt et al., 2020), and the breakdown of hard-won relationships with disadvantaged children and young people (Bray et al., 2021).

2.3. The DEIS Programme

In 2005, the government of Ireland set about establishing an ambitious programme of supports for schools which would combat the barriers faced by students as a result of socio-economic disadvantage (DES, 2005). From a legislative perspective, this ambition rested on the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act of 1998 (Section 32, p. 32), in defining it in terms of the ‘impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools’. The policy direction resulted in the creation of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), School Support Programme. The programme unified pre-existing, evaluated supports and interventions such as Early Start (Educational Research Centre, 1998), Giving Children an Even Break (Weir, 2004), the Support Teacher Project (Inspectorate and Psychological Service of the Department of Education, 1998), Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (Ryan, 1994) and the School Completion Programme (Weir, Mills and Ryan, 2002).

At the time, it constituted an overhaul and unification of educational policy with regard to disadvantage, from preschool through to secondary school, effecting children and young people aged 3-18 years old (Fleming and Harford, 2021). At the primary school level, supports

vary across schools (DES, 2005). However, in general, the support includes lower teacher student ratios, greater capitation grants and access to the schoolbooks grant programme. Also at primary school level, the DEIS programme has made a distinction between urban and rural disadvantage, with those in urban areas further separated into 'Band 1', the most disadvantaged, and 'Band 2' schools. The introduction of the programme saw class sizes reduced in Urban Band 1 schools, while other supports such as the School Meals and School Completion Programmes, and greater access to professional development were rolled out (DES, 2005). At second level education, this meant additional supports in the form of supplementary funding, the resourcing of a whole-school literacy and numeracy strategy, the development of specific planning and target-setting frameworks as well as a number of other curriculum-based supports (DES, 2005). It also meant that DEIS schools would be mandated to provide the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum (Fleming and Harford, 2021).

By 2005, the programme served 19% of all primary schools and 26% of all secondary schools (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston, 2015). At the time of its entablement, the programme meant an additional €40 million investment, exclusively ringfenced for schools serving disadvantaged communities. The initial policy broadly breaks the package of supports into additional staffing and additional financial supports, beyond the core funding already provided to all recognised schools in the state (DES, 2005). It amalgamated the aforementioned programmes and resulted in a whole-school approach to tackling educational disadvantage. For example, in second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage the programme meant:

- enhanced guidance counselling provision
- provision for school library and librarian support (will be extended to the 50 SSP schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage over five years extension to further SSP schools will be considered subsequently)
- access to Junior Certificate School Programme (and literacy/numeracy supports developed by building on existing measures under the JCSP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and associated staffing and funding supports
- additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the

establishment, development, and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes

- access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level
- access to Home/School/Community Liaison services (including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, Reading for Fun and Maths for Fun)
- access to a range of supports (both academic and non-academic, and including after school and holiday-time supports) for young people, with the best practices identified through an evaluation of the School Completion Programme being incorporated into cluster-level action plans
- access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level
- access to planning supports
- access to a range of professional development supports
- eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme (DES, 2005, Pg. 10).

2.4. Programme Rationale: The need to act

The programme is premised on the notion that to see students overcome educational obstacles, faced due to their socio-economic status, additional resources are necessary and must be provided by the state (Kellaghan et al., 1995). The policy is framed by a strong body of literature.

The barriers evident in terms of accessing education generally, and those present in the Irish context are well documented (Kellaghan et al., 1995; Weir et al., 2005; Doyle et al., 2021). For example, researchers across the social science disciplines have long considered and continue to cite financial, social, and cultural capital to be explanatory factors in predicting access to and worthwhile participation in education (Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, 1974; Hannon, 2020). In the Irish context, such considerations were first made with regard to formal policymaking in 1966, as part of the Investment in Education Report (DES, 1966), incidentally, the first OECD review of national education policies. The report found that the educational performance of children was closely linked to their social background. Family income played a role but also

the cultural value and significance placed on education in the family, finding for example that the children of teachers were disproportionately represented at third level education.

Prior to the formulation of the DEIS programme, two bodies had been set up to support the department in reviewing existing interventions and policy, the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Educational Disadvantage Forum. The influence of the committee can be seen in the review and resulting changes and formalisation of methodologies in assigning DEIS status to schools (Weir and Archer, 2005). More importantly for the purposes of this study, the work of the committee had a role in manifesting changes in policy discourse which had occurred during the 1980s (Weir et al., 2005). There was a shift away from the policy goal of increasing the provision of education more generally, as was the case in the two decades prior, towards a targeted funding model to tackle educational disadvantage (Fleming and Harford, 2021). It is noteworthy that such an approach is common internationally, with states such as France and the United States employing similar policies (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Such work, supported by the Educational Research Centre (Weir et al., 2005), was central to the development of the DEIS programme (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015), laying out the domestic and international literature available at the time.

Also prior to the establishing of the DEIS school model, Patrick Clancy (1999) wrote that the class differences found across higher education in Ireland represented a cumulative process with disadvantage experienced early on, well before students actually entered third level education, representing a barrier to such education. He showed that differences in third level participation across communities were driven by students' parents' socio-economic status, but also that the impact was evident in terms of early school leaving at second level. Successive reports, completed more recently, by the Higher Education Authority have shown that these disparities across income and social class persist, for example within the Progress Review of the National Access Plan (2018) and academic literature such as Doyle et al. (2021).

The existing literature shows that educational inequality has many consequences for those on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum including negatively impacting employment prospects and health outcomes while even increasing the propensity for criminality (Smyth and McCoy 2009). It also shows that that impact is lasting, influencing children's life-trajectory in the long run (Smyth, 2018) and indeed that these effects are passed on generationally (Frawley, 2014). As such literature emerged, it gave renewed impetus to the Department of

Education to act to address educational inequality, building a case for support with regard to increasing the level of state intervention in the area. Notwithstanding, what we might call the pragmatic reasons for a new policy direction, other scholars such as Baker et. al (2009, Pg. 141) have argued, in the first instance, that the need to address educational inequality is based on education's own intrinsic value, and secondarily because "it is indispensable in achieving other human rights" and in addressing other forms of social disadvantage.

2.4.1. Shaping new interventions

The aforementioned work of the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Educational Disadvantage Forum, alongside the Irish body of literature going back to the 1960s was important in demonstrating a need for the government to act, not just in terms of the DEIS programme but earlier school supports. However, much of this was driven by a recognition of the impact of educational disadvantage on the individual, despite there also being a need to look at the school from a holistic standpoint (Sofroniou, Archer and Weir, 2014). In fact, the earlier landscape and design of policy interventions within the Irish context demonstrates this understanding. These interventions were largely conceptualised in response to individual aspects of educational inequality, for example the Early Start programme was aimed at improving language skills (Kelly and Kellaghan, 1999) while the Home School Community Liaison programme was targeted at increasing parental involvement in their children's education (Ryan, 1994). This approach was criticised by reviews carried out by both the Educational Disadvantage Forum (2003) and the Comptroller and Auditor General (2006) for their fragmented nature.

Specifically, the Educational Disadvantage Forum (2003) took issue with the treatment of educational inequality in isolation from other issues. Alongside the Educational Disadvantage Committee, it recommended a renewed approach which would abandon the prevailing approach of ad hoc project-based policymaking. They argued that educational disadvantaged would be better alleviated by tackling disadvantage at the aggregate rather than at the micro level, with targeted funding. The Comptroller and Auditor General (2006) agreed from both a cost-effectiveness and consistency argument. As such, the development of the DEIS programmes interventions took a more integrated and holistic approach, drawing on literature which sought to understand the effects of educational disadvantage at the school and aggregate level.

When we take the analysis from the individual micro level to the aggregate community level, the findings from the research become even more stark. Authors such as Sofroniou, Archer and Weir (2014) have demonstrated what they call a 'multiplier effect', what others have also referred to as the 'social context effect'. They argue that the social context in which a school operates is paramount, as the negative educational impact of factors such as poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion is compounded when large numbers of students from a similarly disadvantaged background attend the same school. The scholars found that literacy skills tend to be lower in schools with a higher proportion of students coming from families with medical cards, even when controlling for each individual student's medical card status.

It is interesting to point out that the international literature has taken a less assertive view on this matter. The international research has argued that the impact of the 'multiplier effect' on student's school experience is inconclusive, with studies generally disagreeing. For example, Reynolds and Teddlie (2000), lay out this disagreement in their study of school effectiveness, analysing the experiences within the UK, Australia, North America and, the global south from a comparative perspective. Other studies have focused on each of these specific contexts individually (Rutter, 1979; Perry and McConney 2010). However, with regard to the Irish education system, scholars have taken a much stronger stance with multiple research studies coalescing and finding the multiplier effect to be significant. For example, research based on the Growing Up in Ireland survey has indicated a negative relationship between socio-economic status and reading and mathematics scores, beyond which can be explained by individual ability (McCoy et al., 2014). The negative relationship between DEIS schools and test scores holds even when controlling for factors such as parents' education level, class, and income. The social mix of the community served by a school has also been shown to impact on school attendance, stress levels and early school leaving, again controlling for each individual's own socio-economic status (Smyth, 1999). Smyth (2018) has also pointed to differences in school practices driven by the social class mix of the general school population which she has found to reinforce inequality in the education system, for example an increased propensity to stream classes by ability and a tendency to do so at an earlier age. This literature formed part of the initial rationale for introducing interventions at the school level through the DEIS programme (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003).

In order to combat this effect, the DEIS programme was established. It's many different aspects, each combine to create a school-level intervention rather than one targeted at the individual, as had been the case previously with the disjointed supports criticised by the Educational Disadvantage Forum (2003) for its limited impact, and by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2006) from a value-for-money perspective. A novel characteristic of the programme was the embedding of a certain amount of flexibility. Importantly, principals were given 'additional supplementary financial support' to resource their schools (DES, 2005). As actors with local knowledge on the ground, they were perhaps viewed best placed to implement any auxiliary interventions at the school level. As part of the initial policy, the decision was made that €1 million would be ringfenced for this purpose. The amount was to be dispersed among the initial 150 secondary schools involved in the programme based on the level of disadvantage measured in the school community (DES, 2005).

2.5. Additional School Funding

Importantly, this funding is additional to the general grant given to the secondary schools across the country (DES, 2005). It does not affect each schools' core funding from the state which they would have otherwise previously received. It is worth noting that this fact has been stressed by actors in discourse around the DEIS programme. Since 2005, efforts have been made to ensure that these resources are framed as 'additional' and understood to be so. In the first instance, this can be seen in the Minister's foreword to the original DEIS policy (DES, 2005). In doing so, the programme can be conceptualised as support over and above that given to non-DEIS schools.

The issue of school funding has been an area in need of additional research more widely. Generally, state supports to schools take the form of financial resources and human resources, covering running costs and providing teaching staff. This is most often done on a per capita basis. However, the manner in which schools are funded has been criticised as opaque and lacking in transparency (Fleming and Harford, 2021). Traditionally, the allocation of financial support has been difficult to assess as it varies depending on the individual schools' ownership, organisation and management (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). These authors cite the three categories used to describe the governance of Irish schools as voluntary, vocational, and community and comprehensive.

Darmody and Smyth (2013), alongside other researchers such as Walsh (1999), have described the distinctions between such schools in terms of the manner in which they are funded. Much of the difficulty lies in the fact that each of these categories of schools are allocated financial support through separate funding mechanisms (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). For example, privately owned and managed voluntary schools are funded on a per capita basis dependent on the number of students enrolled, while vocational schools, those held under the trusteeship of the state through the local Education and Training Boards network, are funded through a set block grant. Additional distinctions can then be made when we consider community and comprehensive schools, regarded as a combination of the above in terms of their governance, submit a requested budget directly to the Department of Education (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). Further barriers to comparison arise when we consider fee-paying schools which receive support in the form of paid teachers' salaries in addition to the income they generate independently. This issue has long been identified with a report from an expert group on secondary school funding set up within the Department of Education on the matter in 1996. The report recommended a formula-based method which would apply to all schools as a more transparent and fair approach to resource allocation (Blackstock, 1999). As a precursor to the DEIS scheme it also proposed the use of a different formula for schools in disadvantaged areas with the goal of providing greater resources in these communities. These recommendations were never implemented (Darmody and Smyth 2013; Fleming and Harford, 2021).

2.5.1. Voluntary Contributions

In more recent times, the issues of transparency and equity have been compounded by schools' own access and capacity to fundraise locally. The prevalence of 'voluntary contributions' has become more and more widespread and important for schools (O'Halloran, 2019). The process sees parents asked to contribute financially to the cost of their child's education, with parents most often asked at the beginning of each year, although there is a statutory obligation on schools to indicate clearly that payment is not compulsory. This is laid out by both the School Admissions Act (2018) which prohibits the charging of fees in return for enrolment and is further clarified in guidance issued to schools by the Department of Education's circular (0065/2010) with regard to the Free Education Scheme.

The first systematic analysis of voluntary contributions was carried out by Darmody and Smyth (2013), using a qualitative methodology. The authors employed both interviews and surveys, engaging with key educational stakeholders, including school representative bodies and principals. Through this work, the researchers found that in non-fee-paying schools, parents may be asked to pay “from fifty euros up to six or seven hundred euros” (Darmody and Smyth, Pg. 62) depending on the school. The system of such contributions has been criticised by many however it has become widely embedded within the Irish educational landscape (Doyle et al., 2021). In recent years the issue has become politicised with a number of lawmakers pushing for reform in the area. A bill has passed first stage in the Houses of the Oireachtas which seeks to eventually ban the practice altogether (Ireland, 2021).

In the interim, the bill would mandate the Minister for Education to create and publish a register of schools asking for parental voluntary contributions and to document the amount requested by such schools in the state. This is only the latest of such attempts with similar bills proposed in the past (Ireland, 2017). Such a register would help increase transparency in an area of education policy which is opaque.

Furthermore, the Darmody and Smyth’s (2013) survey found great disparity in terms of voluntary contributions across school type. They found that in the schools they surveyed, 87% of voluntary schools were receiving parental contributions, while 49% and 62% of vocational, and community and comprehensive schools were in receipt of voluntary contributions respectively. The type of school was also important in terms of the amount of the voluntary contributions requested. Voluntary schools tended to ask for a greater financial contribution, up to three times more per year, when compared to their counterparts in the vocational and community and comprehensive sectors.

It is important to consider this disparity not just in terms of school type, but also in terms of geography and other factors. Some schools are in a better position to fundraise locally, specifically with regard to the parental voluntary contribution. DEIS schools are significantly less likely to ask for voluntary contributions, and where they do, they are less likely again to actually receive the contribution due to the nature of the areas they serve, with fewer financial and social resources in disadvantaged communities (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

There has been little research completed at the nexus of these two issues, DEIS school funding and voluntary contributions. The discussion on the resourcing allocated to the DEIS programme has been limited, especially in the context of the increased fundraising capacity of non-DEIS schools as a result of such contributions. More attention from scholars and policymakers is needed and has already been called for (Smyth, McCoy, and Kingston, 2015). In fact, one of the strongest criticisms of the DEIS policy to date has been the lack of research and consideration given to investigating the cost of achieving its objectives, i.e., how much funding is necessary to run the programme or indeed to help students overcome the educational barriers they may face. Fleming (2020), for example, argues that this important question of funding has never been sufficiently addressed by policymakers. The question remains as to whether or not DEIS schools are adequately funded under the DEIS programme. As has been already stated, educational disadvantaged is a wide ranging and complex issue. Fleming and Harford (2022), have been cited in national press media, stating that the scheme is “grossly underfunded relative to the challenges faced by school communities”. This perhaps, goes some way to explaining the limited success of the DEIS scheme suggested by the literature, in spite of the fact that it has been resourced for over 16 years. McAvinue and Weir (2015) have tracked improvements among DEIS schools in terms of increasing attainment and reducing early school leaving but point to persistent and significant differences when the data is compared to that of non-DEIS schools. Other areas of the literature have also pointed to mixed success, for example, Gilleece et al. (2020), found that literacy and reading scores have coalesced among DEIS and non-DEIS schools, the same is not the case for results in Maths and Science. The literature continues to point to funding to at least in part explain this limited success. This is the case when we consider the DEIS programme solely in its own right, irrespective of the context of predominate voluntary contributions in non-DEIS schools. This fact has been lamented by scholars, giving specific recommendations in the evaluation of the programme, to investigate and compare the level DEIS funding and voluntary contributions in non-DEIS schools (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

More recently, the Minister for Education announced the expansion of the DEIS programme (DES, 2022). The extension will see an additional €32 million provided to the scheme. It will mean that an additional 310 schools including 37 post-primary schools will benefit from

increased funding from September 2022. The investment was made following changes to the identification model used by the Department of Education. Scholars have already weighed in on the plans, pointing to some interesting developments. For example, Harford and Fleming (2022) have highlighted the Minister’s assurances to existing DEIS schools that they will not lose out from any reconfiguration of DEIS criteria or identification models, stating that such a stance frames educational disadvantage as an intractable problem, where additional funding will always be necessary. Notwithstanding this point, perhaps it is most interesting to note for the purposes of this study, that the allocation of additional resources in this manner represents a scaling wide of the programme, rather than increased funding for each existing DEIS school.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters have given an insight into the rationale behind this research and provided the policy context. This chapter lays out the methods used through the course of this research in terms of both isolating DEIS funding per student, an important figure for comparison within this study, and the rate and prevalence of voluntary contributions. In this vein, this chapter first describes the research design (3.2.) before giving attention to ethics (3.3.). Finally, the chapter outlines the justification and rationale behind the research design, while presenting some of the limitations to the study (3.4.).

3.2. Research Design

At its core, this research seeks to collect, collate, and compare quantitative data from two domains, DEIS school funding and voluntary contributions. It does so by taking a desk-based approach, undertaking a digital documentary analysis of publicly available information, including post-primary school websites and publications within a defined geographical case study. As Bryman (2016) puts it, such an approach assembles and analysis existing available data. In answering the research question ‘accounting for voluntary contributions in non-fee-paying secondary schools, to what degree can DEIS school funding be considered to constitute additional resources?’, there is a need to first identify the amount of additional funding available to schools through the DEIS programme. This is achieved through a review of departmental publications, alongside an analysis of school lists and enrolment figures held by the state, in order to isolate the DEIS grant from other sources of school finance administered

through the Department of Education, such as school capitations funding. These inputs into the research make it possible to gain an insight into the level of DEIS funding available to schools on a per capita basis, using the function below derived for our purposes. This function divides the total DEIS grant budget, distributed by the Department of Education, by the number of DEIS schools involved in the programme, to estimate an average figure for the DEIS funding allocated to each school involved in the programme. It then divides this number by the average number of schools enrolled in secondary schools at the time, creating an estimate of the average DEIS funding per student. Bryman (2016, Pg.13) states that such an approach is important in terms of a 'data reduction' phase, allowing for interpretation and comparison of the data collected.

$$\frac{\textit{Total DEIS Grant}}{\textit{No. DEIS Schools}} \div \textit{Average number of pupils per school} \sim \textit{Funding per student}$$

Secondly, there is also a need to investigate the extent to which schools employ voluntary contributions as a means to increase their available budget. Bearing in mind the existing literature (Darmody and Smyth, 2013; Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015), there is also a need to examine any potential disparities which may exist between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in this regard. This is achieved through a systematic review of publicly available information from a number of sources including school websites, formal admissions policies, annual reports, circulated book lists, school websites, and online payment portals. This led to the creation of a database (Appendix A), as no such national database or public register exists currently (Ireland, 2021). The data collected was then examined taking a quantitative data analysis approach (Appendix B).

To assist in this work, a checklist was created, ensuring a consistent approach across all schools involved in the study. This checklist was followed sequentially, where such publications were available, in a bid to investigate the value of each schools' voluntary contribution, where it was requested of parents. Additionally, in a bid to further standardise the methodology, a generic student was conceived in response to variations in voluntary contributions within schools due to a degree of differential pricing. For example, the method

employed took account of the fact that the amount requested from parents and families can vary across a number of factors, such as the year group to which a student belongs, and the number of siblings attending the same school. In response, the data collected and reported relates to the voluntary contributions requested from parents of 1st year students, with only one child attending the school, in other words, no siblings also study at the school. This was an important element of the research design as it made comparison across schools easier. As Bryman (2016, Pg. 59) notes, it is necessary to have a standardised method ‘in order to establish variation’. The checklist mentioned above formed an important part of that standardisation process, ensuring a consistent approach to data collection across the documentary analysis. It included the following.

- Search of schools’ website
- Online Payment Portal
- Admissions policy
- School annual report
- School book list
- Other relevant published materials

This checklist was used to investigate the voluntary contributions across each of the schools within the geographical location of the study. The case study area selected was secondary schools in south Dublin (n=69). Formally, this constituted schools based in County Dublin, south of the natural division of the River Liffey. This allowed for the use of the Dublin postcode system for identification of sample schools. Schools on the south side of County Dublin have an even postcode, for example, ‘D2’ while those north of the River Liffey have a postcode beginning with an odd number (Eircode, 2022). The rationale behind choosing south Dublin was based on a number of defined characteristics. The area is representative of the diversity that exists within the national education system. For example, the department of education makes formal distinctions between schools of different governance; voluntary, vocational, and community comprehensive (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). It also makes distinctions based on location, in terms of rural and urban, and the level of disadvantage found in a school’s community (DES, 2005). Importantly, south Dublin has a combination of all the above. There is a near equal mix of schools with regard to their governance structures and a combination of both DEIS and non-DEIS schools (DES, 2020A) while a recent socio-demographic profile

carried out by the South Dublin Children's and Young People Services Committee (2020) highlights that the area has a significant mix of disadvantage and affluence, covering both urban and rural areas.

It is important to note that voluntary contributions, as defined in chapter 1 as monetary gifts/donations requested from the parents of school pupils, have been rebranded under various monikers in a number of schools. Through the course of this research, it has become apparent that some schools have designated the funding they request from parents under descriptions such as 'amenity charge' (Oatlands College), 'school costs' (Coláiste Éanna C.B.S.) and 'services charge' (Our Lady's Grove Secondary School) to name a few. However, they all fall under the category of additional school resources and all such charges have been treated the same for the purposes of this research. It must also be stated that the study refers to DEIS schools as identified by the Department of Education for the academic year beginning September 2021 (n=198) and does not include the most recent designation of DEIS schools (DES, 2022) which are yet to receive funding at the time of writing.

To gain a better understanding of the actual financial resources available to schools as a result of voluntary contributions, further quantitative analysis was necessary. As such contributions are voluntary by nature, the findings must account for the rate of payment across schools. Drawing on the work of Darmody and Smyth (2013), specific attention is paid to calculating these rates across DEIS and non-DEIS in the following chapter, using the results from their research survey as a proxy for conversion rates, the percentage rate at which successful payments are collected.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

In general, desk-based research, especially that which deals with publicly available secondary data, places a lower ethical burden on researchers due to the fact that there are no people involved nor private, personal, or sensitive data. However, ethical considerations are no less important. The ethics application submitted to Trinity College Dublin, School of Social Work and Social Policy for this work helped to set a framework for the research, ensuring integrity in the methodological design and sensitivity and care in communication.

As a result, significant consideration was given towards the manner in which communities would be described throughout this dissertation. In representing individuals, communities,

and schools it is important to be conscious of the language chosen. In the main, the words disadvantaged and affluent are used throughout rather than other terms to describe differences in socio-economic status. Although there are many possible expressions to describe this dichotomy, and perhaps some are less contested (Tormey, 2010) than those chosen, the conscious decision was made to use the term disadvantaged for the sake of consistency. It is the term chosen and used widely throughout the policy under examination (DES, 2005) and one defined in Irish legislation in regard to educational disadvantage (Ireland, 1998). With that said, care was taken to avoid directing the term towards individual students and schools, instead opting to refer to the communities they were part of and served. The aim of this was to describe contextual factors, that is to describe the situation or circumstances in which a person or school operated within as disadvantaged rather than the individual themselves.

3.4. Rationale and limitations

The reason for this approach stems from the overarching rationale behind the research more generally. As discussed in chapter 1, recommendations have been put forward from evaluations of the DEIS programme to specifically examine the level of DEIS funding with regard to voluntary contributions and to address the lack of transparency around school funding more widely (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015; Fleming and Harford, 2021). However, comparison between schools has proved elusive to researchers up to this point due to the nature of centrally held data, particularly with regard to school income per student (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). Beside the existing data being difficult to compare, there are also significant gaps in the data itself, for example, as discussed in chapter 2, there is no central register held by the department of education detailing voluntary contributions (Ireland, 2021), nor are individual school accounts publicly available (Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

There were also resourcing restraints to take into account. The population size of non-fee-paying secondary schools in Ireland is 677, meaning that with the type of analysis necessary, examining the entire population was beyond the scope of one researcher in the timeframe. Therefore, a geographical case study approach was employed, limiting the investigation to South Dublin. Such an approach was chosen for a number of reasons. In the first instance, it was important to generate data from a representative sample of schools, something that

seemed difficult through other primary forms of data collection such as interviews, and/or focus groups. There was also a fear that response rates from surveys may be low, or indeed biased towards one particular group of schools, as had been the case in Darmody and Smyth (2013), the most similar study to this research to date. This case study approach may limit the generalisability of the findings, but it was necessary to place parameters around the research for comparisons sake. It ensured a richness to the data set which may have been missed in random samples, given the extent of the diversity that exists across post-primary schools (rural, urban, affluent, disadvantaged, voluntary, vocational, and community/comprehensive), considering the limitations on possible sample size (Bryman, 2016).

Beyond the decision to employ a desk-based research approach, the choice was also made early on to use publicly available data. There is a strong criticism from within the literature stating that the area of policy concerning school funding has been 'opaque' and lacking in transparency (Fleming and Harford, 2021, Pg. 6), leading to difficulty with comparison. In this context, it was important to investigate the extent to which such information was publicly available and easily accessible.

Similarly, to other approaches, for example surveys, which may have had response rate issues (Byman, 2016), the research design employed could not reveal the full picture and details of voluntary contributions within all of the identified schools. For example, where the documentary analysis checklist had been exhausted for a particular school, the voluntary contribution was recorded as 'unidentified'. This will be discussed later in section 4.3, however it is worth mentioning here briefly in the context of methodological limitations. In case of unidentified voluntary contributions, two scenarios are possible. In the first instance, the practice of voluntary contributions may have existed but was not expressed in the examined documents. However, it may be also the case that no documents were found because the practice is not undertaken in the particular school. It must be noted that this was the case in the minority of schools. More often than not, information was collected and recorded for the schools involved in the case study.

Chapter 4 - Results

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the results of this research, analysing school funding in post-primary schools in South Dublin. It offers a description of important data and key findings before presenting a critical discussion and analysis of these results in the following chapter which will deal with the possible implications of this research while placing the study within the context of the wider literature.

With that in mind, this chapter pays specific attention to DEIS funding, measuring the level of funding allocated under the programme on a per capita basis, tracing how this allocation has changed over time (4.2.1.). It then goes on to present the findings of a digital documentary analysis while describing the data set created through the process (4.3.). It then draws on evidence from earlier research (Darmody and Smyth, 2013) to adjust this study's findings based on the success rate across schools in terms of collecting voluntary contributions (4.4.), before examining how tax relief impacts on school funding (4.5.) and finally presenting a summary of key findings (4.6.). The overall aim of this chapter is to offer a coherent comparison between the additional funding provided to secondary schools under the DEIS scheme and the differential fundraising capacities across schools in terms of voluntary contributions.

4.2.1. DEIS Funding per Student

In order to analyse DEIS funding in the context of such contributions, we must first establish a metric to measure the impact of this fundraising activity. In assessing the level of funding available to schools it is important to create a measure which is comparable across schools and across time, irrespective of school size. With this purpose in mind, a function of average funding per student was created, as has already been discussed.

$$\frac{DEIS\ Funding}{No.\ Schools} \div Average\ number\ of\ pupils\ per\ school \sim Funding\ per\ student$$

In the first instance, it is helpful to look at ‘funding per student’ in the context of the initial DEIS programme. At the time that the scheme was established, €1 million was ringfenced towards the DEIS grant, the financial element of the programme (DES, 2005).

$$\frac{\text{€1 Million}}{125 \text{ schools}} \div 453 \text{ pupils}^* = \text{€17.66 per student}$$

* Mean average of Post - Primary Schools for the 2005/2006 School Year (DES, 2006)

This meant that in the academic year 2005/2006, in terms of direct financial resources, the average DEIS school was benefiting from an additional €17.66 per student enrolled. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, the DEIS programme goes beyond financial contributions and includes other supports in terms of teacher allocations and access to additional resources (DES, 2005).

While the focus of this study is on financial supports it remains useful to examine funding per student in the context of the overall DEIS budget at the time. Although it must be noted that the utility of such a metric is constrained by a lack of available data. Darmody and Smyth (2013) have pointed to such data gaps, stating that the aggregate information recorded and reported by the Department of Education has made in-depth analysis difficult. For example, the department do not break down the total overall DEIS funding into primary and secondary school budget lines. Therefore, it must be observed that the below figure encompasses both primary and secondary schools and therefore has some limitations in terms of our analysis of post-primary schools. Nevertheless, the below figure is useful in providing a descriptive indication as to the total benefit to a school of inclusion in the DEIS programme.

$$\frac{\text{€40 Million}}{750 \text{ schools}} \div 296 \text{ pupils}^* = \text{€180.18 per student}$$

* Mean average of Post - Primary Schools for the 2005/2006 School Year (DES, 2006) and Primary Schools for 2005/2006 (DES, 2006A)

4.2.2. Recent Times

Of course, since the DEIS policy was implemented, changes have been made to the programme, including the expansion of the scheme to a greater number of schools and increased funding. More recent figures, collated from official press releases from the Department of Education (DES, 2020), show that €4 million was distributed to 198 post-primary schools through DEIS grants in the academic year of 2020/21. This funding represents the direct financial resources allocated to DEIS schools.

$$\frac{\text{€4 Million}}{198 \text{ schools}} \div 514 \text{ pupils}^* = \text{€39.30 per student}$$

* Mean average of DEIS school enrolment, calculated from Post – Primary Schools enrolment figure 2020/2021 (DES, 2020A)

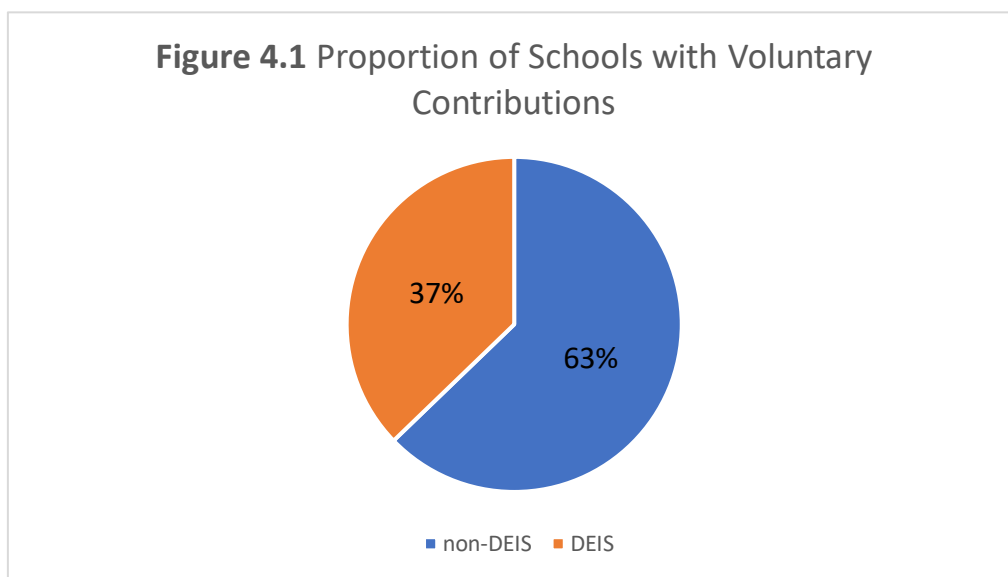
The increase in the DEIS grant from approximately €17 per student in the original scheme to over €39 per student more recently is indicative of the changes made to the programme over time. This constitutes the additional funding such schools receive over and above that allocated to all schools through the Department of Education in other grants.

4.3. Voluntary Contributions: The Data Set

Turning our attention to voluntary contributions, we aim to investigate the private fundraising capacity of secondary schools in South Dublin. As outlined in Chapter 3, a dataset of voluntary contributions across non-fee-paying secondary schools across the geographical area has been created from publicly available information.

This dataset is drawn from all 69 secondary schools within the bounds of the case study. Of these, the voluntary contribution in 23 schools could not be identified. This was due to the fact that the information could not be found on publicly available sources through the systematic digital literature review methodology employed as outlined by the stated research design. There are two possibilities which have been already mentioned in chapter 3, that particularly merit further discussion. For example, the schools in question, or a number of them, may still request voluntary contributions but this information may be inaccessible to the public. For example, in some cases it seemed likely that this information was held behind

a password protected school portal. It is of course possible that such requests for voluntary contributions are being communicated to parents in person or through written communication channels. Additionally, it may also be the case that this information does not exist as no voluntary contribution is requested. It is worth noting that only 8 of the 23 schools were non-DEIS while 15 had DEIS status. Although it is difficult to assess, and no concrete conclusions can be drawn from this data alone, the latter explanation and breakdown of such schools reconciles with the existing literature, finding that DEIS schools are less likely to have voluntary contributions (Darmody and Smyth, 2013; Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

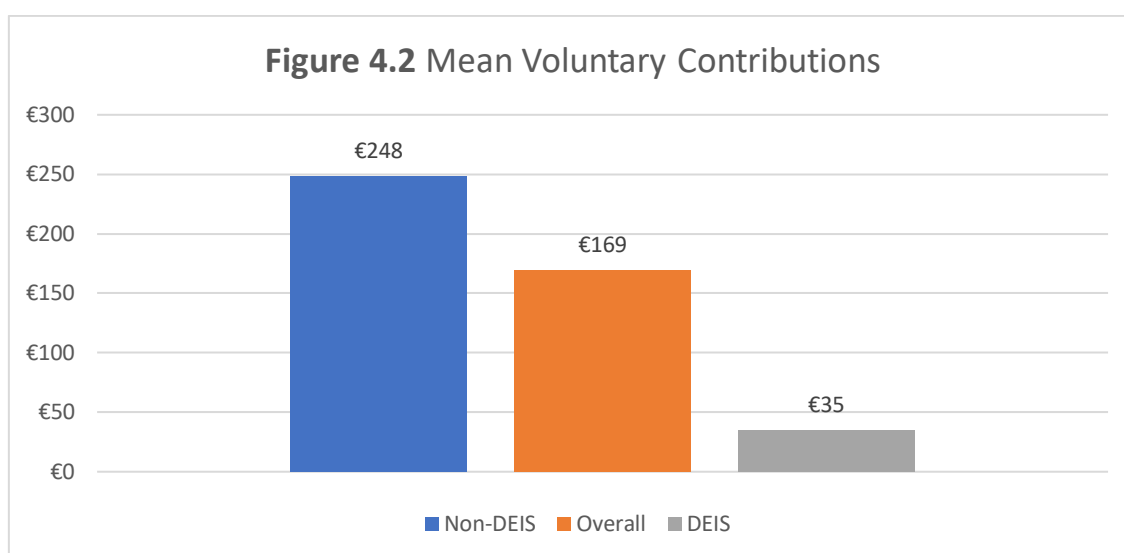


Within the dataset, there were also three schools which requested voluntary contributions however they did not specify an amount. One of these schools had DEIS status while the remaining two did not. It is noteworthy that all of these schools, including the DEIS school, were located in electoral districts of above average affluence (Pobal, 2016). Including these three aforementioned schools, 46 had a voluntary contribution charge. As expected, non-DEIS schools were more likely to request such a contribution, representing 63% of schools (29 schools) in the case study. Of the 46 schools where data could be confirmed through public sources, 12 schools in total were found to not have a voluntary contribution. Two of these schools were non-DEIS, while the remaining 10 were designated as serving disadvantaged communities.

Table 4.1 below, calculated from the constructed dataset (Appendix A), shows that across all schools in the case study, the mean voluntary contribution was €170.16.

Table 4.1	MEAN	MODE	MEDIAN	RANGE	N
OVERALL	€169	€0	€125	€650	43
NON-DEIS	€248.41	€350	€180	€650	27
DEIS	€35	€0	€0	€150	16

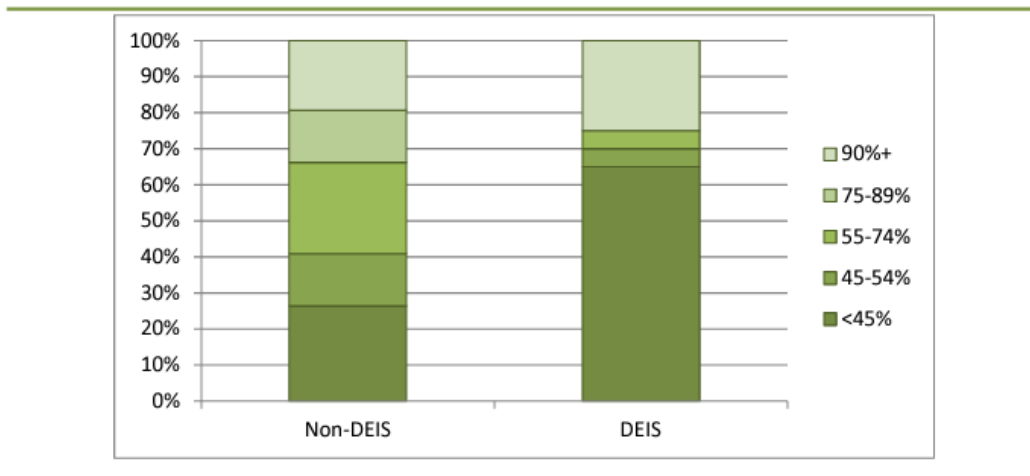
The results also show that non-DEIS schools have significantly stronger fundraising capacity, with the average voluntary contribution at €248.41 in comparison to €35 in DEIS schools. This represents a difference of over €213.



4.4. Conversion Rate

Of course, it must be acknowledged that not all parents will actually pay the requested contribution, as it is voluntary. In doing so, we must also account for any variation across different types of schools. For example, there are significant differences in conversion rates, the name given to the percentage of successful donation requests, between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, as documented by Darmody and Smyth (2013). In their study they find that in more than half of all non-DEIS schools, between 55%-74% of parents pay the full contribution. This is in contrast to the more than 65% of DEIS schools which receive less than 45% of the stated voluntary contribution.

Figure 4.3: Proportion of Parents Paying the Contribution in DEIS and non-DEIS Secondary Schools (where the school receives a contribution)



Source: Darmody and Smyth (2013, Pg. 156)

This is an important phenomenon to consider in our analysis. To understand how much the nominal voluntary contribution benefits a school, we must weigh each voluntary contribution in terms of an estimated conversion rate, constructed from the literature. To achieve this, we can calculate the mean average of the grouped data provided by Darmody and Smyth’s survey (2013, Pg. 156), using the below formula (Fielding and Gilbert, 2006).

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum fx}{\sum f}$$

Where \bar{x} is the mean value, x is the mid-point between each class and f is the frequency of each interval class.

Using this formula, we can calculate a mean conversion rate for both DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

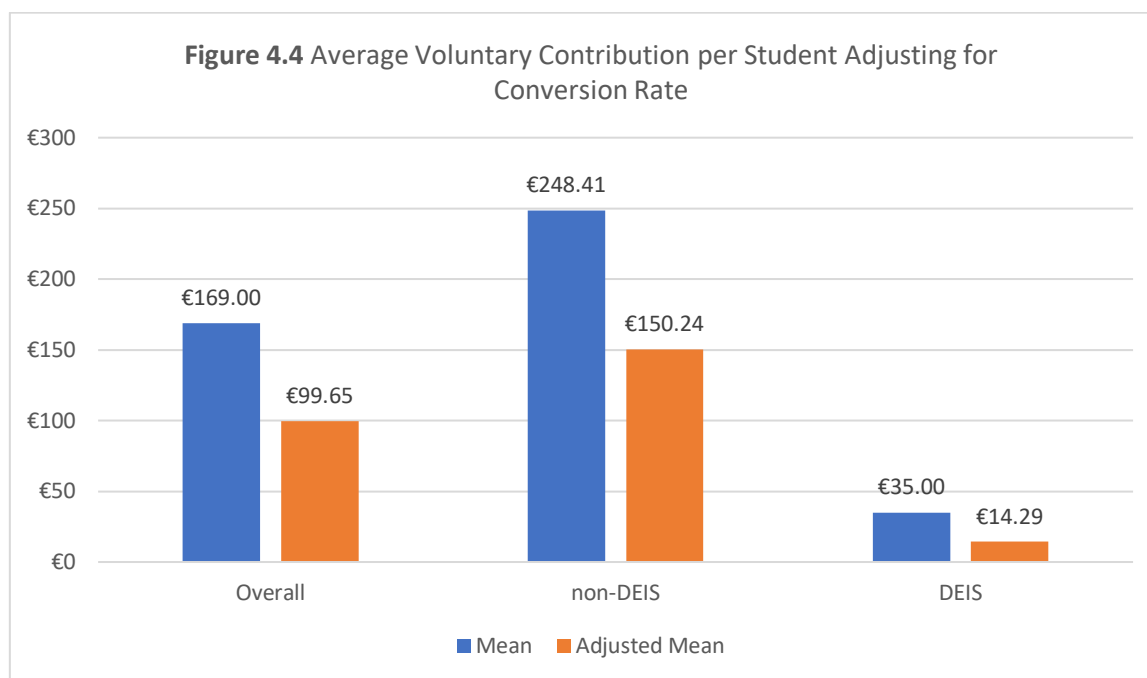
Table 4.2: DEIS SCHOOLS (CONVERSION RATE)

BAND	Mid-point	Frequency of Class	(midpoint x Frequency)
0-45	22.5	65	1462.5
45-54	49.5	5	247.5
55-74	64.5	5	322.5
75-89	82	25	2050
90-100	95	0	0
MEAN			40.83%

Table 4.3: NON-DEIS SCHOOLS (CONVERSION RATE)

BAND	Mid-point	Frequency of Class	(midpoint x Frequency)
0-45	22.5	25	562.5
45-54	49.5	15	742.5
55-74	64.5	25	1612.5
75-89	82	15	1230
90-100	95	20	1900
MEAN			60.48%

Taking the grouped data mean from the above data, we can see that the average conversion rate in non-DEIS schools is 60.48%, while in DEIS schools it stands at 40.83%. These figures now allow us to weight the voluntary contributions requested to better understand the total available funds to secondary schools. Accounting for this variance gives a clearer picture as to the available funds for both DEIS and non-DEIS, as not all parents are paying the contribution.

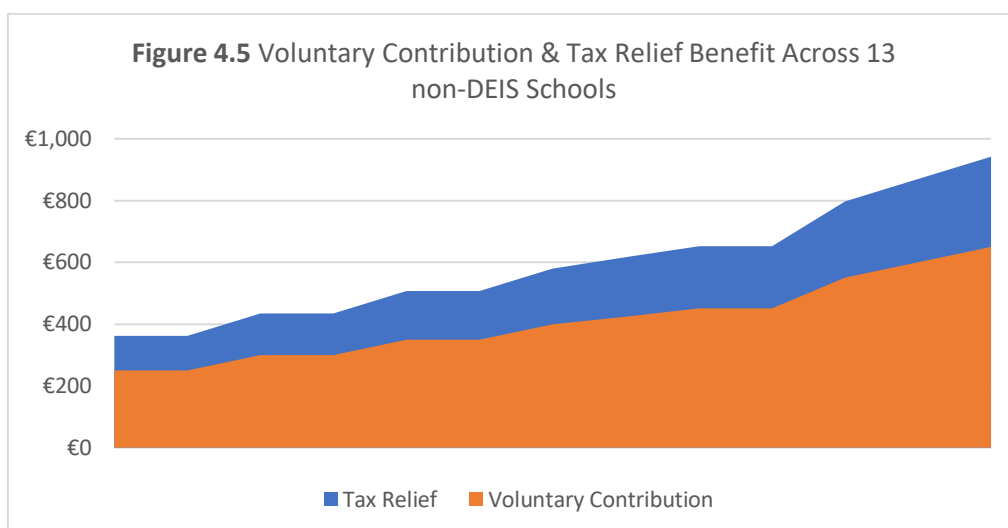


Adjusting for the conversion rate, the difference between voluntary contributions in DEIS schools and non-DEIS schools drops from €213.40 but remains a significant difference at €135.95.

4.5. Double Benefits

There is also another important element to consider in analysing school based voluntary contributions, specifically when interested in how such contributions translate into additional funds in terms of school budgets. As mentioned in chapter 3, post-primary schools under the aegis of the Department of Education are required to register as charities with the regulator as an 'education body' (Ireland, 2009). Therefore, all such schools benefit from the protections and support of charity status. One such support is the potential for tax relief on donations. Under Irish tax law, charities, and therefore schools receiving donations to the value of €250 or above are entitled to claim tax relief (Revenue, 2022). This means that schools can claim 31% tax relief on voluntary contributions greater than or equal to €250 which are donated by any individual each year. It must be noted that this scheme benefits schools with the highest voluntary contributions disproportionately, specifically non-DEIS school as can be seen by the results of this study. As already shown, non-DEIS schools request greater sums in terms of their voluntary contributions, and where they do, they are significantly more likely to receive the full amount. In this case study, 13 schools in total had voluntary contributions set at €250 or above. The entirety of these schools did not have DEIS status. With tax relief of 31% this increases the available funds to non-DEIS schools significantly in terms of the total value of a contribution as shown below. Inclusion of tax relief in the calculation of available funds for schools, increases the mean contribution for non-DEIS up to €337.01 while that of DEIS schools is unchanged at €35.

$$\frac{\text{Voluntary Contribution}}{69} \times 100 = \text{Total Value to School}$$



4.6. Summary

There are a number of key findings which have been outlined in this chapter. Firstly, in examining DEIS school funding in the context of voluntary contributions we can now compare the average DEIS grant per student, €39.30 in the 2020/21 academic year, with voluntary contributions across schools in the case study. Importantly, it has been shown that non-DEIS schools have a significantly higher capacity to raise funds through the mechanism of voluntary contributions. Across the schools examined, the average contribution is €213 higher in non-DEIS schools. Even when accounting for conversion rates, which also differ across DEIS status, a difference of approximately €136 remains, with the non-DEIS schools better off. Finally, it has also been shown that amongst the schools concerned with the highest voluntary contributions, all of which have non-DEIS status, they also benefit from tax relief from the state, increasing the difference between school types to €302.01, or €189.54 adjusted for variation in conversion rates.

Table 4.4: Difference in Voluntary Contributions (V.C.) and DEIS Grant	
Average non-DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€248.41
Average DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€35
Difference (means additional funds available to non-DEIS schools)	€213.41
Average DEIS Grant per Student (2020/21)	€39.30
V.C. Difference minus DEIS Grant (means greater available funds for non-DEIS schools)	€174.11

Table 4.5: Adjusted for Conversion Rate	
Average non-DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€150.24
Average DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€14.29
Difference (means additional funds available to non-DEIS schools)	€135.95
Average DEIS Grant per Student (2020/21)	€39.30
V.C. Difference minus DEIS Grant (means greater available funds for non-DEIS schools)	€96.65

Table 4.6: Adjusted for Conversion Rate and Tax Relief	
Average non-DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€203.83
Average DEIS Voluntary Contribution	€14.95
Difference (means additional funds available to non-DEIS schools)	€302.01
Average DEIS Grant per Student (2020/21)	€39.30
V.C. Difference minus DEIS Grant (means greater available funds for non-DEIS schools)	€262.71

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the findings put forward earlier in greater detail, offering an in-depth analysis and examination of their implications in order to address the stated research question, ‘accounting for voluntary contributions in non-fee-paying secondary schools, to what degree can DEIS school funding be considered to constitute additional resources?’. The chapter follows a similar structure to the previous one, first discussing the results relating to the analysis of DEIS grant funding per student, before considering the findings pertaining to voluntary contributions as they relate to both DEIS and non-DEIS public secondary schools in South Dublin. Taken together, these results suggest that the DEIS grant allocation does not confer additional spending power on school management, as sought and indeed framed by policymakers (DES, 2005). Rather, it can be said that it is more accurate to conceptualise the DEIS grant as offsetting the additional resources available to non-DEIS schools when accounting for differences in voluntary contributions. Within the limits of this geographical case study, non-DEIS schools retain greater access to financial resources due to their increased fundraising capacity through such contributions, with this capacity further augmented by tax relief.

5.2. DEIS Funding per student

As outlined in chapter 2, school funding has been criticised as an area of educational policy which is opaque and lacking transparency (Fleming and Harford, 2021). It is difficult to separate the overall package of supports provided under the programme into its various constituent parts due to the manner in which it is recorded and reported by the Department of Education (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). For that reason, an estimated average needed to

be calculated using the methodology outlined earlier in chapter 3, allowing for the comparison of DEIS school funding over time, specifically the DEIS grant, despite the lack of reported data on an individual school basis.

The first relevant finding from this analysis is the change in funding over time. At the initial phase of the programme, this grant stood at €17.66 per student but increased to approximately €39.30 per student. This increase coincided with changes to the programme, including the expansion of the number of schools with DEIS status, alongside the provision of significantly greater exchequer funding (DES, 2017). These figures are important in their own right given the aforementioned lack of transparency in education funding.

The question has remained as to whether DEIS schools are adequately funded given the complex and wide-ranging issues they face. It is also interesting to note that no significant preparatory or consultative work was completed by policymakers in setting the DEIS grant or estimating the budget which would be required to resource the goals laid out in the DEIS plan (Fleming, 2020). One of the contributions of this research has been to trial a way forward which can identify and isolate DEIS funding on a per capita basis.

It is important, for reasons which will be discussed throughout the course of this chapter, to reiterate the original aim of DEIS funding, the rationale behind such a programme, and the framing of the policy. The objective of the policy is to tackle educational disadvantage (DES, 2005) with the programme design based on conclusions drawn from the education and social policy literature, stating that to overcome socio-economic barriers to education, additional resources are necessary from the state (Weir et al., 2005; Kellaghan et al. 1995). Importantly, the programme recognises the 'social context effect' which has been shown to be present in Irish schools (Sofroniou, Archer and Weir, 2014). The effect refers to the social context in which schools operate, with the cited researchers demonstrating the aggregate effect on overall school attainment when large proportions of students from low-income backgrounds and those facing social exclusion are in attendance. The DEIS scheme with its whole school approach, as opposed to placing the focus on the individual, as was the case in predecessor programmes, was proposed to combat such barriers (Weir et al., 2005). Additional funding was seen as important in addressing educational inequality in the scheme. Therefore, importantly this €39.30 per student provided to DEIS schools is in addition to all other core state funding, for example capitation grants. The premise being that DEIS schools facing

additional barriers require more funding than their more affluent counterparts in order to achieve the same outcomes and indeed, policymakers have also considered it important to present this funding as such, additional (DES, 2005). This is noteworthy in the context of latter sections of this chapter, discussing the degree to which this funding can actually be considered additional in the context of school voluntary contributions.

5.3. Voluntary Contributions

This research has also offered some interesting insights into what could be considered the capacity of secondary schools to fundraise from parents. The key findings contribute towards again highlighting the lack of transparency in school funding, point to a greater capacity for fundraising amongst non-DEIS schools when compared to schools with DEIS status and highlight benefits through tax policy which disproportionately benefit non-DEIS schools.

5.3.1. The Data Set: Negative Attention and Transparency Concerns

A somewhat unexpected finding from this study, already mentioned in Chapter 3, has arisen through the process of completing the digital documentary analysis and the preceding literature review. In recent years, voluntary contributions have received negative attention in both political discourse and the media (O'Halloran, 2019; McGuire, 2020). This attention has fostered a number of attempts by political representatives to regulate the practice, as has already been mentioned in chapter 2. This includes two bills which have been proposed in recent years. The first (Ireland, 2017) was proposed by Carol Nolan, independent T.D. for Laois-Offaly, seeking to regulate the collection of voluntary contributions while providing for the publication of such school's details. The bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Dáil and Seanad in 2020. The other bill (Ireland, 2021) is currently at second stage in Dáil Éireann, having been proposed by Sinn Féin to national media attention (Hosford, 2021). This bill seeks to eventually ban the practice (Ireland, 2021). It is interesting to note that if this bill (Ireland, 2021) was passed, it would mandate the Department of Education to maintain a register of school voluntary contributions in the interim. This would offer greater transparency, aiding similar evaluations and analysis in future research.

With that said, it appears that in response to such negative attention, many schools have rebranded their voluntary contributions, requesting financial support under several different names such as 'amenity charge' and various other designations. There are a number of possible reasons for changing the name of such requests, of course, this would include

avoiding the possible reputational damage to a school which could result from association with the aforementioned negative media attention. However, there is also the possibility that such a decision was taken by school management or governing bodies in order to increase payment rates, for example, by avoiding the use of the word 'voluntary'. This perspective is supported by practices across a number of schools nationwide, including three involved in this study, which were identified by print media journalists (McGuire, 2020). On foot of complaints made by parents to the Department of Education due to contribution requests which appeared to be disguised as formal fees, directives were issued from officials to school management. These communications reminded schools of their obligation to make it clear in their admissions policies that enrolment is not contingent on the payment of such contributions (McGuire, 2020). However, systematic research would be necessary to examine the ubiquity of such practices across secondary schools, perhaps presenting an opportunity to employ qualitative research methodologies in examining the wider context and impact of voluntary contributions.

Another supplementary yet important contribution made by this research has been in understanding the opaqueness which surrounds school funding models. This has been signalled by not just the above proposed legislation, but authors such as Darmody and Smyth (2013). These authors, amongst others, have also called for greater transparency in relation to school funding, however, in some cases these statements are made in passing rather than as substantive points central to the argument of the publication (Fleming and Harford, 2021). With that in mind, it is important to state that the methodological design of this study has helped to interrogate this common refrain from the literature. Through its use of publicly available data, it has demonstrated that information gaps exist, with the details of voluntary contributions across a number of schools going unpublished or proving to be inaccessible. This methodology, and thus this research therefore, supports the case for greater transparency when it comes to school funding.

5.3.2. Differences Across Schools

With that said, the most important finding of this study has been the difference in voluntary contributions that exist across schools in South Dublin. The results show that the average non-DEIS school has a significantly higher capacity to fundraise through the collection of such contributions, when compared to their DEIS counterparts. In the first instance, DEIS schools

are less likely to request voluntary contributions, and where they do so, they are generally for smaller amounts. Across schools in South Dublin, the average contribution was €213 higher in non-DEIS schools, with the average contribution in DEIS schools of €35 contrasting with non-DEIS contributions of €248. This finding is significant in the context of the DEIS grant allocated from the department of education and its framing as additional, as outlined in section 5.2. above. The DEIS policy is based on literature which demonstrates the need for additional supports to students experiencing disadvantage over and above that provided to students from more affluent backgrounds (Weir et al., 2005). When we consider the available funds from voluntary contributions to schools in each category, and the additional grant allocated to DEIS schools, approximately €39 per student as shown above, the difference remains. This of course has implications for policymakers. It means that the average non-DEIS school has access to an additional €174 per student, accounting for the DEIS grant. Therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to conceive and frame the DEIS grant as a mechanism through which policymakers seek to offset or redress the additional funding available to non-DEIS schools as a result of their higher voluntary contributions. However, it must be acknowledged that these findings relate to the schools examined within the bounds of this case study, so some measured considerations of these results and limitations are necessary and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Importantly, this study goes beyond the crude figure of the stated voluntary contribution, although that remains a valuable insight into the differences across schools. Due to the voluntary nature of such contributions, it is necessary to account for payment rates or what we might call conversion rates, the number of people that actually pay the requested contribution. Despite changing the numbers involved, the general conclusions we can draw from the results remain the same. As the findings show, when accounting for conversion rates, drawn from Darmody and Smyth's (2013) earlier study as outlined in Chapter 4, the difference between available funds for DEIS and non-DEIS schools remains. Despite the gap closing when accounting for conversion rates, non-DEIS schools are still the beneficiaries of an additional €97 per student on average. This suggests that even when adjusting for mitigating factors such as payment rates, on a per capita basis, voluntary contributions offer schools based in more affluent areas a significant advantage and result in increased access to

resources. This further refutes the contention that the DEIS grant provides schools in disadvantaged communities with what can be considered additional resources.

Another important finding relates to the tax relief benefit that schools can claim due to their charity status. As outlined in Chapter 4, all voluntary contributions to schools of €250 or above qualify for tax relief of 31%. As already shown, non-DEIS schools on average have higher voluntary contributions. In fact, no voluntary contribution recorded from a DEIS school as part of this study would qualify for the above tax relief from the state. This means that the advantages seen in non-DEIS schools in terms of requesting and receiving larger voluntary contributions are being inadvertently supplemented by national policies implemented under other government departments. Including the additional benefit of this tax relief in the analysis further increases the difference between available funding across the two school categories, finding that non-DEIS schools have access to an additional €263 per student approximately. This finding constitutes an important addition to the education and social policy literature because although it is a phenomenon of school funding which has been the subject of commentary in public media (RTÉ, 2014), the extent to which tax relief in this context has been discussed in academic literature has been extremely limited, even in studies specifically pertaining to voluntary contributions and school funding. Although further study is necessary to confirm these findings in a national context, when accounting for tax relief in schools with the highest voluntary contributions, non-DEIS schools have significantly greater resources available, despite national policy recognising the necessity for positive funding discrimination towards schools in disadvantaged communities.

This is especially important to consider in the context of the limited success of the programme as outlined earlier. Over the past 16 years of the programme's implementation, the scheme has had mixed results. For example, McAvinue and Weir (2015) have described improvements in DEIS schools over time in terms of increased attainment and attendance in absolute terms but measure their praise for the programme when figures are compared against those in non-DEIS schools. Elsewhere, Gilleece et al. (2020) have found that while literacy rates have improved in DEIS schools, similar improvements have not been seen in areas such as maths and science. A possible explanation for this mixed success is that in operationalising the objective to provide schools in disadvantaged communities with additional funding, policymakers did not consider or account for the greater fundraising capacity amongst schools

in more affluent areas. It is already argued that the programme is not resourced sufficiently to achieve its aims (Fleming and Harford, 2022), and that conclusion is supported by these findings. However, this research goes further to also suggest that the DEIS grant has not given schools in disadvantaged communities an additional tool to combat educational barriers but rather contributed towards closing the financial gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

5.4. The Literature

This study has connected two distinct areas of the literature, voluntary contributions, and educational disadvantage. Many researchers have explored both of these topics but have tended to do so in isolation, choosing not to explore the degree to which they are connected formally. Notwithstanding this point, those involved have called for such an inquiry to take place while outlining potential areas of further study, for example, Smyth, McCoy, and Kingston (2015). In their evaluation of the DEIS programme they specifically recommended an analysis of voluntary contributions in the context of the DEIS grant, stating that they considered DEIS schools would be less likely to receive such contributions from parents given they have 'substantially fewer economic, cultural and social resources than those in non-DEIS schools' (Pg. X). In doing so they write that no significant discussion has occurred, examining whether the DEIS grant is adequate to bridge this gap in resources. The results of this study have suggested that they are not. This finding is congruent with similar research and studies already completed. For example, the most similar study conducted to date was authored by Darmody and Smyth (2013). Their survey showed that non-DEIS schools were more likely to request voluntary contributions, a finding supported by this study. However, the literature up until this point did not attempt to measure the extent to which greater voluntary contributions in non-DEIS schools translates into greater access to resources, given the DEIS grant.

5.5. Limitations and Further Study

As with all studies, there are a number of limitations which must be considered. In the first instance, it is important to do so in order to offer measured and accurate conclusions but also because such limitations identify and highlight potential areas for further study. As laid out in Chapter 3, the methodology chosen was influenced by a case study approach, concentrating on post-primary schools in South Dublin. Therefore, there are restraints on the generalisability of the findings. Despite this, the results of this initial study indicate that there

is an interesting and important issue to be further analysed, with a clear need to address a similar research question at a national level.

Importantly, this study has identified differences in the available financial resources at the disposal of both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, however, it has paid little attention to the human resources and other non-financial supports provided to schools. This research did not set out to do so as it was beyond the scope of this work. Now though that such differences between schools have been identified, new research questions may be posed. In addressing these questions, researchers may draw on this study or explore novel methodological approaches, including the possibility of using the Freedom of Information Act (2014) to request financial data from the Department of Education, although further investigation is required to examine its merits. It is possible that this approach would provide an opportunity to assess both the financial and human resources provided to schools in tandem, while removing the need to estimate conversion rates or account for tax relief to schools. There is also scope to employ qualitative research methods as already mentioned, both in terms of further investigating voluntary contributions, such as through surveys, but also approaches seeking to interrogate the deeper impacts resulting from the funding disparities highlighted by this study.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will present the concluding remarks of this dissertation. Firstly, it will reiterate the key findings of this research (6.2.), drawing conclusions from the results before offering some policy recommendations based on this study (6.3.). Finally, it will present some short reflections on the overall process of completing this project and dissertation (6.4.).

6.2. General Conclusions

It is clear that this research has presented a strong case in terms of identifying the area of school funding as a domain in need of further study. In the first instance, there is an opportunity to investigate the generalisability of these results at a national level. However, it is also interesting to consider the other areas of educational policy where a better comprehension of the role played by voluntary contributions in the education system would influence both our understanding of issues and our policy responses.

Up until now, there has been an implied assumption that the DEIS grant means that schools in disadvantage communities have access to additional financial resources over and above that available to their non-DEIS counterparts, as discussed in chapter 5. It must be recognised that the lack of transparency, data, and analysis surrounding voluntary contributions has advanced that idea. As a result, voluntary contributions have not formed a substantial part of our calculations when evaluating the needs of DEIS schools. However, this research has highlighted that there is a clear necessity to account for these contributions when it comes to examining and formulating educational policy, especially policy pertaining to educational disadvantage. That is because when we do so, our conceptualisation of the DEIS grant changes. Although it is framed as additional funding, the reality suggested by this study is that DEIS schools, in the main, do not have access to additional financial resources due to the inherent advantages benefiting non-DEIS schools in terms of fundraising through voluntary contributions. That is not to say that this funding is not additional in a general sense. It is indeed funding allocated to DEIS schools supplementing their core school funding. It is however suggested by the findings of this research, that the degree to which the funding can be considered additional has been tempered by realities on the ground. The study has suggested that the case remains that non-DEIS schools have greater financial resources at their disposal, and that the DEIS grant contributes towards closing this gap, as opposed to putting DEIS schools ahead.

An important point to stress, is the scope of the work undertaken as part of this dissertation. It has already been mentioned, but it is worth reiterating. This study has been concerned with the additional financial resources allocated to schools as part of the DEIS programme. There are a number of human resources and other supports which can form part of the programme and may differ across schools. Examining these supports were beyond the scope of this research and therefore further study is warranted. However, an important point to note is the extent of the differences between non-DEIS schools with the highest voluntary contributions, those in receipt of tax relief, and the majority of DEIS schools with no such contribution. With the additional tax relief which these high earning secondary schools also receive, it is possible that the monetary value of these other supports offered in DEIS schools are also eclipsed. This possibility is suggested by the analysis of the total overall initial DEIS budget in chapter 4, however further study would be necessary to draw concrete conclusions,

and it seems this would only be the case for schools on the extremes of the voluntary contribution spectrum.

6.3. Recommendations

Given the discussion and analysis which has taken place up to this point, there are a number of recommendations which may be put forward for the attention of policymakers based on this research study. These recommendations are perhaps best understood as a series of policy options emanating from the research, which could be placed on a continuum of action, based on the degree to which relevant stakeholders are interested in change as measured from both a cost and impact or effectiveness perspective.

In the first instance, the research points to a need to increase the DEIS grant. Although a similar study conducted at national level would be prudent before such an action was taken, this research at least suggests that DEIS schools are not adequately funded to the extent to which was envisaged by the initial and subsequent DEIS plans. Voluntary contributions have not been seriously considered in discussions of the DEIS scheme up until this point and the evidence signals that non-DEIS schools continue to have access to greater financial resources, despite the existing literature strongly pointing to the increased challenges faced by schools in disadvantaged communities. There seems to be a number of possible avenues to explore in terms of addressing this disparity in access to funding. One potential approach would be to discourage the use of such contributions in the education system in the first place. However, in view of the widespread use of such contributions, particularly in non-DEIS schools, significantly increased investment in post-primary schools would be necessary in order to prevent a drop in school standards. Alternatively, this disparity may be addressed through increases in the existing targeted support to schools in disadvantaged communities through the DEIS scheme. Increasing the DEIS grant would close the gap in terms of the level of financial resources available to such schools and level the playing field. However, based on the numbers found in this research, it would still be necessary for a significant increase in state funding to bring the programme to the position envisaged by the initial policy (DES, 2005), that is to provide DEIS schools with access to greater resources than their non-DEIS counterparts.

Although this approach would help policymakers achieve their stated goals, it seems unlikely with recent developments. Just this year, the Department of Education has opted to expand

the DEIS programme (DES, 2022), significantly increasing the exchequer funds available to the scheme, however, this funding has been allocated with the aim of increasing the reach of the programme rather than its depth. This means that the additional funds available from the state are intended to increase the number of schools involved at the current rate of funding as opposed to increasing the level of funding available per student. It therefore seems unlikely that another significant investment of this scale would be credible in the near future.

Alternatively, there seems to be a potential middle ground, which would go some way to closing the gap in terms of the funds available to schools on a per capita basis. The tax relief system which exists to encourage donations to charities has unintendedly benefited non-DEIS schools disproportionately due to their increased propensity to request larger voluntary contributions. As a consequence, it appears at odds for the government to be financially contributing towards topping up non-DEIS schools voluntary contributions, while simultaneously holding the stated policy position that DEIS schools require a greater level of funding than their counterparts in more affluent areas.

One possible way forward is to include donations of any amount in the tax relief scheme for schools in disadvantaged communities, meaning that they too can benefit from their charity status in this manner. The results of this study show that when tax relief is taken into consideration, the gap between the funds available to DEIS and non-DEIS schools widens significantly. Therefore, such a move would contribute towards closing that gap. However, it must be noted that this would certainly not remove the disparity in available funding, as the fact remains that DEIS schools remain less likely to both request and receive such contributions, and where they do, they are of smaller amounts.

Furthermore, this recommendation must be nuanced, taking account of the wider context and educational policy more generally. Such a policy may have the effect of encouraging more schools to request voluntary contributions and incentivise them to do so at higher rates. It could be argued that this might shift some of the burden for financing post-primary education onto parents and away from the state, if only to a degree. This would be in conflict with the state's aim to provide free post-primary education (O'Connor, 1986). However, it must be recognised that voluntary contributions are already widespread. This policy recommendation would seek that where voluntary contributions are requested in DEIS schools, they have the same level of impact.

Finally, the issue of transparency has arisen frequently over the course of this study, whether that be in terms of the existing literature or emanating from the research design. It is clear that greater transparency would aid researchers in their work and support the formulation of insights into the education landscape. The existing manner in which such information is recorded and reported makes both analysis and comparison difficult. The provision of a more detailed breakdown of such government spending would be helpful and support important research, increase accountability, and facilitate additional findings which could inform policy going forward. In the same vein, increased reporting requirements concerning voluntary contributions would be valuable. The maintaining and publishing of a centrally held register of voluntary contributions would in the first instance increase transparency and accountability but would also inform policymakers as to the level of funding available to post-primary schools. This would have implications for our understanding of the true cost of educating a child through secondary school, but also support policy concerning educational disadvantage and inform our conceptualisation of the DEIS grant.

Figure 6.1 Policy Recommendations Cost/Effectiveness Matrix

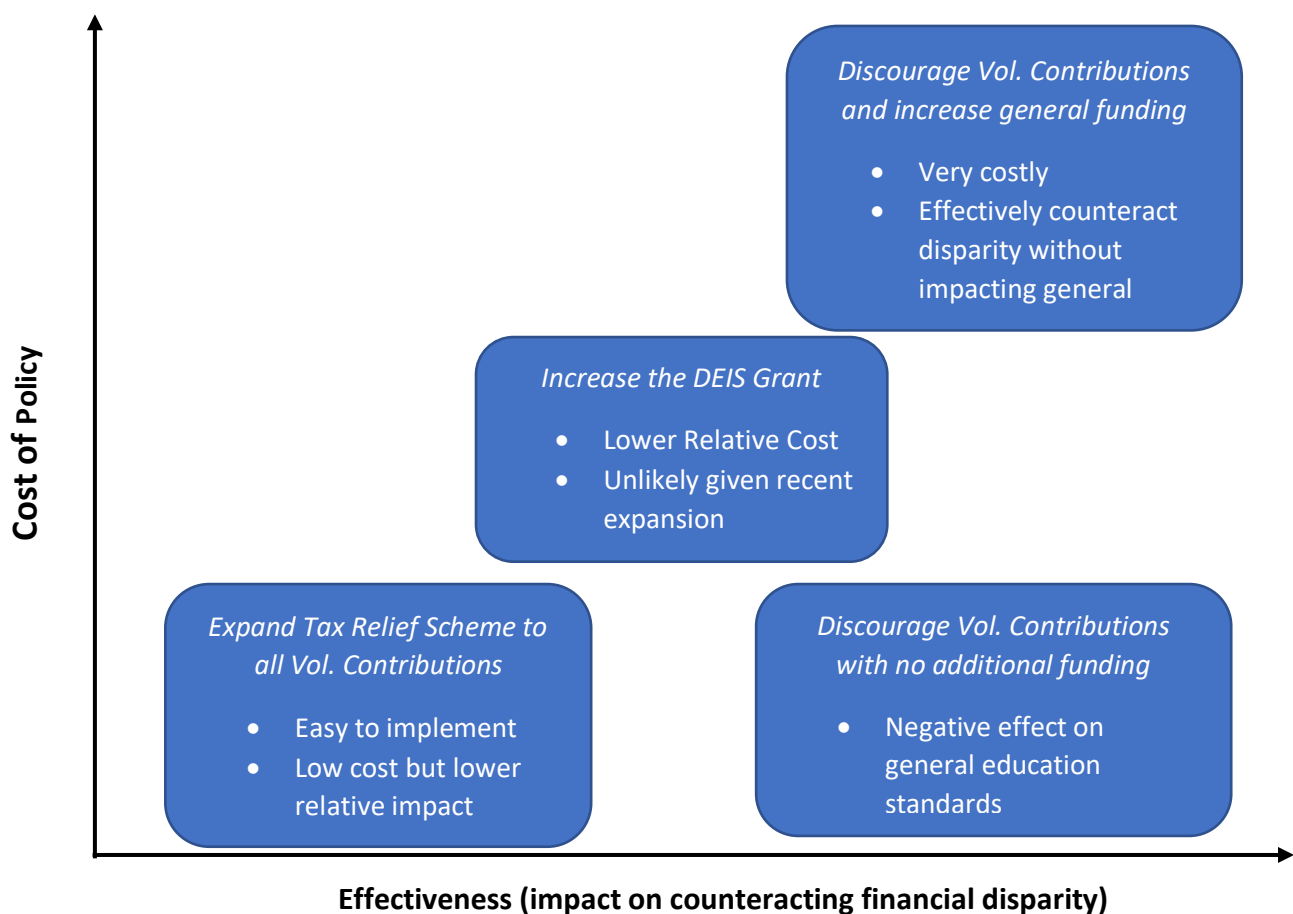


Figure 6.1 above places the proposed policy responses on two axes, comparing the policies in terms of their likely effectiveness in terms of closing the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools with regard to financial resources. As stated, the most likely of the responses proposed would be changes to the tax relief scheme to include all donations paid to DEIS schools. Despite having the lowest impact as a policy response relative to those put forward, it is an easily implemented policy which at least would mean that contributions to such schools, where they exist, would be supplemented alongside those in many non-DEIS schools, somewhat closing the gap.

6.4. Reflections

The process of undertaking this master's degree and completing this dissertation has been a very rewarding yet difficult experience. Coming to the end of this research project I find myself simultaneously looking forward to the finish line and towards submitting the final write-up, but also wishing I could continue the work. I think that that is testament to both the challenge which an endeavour like this presents, and the opportunities it offers in terms of developing important skills, and of course the excitement it engenders, driven by the possibility of contributing to academic knowledge. I have certainly learned new skills along the way, and notice myself thinking more critically, asking for evidence, and challenging my assumptions. I am particularly glad to say so as it is a skillset which is likely to only become more important.

Another thing which has only become apparent to me during the course of this process has been the real and dynamic interaction between research and wider life. Of course, much of academic research, particularly in the social sciences, attempts to explain observations found in the everyday. Until now, beyond that fact I've thought of research and researchers as in some way insulated from everyday life and the outside world. However, for me and many of my peers, one of the biggest challenges we have faced is in completing our research in spite of external factors, for example our other commitments such as work, family and friends. It is also true in terms of dealing with other people, organisations or indeed regulation and policy over the course of our study which has at time impacted our best laid plans. In short, many of the obstacles have been external to the actual study but issues which are often the subject of interest in the social sciences; family, motivation, work-life balance, annual leave. For me,

that has served to remind and highlight the fact that in the social sciences, we are often the subjects of our research, we are trying to explain the world around us while also interacting with it. Not an easy task.

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Appendices

Appendix A – The Data: Voluntary Contributions of Post-Primary Schools in South Dublin

School	Total Enrollment	Voluntary Contribution	Additional charges	Total Contribution
St Benildus College	845	€350		€350
Clonkeen College	609	Voluntary		
De La Salle College	308	€100		€100
Oatlands College	595	€300	plus €250 amenity charge	€550
Coláiste Éanna	619	€250	plus 100 school cost	€250
Coláiste Phádraig CBS	582	Unidentified		
Moyle Park College	747	Unidentified		
Templeogue College	693	€450		€450
St Louis High School	692	€350		€350
Muckross Park College	705	€500	plus €150 'essential costs'	€650
Dominican College	510	€300		€300
St Raphaela's Secondary School	585	€300		€300

Rockford Manor Secondary School	307	Unidentified		
Our Lady's Grove Secondary School	316	€250	plus €200 essential services charge	€450
Sancta Maria College	572	€150		€150
Coláiste Bríde	957	€0		€0
Our Ladys School	758	€600		€600
St Josephs College	904	€130		€130
Holy Family Community School	962	€135		€135
St. Colmcille's Community School	717	€150		€150
Old Bawn Community School	1,000	€100		€100
Newpark Comprehensive School	860	Voluntary		
St Patricks Cathedral Grammar School	256	250-600		€425

Sandymount Park Educate Together Secondary School	216			€0	€0
Harolds Cross Educate Together Secondary School	109			€250	plus 150 admin charge €400
Booterstown_ Blackrock Dun Laoghaire Educate Together Secondary School	32				
					Unidentified
Goatstown Educate Together Secondary School	73			€250	€250
Firhouse Educate Together Secondary School	188			€125	€125
Coláiste Chillian	433			€80	€80
Coláiste Cois Life	715				Unidentified
PRESENTATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE	439				Unidentified

St Pauls Secondary School	424	Unidentified		
Holy Child Community School	255		€150	€150
St. Tiernan's Community School	322		€50	€50
Ballinteer Community School	413	Voluntary		
Cabinteely Community School	527		€75	€75
Killinarden Community School	469		€0	€0
St Aidan's Community School	391		€0	€0
St Marks Community School	846		€0	€0
Tallaght Community School	754		€50	€50
Presentation College	131		€85	€85
Rosary College	203		€0	€0

Our Lady Of Mercy Secondary School	269	Unidentified		
Mercy Secondary School	195	Unidentified		
C.B.S. Westland Row	160	Unidentified		
Marian College	316	Unidentified		
C.B.S. James Street	161	Unidentified		
St Laurence College	259		€150	€150
Coláiste de hÍde	297	Unidentified		
Balbriggan Community College	640	Unidentified		
Collinstown Park Community College	586		€0	€0
Deansrath Community College	344	Unidentified		
St. Kevin's Community College	373	Unidentified		
Mount Seskin Community College	327		€0	€0

Kylemore College	435			€0	€0
Clogher Road Community College	184			€0	€0
Ringsend College	206			€0	€0
Greenhills College	162		Unidentified		

School	Fees x students	Adjusted for response rate in Darmody and Smyth	Adj. rate Per student	Contribution incl. Tax Relief	Contributions (incl. tax) x Students	Total Fees incl. Tax Relief/student (adjusted)
St Benildus College	€295,750.00	€178,869.60	€211.68	€507.25	€428,623.19	€306.78
Clonkeen College						
De La Salle College	€30,800.00	€18,627.84	€60.48	€100.00	€30,800.00	€60.48
Oatlands College	€327,250.00	€197,920.80	€332.64	€797.10	€474,275.36	€482.09
Coláiste Éanna	€154,750.00	€93,592.80	€151.20	€362.32	€224,275.36	€219.13
Coláiste Phádraig CBS						
Moyle Park College						
Templeogue College	€311,850.00	€188,606.88	€272.16	€652.17	€451,956.52	€394.43
St Louis High School	€242,200.00	€146,482.56	€211.68	€507.25	€351,014.49	€306.78
Muckross Park College	€458,250.00	€277,149.60	€393.12	€942.03	€664,130.43	€569.74
Dominican College	€153,000.00	€92,534.40	€181.44	€434.78	€221,739.13	€262.96
St Raphaela's Secondary School	€175,500.00	€106,142.40	€181.44	€434.78	€254,347.83	€262.96
Rockford Manor Secondary School						
Our Lady's Grove Secondary School	€142,200.00	€86,002.56	€272.16	€652.17	€206,086.96	€394.43

Sancta Maria College	€85,800.00	€51,891.84	€90.72	€150.00	€85,800.00	€90.72
Coláiste Bríde	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Our Ladys School	€454,800.00	€275,063.04	€362.88	€869.57	€659,130.43	€525.91
St Josephs College	€117,520.00	€71,076.10	€78.62	€130.00	€117,520.00	€78.62
Holy Family Community School	€129,870.00	€78,545.38	€81.65	€135.00	€129,870.00	€81.65
St. Colmcille's Community School	€107,550.00	€65,046.24	€90.72	€150.00	€107,550.00	€90.72
Old Bawn Community School	€100,000.00	€60,480.00	€60.48	€100.00	€100,000.00	€60.48
Newpark Comprehensive School						
St Patricks Cathedral Grammar School	€108,800.00	€65,802.24	€257.04	€615.94	€157,681.16	€372.52
Sandymount Park Educate Together Secondary School	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Harolds Cross Educate Together Secondary School	€43,600.00	€26,369.28	€241.92	€579.71	€63,188.41	€350.61
Boosterstown_ Blackrock Dun Laoghaire Educate Together Secondary School						
Goatstown Educate Together Secondary School	€18,250.00	€11,037.60	€151.20	€362.32	€26,449.28	€219.13
Firhouse Educate Together Secondary School	€23,500.00	€14,212.80	€75.60	€125.00	€23,500.00	€75.60
Coláiste Chillian	€34,640.00	€20,950.27	€48.38	€80.00	€34,640.00	€48.38
Coláiste Cois Life						
PRESENTATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE						

St Mac Dara's Community College	€10,164.00	€6,147.19	€7.26	€12.00	€10,164.00	€7.26
Firhouse Community College	€64,400.00	€38,949.12	€48.38	€80.00	€64,400.00	€48.38
Lucan Community College	€166,680.00	€100,808.06	€108.86	€180.00	€166,680.00	€108.86
Kishoge Community College						
Stepaside Educate Together Secondary School						
Kingswood Community College	€121,800.00	€73,664.64	€84.67	€140.00	€121,800.00	€84.67
Meanscoil Iognáid Rís						
Christian Brothers, Synge St.						
St. Dominic's College Ballyfermot	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Assumption Secondary School						
Loreto College						
St Pauls Secondary School						
Holy Child Community School	€38,250.00	€15,617.48	€61.25	€150.00	€38,250.00	€61.25
St. Tiernan's Community School	€16,100.00	€6,573.63	€20.42	€50.00	€16,100.00	€20.42
Ballinteer Community School						
Cabinteely Community School	€39,525.00	€16,138.06	€30.62	€75.00	€39,525.00	€30.62
Killinarden Community School	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
St Aidan's Community School	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
St Marks Community School	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Tallaght Community School	€37,700.00	€15,392.91	€20.42	€50.00	€37,700.00	€20.42
Presentation College	€11,135.00	€4,546.42	€34.71	€85.00	€11,135.00	€34.71
Rosary College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Our Lady Of Mercy Secondary School						

Mercy Secondary School						
C.B.S. Westland Row						
Marian College						
C.B.S. James Street						
St Laurence College	€38,850.00	€15,862.46	€61.25	€150.00	€38,850.00	€61.25
Coláiste de hÍde						
Balbriggan Community College						
Collinstown Park Community College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Deansrath Community College						
St. Kevin's Community College						
Mount Seskin Community College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Kylemore College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Clogher Road Community College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Ringsend College	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Greenhills College						

Appendix B – Summary Statistics

	Mean	Mode	Median	Range	n	Avg. funding per student (adjusting for response rate)
Overall	€169.00	€0.00	€125.00	€650.00	43	€99.65
Non-DEIS	€248.41	€350.00	€180.00	€650.00	27	€150.24
DEIS	€35.00	€0.00	€0.00	€150.00	16	€14.29
Difference	€213.41					€135.95

	avg funding per student (adjusting for response rate)	Mean (incl. Tax relief)	Mean (incl. tax relief) adjusted
Overall	€99.65	€224.64	€133.30
Non-DEIS	€150.24	€337.01	€203.83
DEIS	€14.29	€35.00	€14.29
Difference	€135.95	€302.01	€189.54

	Unidentified	VC = €0	VC > €250	VC < €150	€150-€249	VC > €250
Overall	23	12	13	29	1	13
Non-DEIS	8	2	13	13	1	13
DEIS	15	10	0	16	0	0

Appendix C – Conversion Rates

DEIS Schools			
Band	Mid-point	Frequency of Class	(midpoint x Frequency)
0-45	22.5	65	1462.5
45-54	49.5	5	247.5
55-74	64.5	5	322.5
75-89	82	25	2050
90-100	95	0	0
Mean			40.83
non-DEIS Schools			
Band	Mid-point	Frequency of Class	(midpoint x Frequency)
0-45	22.5	25	562.5
45-54	49.5	15	742.5
55-74	64.5	25	1612.5
75-89	82	15	1230
90-100	95	20	1900
Mean			60.48