PRIME

Policy Briefing No. 1

Progression **R**isk/**R**esilience **I**n **M**arginalised **E**nvironments



A BRIEFING FOR SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS AND POLICY MAKERS

Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School

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UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh Limerick City & County Council

St. Gabriel's Foundation

HAPPEE

THE CHALLENGE -
how to plan for better outcomes in DEIS school communities

As children move through school they acquire and develop a range of cognitive, physical, and social skills that provide the necessary foundation to maximize their life outcomes and full potential. School progression is a fundamental and critical indicator of successful child development.
Being able to identify those children that are doing well and those that need additional supports as soon as possible is crucial for effective intervention. Yet despite decades of educational research, we are still unclear about the impact of different factors in early life related to family, community, and school experiences. This is of critical importance in DEIS school communities: we have no comprehensive or long-term studies to determine the impact of school environments, teaching activities, and direct interventions either in offsetting early life risk factors, or in promoting successful developmental trajectories.

This gap in knowledge is particularly acute in the context of multi-disadvantaged children where risks of developmental delays and progression difficulties really matter.

Early identification is crucial

Consequences of Early School Leaving in Ireland:
• diminished employment and economic activity
• increased poverty,
• reduced psychological wellbeing,
• higher teen pregnancy,
• more likely to engage in criminal activity.
Source: Educational Research Centre, DCU, 2000

An early school leaver is 3 times more likely to be unemployed than the general population aged 18 to 24 Source: CSO, 2019.

30% of Irish prisoners have a learning disability Source: Dept Justice Equality & Law Reform, Report, 2000

PRIME OBJECTIVES

- To describe the educational experiences of children from disadvantaged environments and how they are related to better and worse developmental progression
- To assess each child's development at school entry and in relation to early life circumstances
- To identify the key factors that most help or hinder positive development
- To establish the effects of school-based interventions in fostering better developmental outcomes
- To identify critical experiences and circumstances across individuals and in family, community, and school-contexts that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation
- To obtain children's views and opinions about their lives and circumstances
- To generate rolling benchmarks of school progression and personal and social development for continual evaluation of school effectiveness

PRIME INNOVATION

Traditional 'Ages and Stages' questionnaire assessments are sent to parents/guardians in survey form and the response rate from families in the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities is poor. Instead of sending surveys home, which may seem complicated and often don't get returned, we re-create the skills assessment as a series of interactive, fun games and puzzles for children to play. Collecting this information directly from the children, supported by the school, provides valid and reliable data quickly and efficiently.

HOW PRIME WORKS

The PRIME project assesses children's basic skills – physical, cognitive, and social – at the beginning and end of each school year through a series of interactive games that take place in the school during the school day. Assessing at the beginning of the year enables schools to identify children in need of support quickly. Assessing at the end of the year enables the PRIME team to assess the most effective interventions at various ages and stages. Assessing again after the summer at the start of the next school year enables schools to identify children most at risk, whose progress has fallen back during the summer break. Such information is vital for understanding individual developmental trajectories, as well as peer group assessments and comparisons within and between participating schools and measured against national and international norms.



EXAMPLE:
Fine Motor Skills assessment.
Task 1 (of 5): build a tower
When children try to build a tower, they develop their fine motor skills as well as hand - eye coordination.



completed | partial completion | did not complete | did not engage

☑ ☐ ☐ ☐

PROGRESSING POLICY PRIORITIES WITH PRIME

The PRIME project will establish a long-term data base on children's basic skills that are the foundation of numeracy and literacy, that increase attendance and retention, and that support educational transitions and overall attainment throughout their educational journey. The data collected will include children from junior infants to sixth class who will be followed over the entirety of their primary school career. This data will advance evidence-informed policies, practices and services for schools to enable evidence-informed decision-making that delivers real and lasting societal impact, aligned with the missions identified in the DEIS Action Plan 2025-2028.

THE BENEFITS OF PRIME INCLUDE:

- Reduces the administrative burden of the DEIS / SSE planning processes by providing robust data analytics in a timely fashion to aid school planning
- Fosters a culture that supports effective data collection and analysis for systematic monitoring of pupils' progress and identification of interventions that best support children's needs
- Provides real-time analysis and screening, identifying needs quickly and opening the possibility of addressing them quickly to avoid longer-term developmental delay
- Guides decision-making regarding what interventions are most effective based on comprehensive understanding of children's developmental progress - as against themselves, their peers, and national / international comparisons - regarding their developmental needs, their causes and the effects of school programmes and interventions

Six Steps Schools Evaluation process



Source: Dept of Education School Self Evaluation

PRIME focuses on the critical role of core skills in early life, ensuring that children from socio-economically disadvantaged communities have the confidence and capacity to become successful learners.

PRIME applies an innovative child-centred approach to gather standardized, multi-cohort longitudinal data, enabling measurement of basic skills and changes in basic skills in response to environmental factors at home and school.

Analysis of data will reveal changes in progress over time for children's needs at individual, class and group level in order to: identify children at risk; respond promptly with specific activities and interventions; and judge their efficacy.

PRIME will produce biannual reports at the end of each data collection, in order to support DEIS planning that is specifically targeted, measurable, acheivable, realistic and timed (SMART).

PRIME provides the data necessary to put improvement plans into place and assess their efficacy over time, both across the school year and over the summer period. This supports real-time planning that is responsive to childrens' needs.

PRIME monitors changes in basic skills and their relationship to educational experiences. The longitudinal data collection will monitor development over the school year between school years during the summer period.

UL ENGAGE is working to bring higher education researchers and communities together to address locally identified needs.
We aspire to building partnerships between Higher Education, Government and Communities to address societal challenges together.

This document was compiled by the PRIME project team.

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