| Title | Building educational partnerships: An illustration of the disparities between policy and practice of the Home, School and Community Liaison Programme through an exploration of the challenges that HSCL Coordinators experience in its implementation |
| Author(s) | Furey, Eamonn |
| Publication Date | 2019-03-20 |
| Publisher | NUI Galway |
| Item record | http://hdl.handle.net/10379/15031 |
Building Educational Partnerships: An Illustration of the Disparities between Policy and Practice of the Home, School and Community Liaison Programme Through an Exploration of the Challenges that HSCL Coordinators Experience in its Implementation.

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PhD 2017
Building Educational Partnerships: An Illustration of the Disparities between Policy and Practice of the Home, School and Community Liaison Programme Through an Exploration of the Challenges that HSCL Coordinators Experience in its Implementation.

A thesis presented
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In
Political Science and Sociology
National University of Ireland, Galway

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October 2017
Declaration of Originality

I, the candidate, certify that this thesis is all my own work and that I have not obtained a degree in this University or elsewhere on the basis of any of this work.

Signature: Eamonn Furey

Date: October 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2017
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Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the ongoing support, assistance and encouragement of so many people. Therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to a number of very special people.

Firstly, I would like to thank the hard working HSCL coordinators who kindly agreed to participate in this study by sharing their stories and experiences. The level of enthusiasm and interest in this research demonstrated by the participants was incredibly warming and encouraging.

I would very much like to thank my Supervisor Dr. Michelle Millar for her patience, support, guidance and ongoing encouragement throughout my PhD studies. Thank you so much Michelle.

I would like to especially thank my parents, Noreen and Bill, for everything that they have done for me over the years; it will always be remembered and appreciated. I would also like to thank Anne Jane for all of her support and words of wisdom over the years such as ‘keeping a cool head’ in times of panic. I would like to also express a note of thanks to Mauny and Catherine for their support and generosity throughout.

I would like to take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Patrick Malone and Dr. Rosemary Crosse for their friendship and guidance. Your own wonderful achievements have provided me with much inspiration.
Finally, your love, companionship and belief, has given me strength and motivation throughout, thank you so much Avril. You have provided me with so much encouragement over the years and I hope that I can offer you the same.
Abstract

Poverty inhibits pupils from reaching their full educational potential. A body of literature exists which suggests that pupils experiencing financial deprivation or who have parents with lower levels of education are more likely to leave school early. Education policy designed to alleviate the effects of marginalisation targets early school leaving and attempts to improve attendance levels. This research however, suggests that integrated policies such as the Home, School and Community Liaison Programme are more effective than in-school compensatory interventions. The HSCL draws together the home, local community partners and State agencies in order to tackle inequality at its core. This thesis examines the ways in which HSCL coordinators implement various components of the scheme and how they view the roles of the home, parents and the community within HSCL. The findings are used to examine the disparities between policy and practice. The final section of the study seeks to evaluate the coordinators’ perceptions of the overall success of the HSCL.

Semi-structured interviews with HSCL coordinators were conducted to provide an often missing voice in this discourse. The subsequent findings are thematically analysed. Underpinned by a constructionist theoretical paradigm this research allows the realities of teaching to be illustrated whilst enabling an opportunity to apply a pragmatic approach towards the development of knowledge.

The research concludes that the role of families’ involvement in children’s education is important. HSCL coordinators stress that encouraging parental involvement is difficult and the level of persuasion required, proves to be frustrating. They also rely heavily upon the local community partners for support, as many HSCL coordinators have little access to funding. Less productive relationships with State agencies are reported due to a perceived lack of joined up thinking. Finally, this research suggests that due to the absence of clear policy direction in terms of educational achievement, many coordinators have difficulty in benchmarking the success of both the scheme and the pupils.
Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research is an exploratory study which focuses on the effectiveness of the Home, School and Community Liaison Programme (HSCL) in order to emphasise the potential that families and communities have in assisting with children’s educational development. The HSCL is a single component of the Department of Education’s (DES) Delivering Equality in Schools Action Plan, designed to create partnership approaches to address educational disadvantage. Coordinators are often challenged when teaching in schools located in areas with high concentrations of disadvantage. The school’s response to inequality is often limited, due to the ways in which the problems of disadvantage are presented by children. Disadvantage in most cases happens as a result of circumstances that occur outside of the school environment. This research suggests that Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of development provides an effective tool for understanding how multi-agency approaches to educational disadvantage are more effective than policies located within the formal school environment only. Integrated policies such as the HSCL are of great consequence as through the utilisation of a wide network, problems can be addressed through the implementation of collaborative thinking.

Through semi-structured interviews conducted with HSCL coordinators across Ireland, this thesis provides an account of the experiences of those employed on the front line delivering the various components of the HSCL programme. The purpose of this research is to present the challenges faced by coordinators in order to identify disparities between the HSCL’s policy directions and the practices of its execution. This research explores coordinators’ understanding of the different components of the scheme and their attitudes towards both the mechanics of the scheme’s implementation and those whom they engage with.
1.2 Background to the Study

In the backdrop of the post Celtic Tiger financial crisis, five successive budgets in Ireland implemented a range of austerity measures beginning in 2009, severely impacting upon teachers and young people in Ireland (Lillis and Morgan, 2012). Reductions in the education sector pay bill resulted in decreased numbers employed within the sector, a moratorium on promotions and pay reductions, to name just a few. In addition to damaging staff moral and confidence in the education sector, those affected most are pupils and their families. Cuts in the education budget left schools in a precarious state with reduced supports and provisions. Some of the most concerning aspects of the austerity measures was that SNA numbers were drastically reduced as well as additional supports for Travellers and other disadvantaged sectors of society (Humphries, 2014).

The link between education and poverty has been widely documented and the most recent figures suggest that consistent poverty has dramatically risen in Ireland. Consistent poverty has risen from 4.2% in 2008 to 8.7% in 2015 (EAPN Ireland: 2017). Education is regarded as providing individuals with a greater quality of life and greater employment prospects, leading to a more financially stable future. Education is also regarded as being an instrument to deliver a more equal society (Social Justice Ireland, 2016). Issues of poor attendance, school retention and the transition to further educational opportunities are long standing challenges for children from lower socio-economic groups (DES, 2005a), (National Youth council of Ireland, 2001), (Smyth et al., 2015). However, responses commonly focus upon compensatory initiatives ¹ that are delivered within the school environment. Compensatory policies that are implemented only within the school often neglect to encompass a broader understanding of the causes of disadvantage. Thus, the HSCL can be viewed as a positive move towards creating a greater understanding of the origins of the issues pertaining to poverty.

¹ Policies that focus on providing positive discrimination in schools which enable children from lower socio-economic backgrounds to have same chances as their advantaged peers.
Despite education being regarded as a means of generating social mobility, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Gatto (1990) suggest that schools perpetuate social inequalities, as children who already have the prerequisite skills learned in the home tend to achieve the most educational success. Also compensatory education policies provided to children from disadvantaged backgrounds are usually counteracted by those families with the means to advance their children’s studies through private tuition (Ball, 2004: 93).

The concept of school being able to alleviate the effects of social inequality needs to be reviewed. The HSCL programme is based upon five core goals which include the support of marginalised pupils, the promotion of greater cooperation amongst the school and the families, the empowerment of parents, the encouragement of young people to complete the Leaving Certificate and the dissemination of good practice (DES, 2005b). The roles played by the proximal relationships that children have with their families and communities are widely regarded as the most influential factors in children’s educational development. As with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bio-Ecological Model, the HSCL focuses on inequalities that originate outside of the school environment.

Through creating and maintaining effective relationships with parents and the local community, coordinators can adapt the various components of the HSCL to best fit with the needs of the parents that they work with and the local community. By observing the ways in which families interpret the world and operate in it, the HSCL has the potential to create school-wide approaches with the aim of alleviating educational disparity by drawing together a wide range of policy responses from local organisations and statutory agencies (DES, 2005b).
1.3 Reflexivity

From a personal perspective, this research is based upon a keen interest in education and its intersection with social inequalities. As a result of completing my secondary school education in the south of England and completing my university education at the National University of Ireland, Galway as a mature student, I consider myself placed in the fortunate position to have an understanding of the inclusivity of education policy in both jurisdictions.

Shortly after my relocation to Ireland in the late nineties, I noticed that the number of children and young adults transitioning to third level educational institutions was of a far greater proportion than those in England. I understand that this may be connected in some way to the costs related to attending university in England. However, unlike England there seemed to be an almost natural and organic progression from secondary school to colleges and universities in Ireland. Whilst this pressure on children to gain the prerequisite grades to make it into their desired colleges and universities is done with the intention of advancing social mobility, I quickly became aware that not all parents were equipped with the same skills to encourage and support their children’s education. Through the knowledge gained during my undergraduate education in Political Science and Sociology, and returning to college after many years as a mature student, I was able to understand the difficulties experienced by some families, which in many cases perpetuate social and more specifically educational inequality.

Through conversations with friends and colleagues it was apparent that there is a lot expected from coordinators and often such expectations are beyond the remit of their role. It became clear to me that there is an absence of the teacher’s voice in much of the preliminary research that I conducted, which inspired me to give a voice to those delivering education programmes in disadvantaged communities. Whilst I understand the difficulties that all educators encounter, the concern of this research is not to portray coordinators as being beyond question, but instead to illustrate the realities of their daily experiences.
1.4 Experiences

This research provides a voice to coordinators who deliver the HSCL programme in some of Ireland’s most marginalised communities. Whilst there is a considerable body of literature based upon the theoretical underpinnings of educational disadvantage and various policy responses (Oppenheim, 1993), (Brookes-Gunn & Duncan, 1997: 61), including the advantages of partnership models (Craft et al., 1980), (Wolfendale, 1992) and (Todd, 2007), little research has been conducted which gives a voice to those at the coalface of policy implementation. Studies by Hanafin and Lynch (2002), Smith et al (2011) and various evaluations commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (Archer, 2003), (Weir, 2006), have documented the views of parents in relation to the education system and emphasise the experiences of children who are being educated in Irish schools. Such research has not however, focused upon the relationships and disparities between policy direction and the challenges encountered by coordinators in the HSCL’s delivery. This thesis presents how parents perceive interventions designed to create more proximal relationships between the home, community and the school. This research finds that the roles that HSCL coordinators fulfil vary in many instances from the policy described by the DES (2005a, 2005b 2104). A level of ambiguity exists within the HSCL, which has led to the many components of the scheme being interpreted and delivered in a multitude of ways which potentially impact upon the educational outcomes of children in DEIS schools.

As well as this research being able to identify the effectiveness of the HSCL from the coordinators’ perspective, this study examines their perceptions of the ways in which parents interact and partner with the school. The voices of participants contained in this research illustrate the difficulties that many coordinators have in building and maintaining relationships and bonds of trust with families, and how such partnerships are sometimes jeopardised by adhering to the policy guidelines (DES, 2005a, 2005b, 2017).
1.5 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research is to capture the experiences and challenges that HSCL coordinators encounter whilst carrying out their roles. Coordinators’ perceptions of the HSCL’s ability to alleviate disadvantage are sought, as are their understandings of how partnerships with families and communities contribute to reducing inequality in Irish second level schools. The key research questions that are considered in this study are as follows:

- How the HSCL is being implemented in schools around the country as perceived by the HSCL coordinators? This provides information on how the core principles of the HSCL are understood by coordinators and demonstrates the variance in policy delivery between schools.

- What do HSCL coordinators regard the role of the home and the family within the HSCL partnership as being? This question examines how the home is promoted as a place of educational learning. The home also provides a valuable means of viewing life from the position of marginalised families, thus allowing HSCL coordinators to communicate the problems associated with disadvantage to their colleagues.

- How do HSCL coordinators understand the roles that the community occupies within the school partnership model? As with the home, this question presents the multiple ways that local community agencies assist with the delivery of HSCL. The means by which local community agencies and statutory bodies influence the development of children, demonstrate how Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Human Development is applicable to this research.

- What ways do HSCL coordinators perceive their role as being the effective? The purpose of this question is to obtain an understanding of how the overall effectiveness of the HSCL in reducing the negative consequences of educational disadvantage is regarded.
To answer the research questions twenty-four semi structured interviews have been conducted with HSCL coordinators, three of which were conducted via telephone. The questions posed were based upon their understanding of the core principles of the scheme and how they view parental participation within the partnership model that the HSCL is based upon (Conaty, 2002). The answers to these questions are juxtaposed with existing theory that pertains to educational inequality, poverty and the role education plays in alleviating social inequality. The following chapters also incorporate an exploration of the concepts of parental involvement in education and the realities of implementing this in Irish schools.

1.6 Theoretical Perspective

The study will closely examine the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) as well as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), who suggest that school based policies to address disadvantage are generally ineffective. For Bourdieu and Passeron this is based on the idea that the most influential factors that determine children’s educational progress occur externally of the school. The school system is regarded as a mechanism which institutionalises social inequalities due to marginalised children being unable to understand the language and values within teaching. Bronfenbrenner can be regarded as developing this concept suggesting that whilst school only policies are ineffective, through working with parents and community partners the root causes of inequality can be addressed by making families aware of their capabilities in improving the opportunities of children.

Parental involvement in the schooling of children is widely recognised as one of the key areas that can bring about change in this field (Hornby and Lafaelle, 2011), (Epstein and Sanders, 2006). Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ‘Bioecological Model of Development’, this thesis suggests that children’s educational development cannot be understood independently of the social context that they occupy. The micro-system that encircles educational development according to Bronfenbrenner can be described as the proximal relationships between family members within the household and close peers. Within this component of the model, the child’s immediate home environment is the most influential in terms of developing both
educationally and socially. The next area of the Bioecological model focuses upon the exo-system, the environment where extended families, the school, the mass media and the community provide a positive role in influencing educational development. Finally, macro-system refers to the ways in which societal norms elicited through policy, customs and laws shape lives and influence behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 16-42). The Bioecological Model is particularly applicable to the HSCL as they both share the idea that school is important, whilst acknowledging that a broader understanding of educational development and policy is required.

Fig 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (University of Michigan, 2017: Online)
1.7 Research Design and Methodology

The research model that is used in this thesis will take the form of a grounded theory approach. This method has been selected as it allows for the systematic development of theories that explain how coordinators view the HSCL programme and perceive their relationships with parents. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were undertaken with HSCL coordinators, consisting of twenty-one face to face interviews conducted during visits to participants’ schools. Three telephone interviews were also conducted due to difficulties in scheduling visits. The information gathered describes the role, the nature of the duties that they engage in and their experiences.

The interview participants in this study were selected by using a theoretical or purposeful sampling method. Initially all DEIS schools that operate the HSCL were asked to participate in this research. It was hoped that the responses would represent a broad geographical range with representation from both rural and urban communities and schools that were considered to have greater concentrations of disadvantage. Semi-structured interviews provided the best means of collecting information from the participants as this study seeks to present the experiences of coordinators, which cannot be quantified.

To code and sort the data collected from the interviews Nvivo was utilised. The use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software allowed for the easy categorisation of common responses and facilitated the collection of off-topic data. Common responses were collated to identify themes and patterns in the interview responses. A methodology such as the one used in this research allows an opportunity to acknowledge the social context of disadvantage and the HSCL in conjunction with individual meaning. A realist ontological approach to answering the research questions coupled with an interpretivist epistemology, facilitates the opportunity to pragmatically develop knowledge in the area of educational disadvantage (Cresswell, 2007, 2009). Such information provides the reader with an opportunity to compare the many different ways in which the HSCL is implemented.
across schools and a means of comparing the findings with the aims and objectives of the HSCL embedded within the policy and literature.

1.8 Thesis Outline

This chapter provides a brief overview of the aims and objectives of the HSCL Programme and the nature of the disadvantage that it is designed to tackle. This chapter also outlines the key aims and objectives of the research. The method by which the data was collected and analysed is also examined briefly.

Chapter two focuses upon the context of the problems that affect the Irish education system. The context in terms of the historical developments of the Irish education system is delineated, paying particular attention to how greater equality has been achieved. Within this chapter, recent studies commissioned by the ESRI and the Department of Education are presented. These studies emphasise the current debates with regard to the links that poverty has to educational opportunity. Finally, this section presents recent policy based evaluations and studies that illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of policy interventions in the areas of disparity and the importance of partnership.

Chapter three presents the existing literature within the field which draws on social disadvantage and the ways in which education is regarded as a means of breaking though the barriers that inhibit children from achieving their full potential. To provide a contextual backdrop for the chapter, it begins with an exploration of educational policy that is specifically focused on alleviating the effects of inequality. It emphasises the preference for education policy makers to promote interventions that take place both in and out of school, promoting partnerships between parents and teachers. The theoretical framework is also outlined in this chapter which is focused upon the relationships between educational achievement and disadvantage. It is suggested that school alone is not effective in enabling some children to reach their full potential. Instead, it is suggested that Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, field and habitus need to be considered when trying to understand the limitations of the
formal school environment to alleviate educational disadvantage. Social and cultural capitals are discussed in detail and literature focused upon the benefits of a broader understanding of education is developed, which focuses upon Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) ecological model. This suggests that children and families are better equipped to reach their education potential when active partnerships exist between the family, home, school and the broader community. The HSCL is a policy instrument that encapsulates many aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s spheres of influence, which positions education in a setting which surrounds learners in all aspects of their lives, not in school alone.

The role of partnerships in educational development is discussed further with an emphasis on each of the components of Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) ecological model. Within this section, debates relating to different concepts of education are presented. Differing approaches to addressing educational inequality are documented, ranging from school only policies to integrated policies such as the HSCL programme that promote the importance of parental involvement in education. The level of autonomy that HSCL coordinators need, in order to tailor the various initiatives to the needs different cohorts of parents is discussed, which can be aligned to Lipsky’s concept of street level bureaucracy, which suggests that policies targeted at addressing educational disadvantage need to be flexible and have a bottom up orientation in their delivery. Finally, this chapter outlines the ways that educational outcomes are measured, suggesting that in many cases children and families from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have less expected of them in comparison with their more advantaged peers.

Chapter four outlines the methodology for the study and elaborates on the research design and theoretical approach taken. This chapter starts by outlining the aims and objectives of the research, which has an overarching aim of providing an often absent voice of those delivering the HSCL scheme. The ethical considerations undertaken prior to interviewing participants are then outlined. As the data collection element of this research was focused on HSCL coordinators and not children or parents, the ethical considerations were limited to providing potential
interviewees with a background to the study and providing advance access to the questions, which is aligned to the protocol of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway. The theoretical paradigm is also outlined in this chapter. It was decided that a social constructionist paradigm was most suitable as it allows for multiple realities to be presented. A social constructionist approach allows the researcher to present the differing perceptions of the HSCL scheme and provides coordinators with an opportunity to describe specific scenarios and experiences encountered within their role.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from HSCL coordinators as they provide rich information regarding the intricacies and individual aspects of practice. It was hoped that the nature of the questions would encourage the participants to elaborate and digress onto the areas which are not documented within published material relating to the role of the HSCL coordinator (Appendix 1). This would allow for comparison to be made between policy and practice. The sample was generated as a result of sending letters to all 192 HSCL coordinators participating in the scheme. From the responses it is difficult to claim that this sample is representative of all HSCL coordinators; however, it does provide a very useful sample consisting of a mix between urban and rural schools and large and small schools. In this chapter a profile of each participant is tabulated to provide the reader with an understanding of the type and size of school, sex of coordinator and their level experience. A section is also provided in this chapter which is focused on the existing literature pertaining to the merits of this methodological approach, including interviews that were required to be completed via telephone. Within this section an explanation is provided as to why field are very important when conducting research of this nature.

Interpretation of the data utilises a thematic analysis of transcribed interview data. The use of NVivo was used in order to organise and categorise common themes. Chapter Four describes this iterative process and a list a table of themes and sub-themes can be found in Appendix 3. Finally, this chapter discusses the validity and limitations of the methodological approach used in the research.
Chapter five presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews. The common themes that emerge from the coding process are laid out with the aim of illustrating how HSCL coordinators regard the various aims and functions of the scheme. The ways in which the various components of the HSCL are implemented demonstrate the need for a flexible approach to the policy’s delivery and highlight the various challenges that are encountered as part of their role. This chapter provides evidence that can be juxtaposed to chapters two and three, in order to gain an insight into the realities of policy delivery.

Chapter six forms the central discussion in the thesis. The sections within this chapter explore the relationships between the data, the policy and the existing literature. The research questions are answered in their own sections which present coordinators’ actual experiences of delivering the various elements of the HSCL programme and challenge many of theories relating to the contribution that schooling makes to alleviate the problems associated with disadvantage. The first section explores the various ways that coordinators implement the HSCL suggesting that whilst the scheme has core precepts many HSCL coordinators adapt initiatives to best suit the families whom they work with. The second section of this chapter discusses the ways that educational support can be provided outside of the formal school environment. This chapter draws upon the ecological model and the various types of capital, which either advance or inhibit the development of positive relationships families have with the school. The third section of this chapter examines the ways that the community can develop learning and support for children and families. As with the home, this section draws upon the micro and exo-systems of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The final section discusses the advantages of education policy which locates parental involvement at its core. This section seeks to tie in the HSCL with the concepts of social capital and the need to define education in broader sense, to a type of learning that takes place in all aspects of life not just within the school gates.
Chapter seven concludes this thesis by summarising each of the chapters, as well as offering an overview of this research as a whole. This chapter states the benefits and overall limitations of this research. The findings when compared to the literature and policy context provide the means to offer suggestions for policy and practice and for further research. Such recommendations are outlined in this chapter as are some final remarks regarding my own reflexivity.
Chapter 2
Policy and Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a historical overview of the Irish education system. Our understanding of the purposes of the education system and who the beneficiaries are is shaped by significant changes in policy direction, which are outlined in this chapter. Section one outlines a theocentric paradigm which regards the education system as a means of instilling cultural nationalist values coupled with the teachings of conservative Catholicism. The widespread changes that occurred within Irish schools because of the OECD *Investment in Education Report* (1965), is discussed. The report culminated in access to free second level schooling to all children in Ireland. This was a result of the significance placed upon maximising school outputs to fulfil the needs of a rapidly industrialising nation and to increase Ireland’s participation in Europe.

The *Investment in Education Report* (1965), represented a departure from elitist second level schooling to a system of equal access. However, it failed to address the challenges of educational inequality, as equality of opportunity and outcome continue to be the central theme of education policy in subsequent years. Section 2.4 presents facts pertaining to the effects of educational inequality currently being experienced in Ireland and how low educational achievement often intersects with poverty.

The policy responses to educational inequality are presented in Section 2.5. In particular, emphasis is placed on the Home, School and Community Liaison Scheme. It is acknowledged by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2005b) and Conaty (2002) amongst others that educational inequality cannot be tackled with in-school initiatives only, just as it is unlikely that social inequality can be addressed through home or community only policies. It is suggested that
integrated responses that draw upon all three elements through a collaborative approach are more likely to succeed (Conaty, 2002). The central components and the sociological keystones of the HSCL scheme are presented to provide how in theory the scheme attempts to combat educational inequality.

2.2 Historical Developments within the Irish Education System

Prior to the OECD *Investment in Education Report* (1965), the Irish education system was based on a theocentric paradigm (O’Sullivan, 2005). As such, education was a mechanism whereby Catholic values were transmitted and reinforced since the foundation of the Irish State. As a result of centuries of cultural control, a strong focus was placed upon all things considered to be ‘Irish’. This included the Irish language, history, religion, geography and Irish literature, which were all prohibited before gaining independence. As Garvin (2004) observes, education was not regarded as a means of affording children the opportunity to discover their strengths and weaknesses; nor was it a method of streaming one’s creativity or self discovery but a means of cultural preservation.

Russell (2010) argues that education has three divergent purposes. The first views education as the means of removing hampering influences, such as the absence of self-confidence and the acceptance of social class positions. In addition, education is viewed as allowing children to develop as rational beings equipped with the knowledge to make democratic decisions. The second holds that the purpose of education is to transmit culture and to allow children to develop their capacities to the utmost, whilst the third argues that education is related to the community rather than the individual (Russell, 2010: 15). Prior to the *Investment in Education Report* (1965), the Irish education system was largely aligned with the second and third of Russell’s ideas. In particular with the third, whereby religion served as a way of reinforcing nationalist and Catholic values (Garvin, 2004). This can be interpreted as a form of social control. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church sought to ensure that its followers had a strong command of the English language (Garvin, 1994: 160). However, in the early years of the twentieth century, the Church contradicted itself by promoting the use of the Irish language in an attempt to
connect with the rural and traditionalist character of Irish society. This gained political support from many of the mainstream parties:

[...] the church did provide an education, and often an excellent education was supplied by dedicated and sometimes brilliant coordinators, merely out of the goodness of its collective heart. It (the Church) supplied an education because it wished to recruit faithful servants, ‘soldiers of Christ’, missionaries to the English-speaking world, and Catholic leaders of Catholic people: priests and middle-class professionals and businessmen (Garvin, 2004: 254).

Garvin (2004: 158) argues that ‘the Catholic Church effectively controlled education and decided what education should consist of, subject to the new, hungry and ambitious Catholic middle class’. In modern society, however these principles differ. With more secular movements and more pluralistic approaches to public life in contemporary Ireland, it is no longer regarded as important for schools to promote nationalism or religious teachings from this perspective. As such, education now instils a new set of values centred on filling the needs of the modern industrial world (O’Sullivan, 2005: 108).

2.2.1 OECD Investment in Education Report

The Investment in Education Report (1965) is regarded as the foundation of the modern Irish education system (Coolahan, 1981: 165). Rather than education being a tool for developing human capital, the report viewed education as an

Investment in people as components of the energising, well being, and maximising of an economy in much the same way as one might view investment in physical plant and new technology (O’Sullivan, 2005: 128-134).
This change was not so much a paradigm shift but rather a paradigm confrontation, as this commercial view of education delivery could not have been more alien to a nation where education’s primary purpose was to produce ‘pious patriots’ (Garvin, 2004: 203-214). Education was now considered to be ‘careerist’ (O’Sullivan, 2005: 125-127); and the curriculum was concerned with channelling children into career paths. The manner in which the *Investment in Education Report* changed education delivery was achieved in a number of ways. The most significant change was the introduction of a free comprehensive education system, which no longer put in place access barriers to those from poorer backgrounds. The introduction of this system was complemented by the introduction of community schools and a transport system, so rural communities were included in these radical new policy interventions (Garvin, 2004: 201).

The *Investment in Education Report*, according to Coolahan (1981: 165), can be categorised into four main headings; participation, manpower, resources and curricula. The report stated that the number of pupils who leave school without having reached primary level education needed to be decreased. Improvements were also sought in the number of children from lower skilled and unskilled social groups who enter post-primary education. Children from social backgrounds A, B and C (farmers, professional, senior employees and clerks) were shown to have five times greater chance of participating in post-primary education than those children belonging to categories D, E and F (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) (Coolahan, 1981: 166). The report also raised issues pertaining to regional disparities. Despite failing to offer a clear explanation for the varied participation rates between counties and provinces, the report nonetheless suggested that differences may be attributed to a number of issues. These included emigration rates from areas with low levels of employment, counties with a high proportion of farm owners providing employment for family members and religious representation amongst schools within Ulster border counties (Coolahan, 1981: 165-168).

The second point identified in the OECD report was that the Irish education system required development in the area of manpower supply for the industrialising Irish
Concerns were also raised in the OECD report (1965) in relation to the rapid expansion required in industry as a result of Ireland’s greater involvement within Europe. The findings suggested that highly skilled and professional positions in Ireland might not be filled due to a shortage of qualified personnel (Taighe Ar Oideachas, 1965: 465-466). The report suggested that area of manpower required development under three main aspects. The first and most relevant to this study centres on deficiencies within basic education. The report suggested that a wider spectrum of subjects was needed to offer pupils a more diverse education that was more suited to the needs of industry. The report also suggested that an increased provision of schools and a grant/scholarship system would help in tackling ‘drop out’ rates. Combating early school leaving (ESL) was a key element discussed, coupled with the raising of the school leaving age from 14 to 16 to make it possible to gain practical skills for the workplace (Taighe Ar Oideachas, 1965: 466).

The survey team examined the efficiency of the existing resources in national schools and found that two-thirds of national schools were one and two teacher schools situated in mainly rural areas. Such schools originated from factors based upon density, mobility of the population and separation because of religion and sex. The pupil – teacher ratio in these schools ranged 18:1 in one teacher schools and 45:1 in schools of seven teachers or more (Coolahan: 1981: 167). The report also highlighted the unevenness of the distribution of resources between large and small schools, with 76% of national schools having an average enrolment of less than 100 pupils. However, the schools that contained only 38% of all pupils benefitted from at least 50% of all practicing teachers (Taighe Ar Oideachas, 1965).

The fourth element of change proposed by the Investment in Education Report (1965) considered how the existing curriculum, which was based upon a traditional theocentric paradigm, could be replaced by a human capital paradigm designed to fulfil the deficits and surplus within the industrial world (O’Sullivan, 2005: 132). Less emphasis was to be placed upon traditional literature and languages for example Latin was replaced by European languages and modern literature was to be added to the curriculum. Subjects of the humanities including history and geography were to
become more varied in their contents. This period saw the introduction of subjects including metal and wood work, accountancy, business, music and home economics in the second level curriculum. As well as changes to the curriculum, larger schools introduced both career and psychological counselling as a means of ensuring that each pupil was clear and confident in preparing for the area of the labour market to which they were most suited (Coolahan, 1981: 203-206).

In Ireland, the Investment in Education Report (1965) was certainly motivated by the need for a supply of technically skilled and higher educated graduates to fulfil the demands of the rapid industrial development of the 1960’s. In a broader context, it is clear that the introduction of mass schooling was also motivated by a desire for social transformation and to provide greater opportunities for the lower socio-economic classes (Taylor et al. 1997: 100-126).

2.3 Early School Leaving in Ireland

In Ireland, the negative outcomes associated with early school leaving are no different from the international patterns (O’Connell and Freeny, 2011). The picture of early school leaving is complex when predictors are examined. It has been suggested by O’Connell and Freeny (2011: 306) that in line with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecologocal theory that any effort put into understanding the reasons for ESL needs to commence with a consideration for the experiences of children and families outside of the formal school environment. Kelleghan (2001) asserts that this is because the competencies and dispositions that a pupil brings to the classroom are determined by the adaptive value placed on these in the child’s home and community environments. The greater the discontinuity between a child’s competencies and the learning processes and expectations increases the difficulties that will encounter (O’Connell and Freeny, 2011).

OECD (2011: 392) figures suggest that Ireland and the UK continue to have an above average teacher to pupil in second level schools when compared to other EU States. Class sizes and teacher to pupil ratios are still an emotive topic amongst
educators along with teachers’ average working time and the division of their time between teaching and other duties (ASTI, 2017: 26). Within an Irish context, particularly in terms of schools attended by a large cohort of marginalised pupils, this allocation of time has proven to be problematic (ASTI, 2016). The belief that smaller classes benefit those from disadvantaged backgrounds is reiterated by the OECD (2011: 394) which argue that smaller class sizes allow the teacher greater job satisfaction, the opportunity to build stronger relationships with their students and alleviate the stresses of a pressurised working environment. This improves the educational experience of all children irrespective of their social background. Based upon 2015 statistics for Irish second level schooling, Ireland’s pupil to teacher ratio stands at 28:1. Jan O’Sullivan, the then Minister of Education, pledged to reduce the ratio to 27:1 by the end of 2016 (Humphries, 2015). At present the DES do not have statistics available for 2015/16 or 2017. For comparative purposes, the United Kingdom’s parent to teacher ratio for secondary school remains at 17.2:1 since 2011 (Department of Education, UK, 2013). Overall, Ireland and the UK still remain significantly above the OECD average of 14:1.

A significant challenge that schools encounter in disadvantaged communities is that of early school leaving – pupils leaving before the completion of the Leaving Certificate. A central tenet of the HSCL is to address this issue with an aim to encourage regular attendance and retain students until the upper secondary cycle is completed. DES (2013) statistics highlight that of a total cohort of 257,060 registered students, 7,719 exited the education system before completing the Leaving Certificate. The figures however, do not indicate that all school leavers exit the education system. Figure 2 illustrates the path that early school leavers take. This figure suggests that whilst ESL remains problematic the majority engage in a form of training once left school leaving only 6.6% of early school leavers reliant on social welfare.

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2 The final examination in the Irish Education system, which takes a minimum of two years to complete. Participation within the Leaving Certificate is not compulsory.
However, in relation to the area of concern for this study, it is interesting to note that the highest level of ESL are pupils from DEIS\(^3\) schools. DEIS policies incorporate the HSCL amongst other initiatives, including the Schools Completion Programme, literacy and numeracy supports along with additional community supports to encourage greater participation and retention. Figure 2.2 shows that 4% of early school leavers are from schools with high proportions of pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This is of a higher proportion to the figure of 2.1%, which represents the pupils attending non-DEIS schools.

\(^3\) DEIS initiative introduced in 2005 in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged pupils and combines a range of additional educational supports to tackle educational disadvantage (Detailed explanation in Section 2.8).
ESL remains a problem despite such interventions. The above figures suggest that a challenge is ever present for schools in retaining students until completion of the Leaving Certificate.

Smyth et al. (2015: 40) report that despite educational supports improving performance at Junior Certificate 4, the performance of children attending disadvantaged schools is still significantly lower than children from children attending schools in non-disadvantaged areas. In terms of retention rates, Smyth et al. (2015) find that both at junior and senior cycles, the presence of supports and initiatives to tackle disadvantage makes a positive impact upon early school leaving. However, despite such strategies greater numbers of children leave school early from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

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4 An educational qualification awarded to second level students who have completed the three years of compulsory schooling.
The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) (2001), suggests that ESL has several causal factors which include poor attendance, age variance within the classroom, poor self-image, low motivation and limited family support, fathers’ employment record and the associated financial cost of education especially for those families subjected to multiple forms of disadvantage. Also, highlighted in the NYCI (2001) submission are the details set out in the National Development Plan from 2000 - 2007 (NYCI, 2001: 5) which allocated £5.35 billion out of a total budget of £40 billion towards tackling ESL and its associated issues. This was to be achieved by dealing with the challenge of ESL in four main strands. Firstly, research and evaluation; where evaluations were to be carried out to examine models of best practice and research on the early identification of potential school leavers. The second strand focused upon the development of an integrated database to help identify pupils at risk of educational failure. The third strand sought to identify schools with retention rates less that 10% of the national average and to tailor programmes to suit their particular needs and finally, to target and support the pupils who are deemed to be at risk of ESL.

The persistent issue of ESL receives much focus within research and policy. In Ireland, approximately 9% of children discontinue school before completing the Leaving certificate each year, with the completion rate now at 91.2% (DES, 2017). Retention rates in general have improved in recent years; however, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those living in designated disadvantaged areas continue to be over represented in ESL figures (Doyle and Keane, 2018). When compared internationally, the OECD (2016) has expressed concern about the employment issues that face those leaving school prematurely.

Since the 1990’s, disadvantage and its relationship to pupil retention have formed the basis for many of the initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage. Byrne and Smyth (2010: 48) report that ESL is most visible amongst lower socio-economic groups and in particular amongst males. The participants of their study provided various reasons for their choice to leave school before the completion of the Leaving Certificate. Some students experienced disengagement with the system. Some also
felt that the academic struggle was too great and they found it difficult to keep up with rest of the class. Others reported having poor relationships with teachers who they believed did not listen to them. The main reasons for ESL included a lack of encouragement by the school, a rejection of school due to a dislike of the rules, issues with teachers and other students, feelings of underachievement, the pull of labour market opportunities, personal issues or a combination of all of these variables (Byrne and Smyth, 2010: 69-96).

In Byrne and Smyth’s (2010) study, many of the early school leavers experienced a transition into unemployment and where employment was attained, it tended to be low paid and unskilled with little security. It was also reported that very few early school leavers held full time employment and that many employers took advantage of their position by offering poor wages and working conditions (Byrne and Smyth, 2010: 163). The resounding theme amongst those who left school early was regret and despite exiting the education system prematurely they still expressed value for education in general and would advise people to remain at school for as long as possible (Byrne and Smyth, 2010: 165).

These sentiments are also expressed in a Barnados (2009) study, which suggests that early school leavers have a significantly higher risk of being unemployed throughout their adult lives. Early school leavers are four times more likely to be unemployed than their highly educated peers (Barnados, 2009: 7). In terms of health, those who leave school early are more likely to describe their health as poor or fair, more likely to experience restrictions in their work as a result of a long term illness or disability, more likely to suffer with mental illness and more likely to be in receipt of a medical card (Barnados, 2009: 11). Such findings reinforce the close links that education has with poverty, as early school leavers are often excluded from the labour market and from broader participation in society.
2.4 Education and Poverty

Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland has witnessed drastic cutbacks within the Irish education sector. As well as austerity measures impacting upon the role of the teacher by increasing workloads and diminishing confidence in the sector, reductions in Special Needs Assistants and supports for traveller and other marginalised groups have proved to be the most significant concerns for families. In the 1990s the question of appropriate measurements of educational disadvantage had become an increasingly important question. Questions as to the extent of disadvantage gave rise to a number of attempts to quantify it (Tormey, 2010). Boldt and Devine (1998) have suggested that in Ireland, most research has not been concerned with defining the term of educational disadvantage but instead finding explanations for the problem. In Ireland, educational disadvantage is considered to be central to educational policy. Section 32 of the Education Act 1998 identifies educational disadvantage as the impediments to education arising from social and economic disadvantage which inhibits students from deriving the most out their schooling experiences (Tormey, 2010: 190). This definition does not fully encompass the impediments that are experienced by children and families. Kelleghan (2001) elaborates on this:

A child may be regarded as disadvantaged at school if factors in the child’s environment conceptualised as economic, cultural and social capital, the competencies and dispositions which he or she brings to schools differ from the competencies and dispositions which are values in schools and which are required to facilitate adaption to school and school learning (Kelleghan, 2001).

This definition according to Tormey can also be contested. Both Kelleghan’s and the Children’s Act’s definition of educational disadvantage locate disadvantage in the children’s environment rather than including the political powers that shape what is valued in school (Tormey, 2010).

The European Anti Poverty Network Ireland (2017) states that the percentage of Irish people living in consistent poverty in 2015 more than doubled since 2008,
rising from 4.2% to 8.7%. The consistent\(^5\) poverty rate for the unemployed also rose from 9.7% in 2008 to 26.2% in 2015. Children remain the most vulnerable group with 11.5% living in consistent poverty. These statistics highlight the relevance of this study, as it holds that education has the potential to contribute to the reduction of long term poverty and thereby enhance the well-being of society (DES, 2005: 11). According to Healy et al. (2016: 177), education is one of the key policy areas that must be addressed urgently for a just Ireland.

In addressing the impact of child poverty, the Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs (ICJSA)\(^6\) (2009: 11) suggests that children are not poor as individuals. Rather, the status resides on being members of families who are experiencing the effects of poverty. In 2013, the ‘at risk of poverty’ rates for people living in rural areas, single parents households, children, those who were unemployed and people with low levels of education remained at a high level (EAPN Ireland, 2016). There was a minimal decrease in ‘at risk poverty’ between 2012 and 2013, however, statistically however, this is regarded as negligible (CSO, 2015). The more apparent findings concern the rise in deprivation rates between 2012 and 2013 which show that over 30% of the population experienced two or more types of enforced deprivation. The EAPN Ireland (2016) states that those who leave school without completing the Leaving Certificate are 21.8% more at risk of being in consistent poverty than those who do not leave school early.

Social Justice Ireland (SJI)\(^7\) suggests that education is crucially important as a means of contributing to the quality of life of the individual and the well-being of society. Education is regarded by SJI as a right for each individual and an instrument to enhance one’s quality of life (Healy et al, 2016: 177). SJI suggest that investment in

\(^5\) This is also known as the combined income-deprivation measure of poverty. It combines relative income poverty with relative deprivation. People whose income falls below the relative income poverty line and who also experience relative deprivation are regarded as living in consistent poverty.

\(^6\) Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs are an organisation 2005 set up by Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, to promote issues pertaining to social justice and equality

\(^7\) Social Justice Ireland is an independent think tank and justice advocacy organisation that advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for societies as a whole.
education at all levels can deliver a more equal society and enable citizens to participate in a democracy. Education has the potential to be an agent for social change and development. According to SJI (2011), education can be an effective means of countering inequality and poverty. Those with higher qualifications earn on average greater sums over a lifetime than those with poor or no qualifications (SJI, 2016: 178). This widely recognised relationship between education and the reproduction of inequalities related to social class is expressed by Gray and O’Carroll (2012: 3), who suggest that educational achievement continues to be a key mechanism in the transmission of disadvantage between generations. Barnados (2009: 4) explain that children’s life chances remain disproportionately affected by their families’ social and economic positions in Irish society. As a result, some children continue to face stark inequalities of both opportunity and educational outcome. Such children have a greater probability of having difficulties in areas such as literacy and numeracy. They are more likely to leave school prematurely and are thereby less likely to transfer onto further and higher education. Others find it difficult to gain unskilled employment due to not having completed the Leaving Certificate (Barnados, 2009: 4).

The Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) (2005) report that educational disadvantage and its reproduction can be categorised into four main strands. The first is transmitted deprivation, which is defined as deficiencies within a child’s upbringing due to parenting issues, poor legacies of education within the family structure or the inability to develop literacy and numeracy skills outside of the classroom environment. Secondly, material deprivation occurs when parents are unable to provide resources ranging from a healthy diet, stimulating toys and family based activities which allow a sense of connection with their more economically advantaged counterparts. This can have a negative effect on the family’s wellbeing. Thirdly, school based deprivation arises when children attend schools with both limited resources and curriculums which are often located in areas of high concentrations of disadvantaged families. In larger schools, disadvantage can be reinforced through streaming and high teacher turnover. Finally, the social class structure of society is cited as a major cause of educational disadvantage. The link between social class and poverty makes breaking cycles of deprivation difficult as
any policy allowances can disproportionately benefit the dominant socio-economic classes, who also have the means to further advance through private tuition and access to resources that are only available to families in a financial position to pay for them (CSER, 2005: 33-51).

The Education Act (1998, Section 32: 9) defines educational disadvantage as being the ‘impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education’. Evidence suggests that income poverty affects the quality of the home environment. This is significant as it is the home environment that influences many aspects of children’s development, including their cognitive, verbal, scholastic and socio-emotional functioning (Kelleghan, 2001: 13; O’Brien, 2007). The effects of material deprivation must also be considered which include the lack of access to educational supports and extra-curricular activities, the lack of physical assets such as books, computers and other equipment to stimulate learning and financial assets (Feinstein et al. (2004: 70).

The effects of poverty upon the development of cultural capital are profound. Social capital is developed through not just through formal education, but also through leisure activities and being able to be engaged actively within broader society. It is suggested that a correlation exists between the level of stimulation and motivation that a child receives at home and the socioeconomic status of the family (CSER, 2005: 55). Homes classified as high in socioeconomic status are more likely to be able to develop the scholastic ability of a child due to providing greater support and having a greater understanding of schooling (Kelleghan, 2001: 14). Sullivan (2001: 8) suggests that parental cultural capital often determines the effects of parental education and class on a child’s achievement.

2.4.1 Inequalities Reported in the Growing up in Ireland Study

The Growing up in Ireland (GUI) study highlights children’s lives both within the school environment and outside of it (ESRI, 2009). This government funded
longitudinal study charts the lives of a sample of nine year old children, revisiting them at multiple stages of their lives until they reach the ages of seventeen to twenty. The overarching aim of the research is to assist with the development and formulation of policy pertaining to children and families (ESRI, 2009: 16). The first section of the GUI focuses upon children at national school level. However, the section that examines parental attitudes towards education and the level of educational support that they are able to provide is pertinent to this research.

In focusing upon the educational experiences of nine year olds, the GUI Survey reports that when the children sat the Drumcondra Maths Test higher results were achieved by those from families where the parents had achieved a graduate level education. GUI also collected data on the level of engagement that children had with school, which was measured by homework completion. The findings illustrate that despite the overall gap being relatively small, higher rates of non-completion of homework were more prevalent amongst children from less advantaged families. This trend also followed in terms of absenteeism and behavioural issues within the classroom where fewer instances occurred in families who had a history of higher educational achievements (ESRI, 2009: 86-95).

GUI (2009: 96) has particular relevance to the study of the HSCL as it examines the relationship of the home and the school by measuring the levels of learning support in the home. The findings suggest that the mothers’ ability to support their children is dependent upon their own educational background. Mothers who attain higher education are best able to assist their children at home. Similar findings suggest that in less marginalised homes books and learning apparatus were more readily available. In addition, mothers with higher educational credentials generally expect their children to achieve a higher education qualification (GUI, 2009).

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8 The Drumcondra Primary Test Scoring System was set up to produce reports on English, Mathematics and Gaeilge using a computerised test and can be accessed by multiple users in one school.
The second release of data by the GUI team concerned the experiences of the same children who reached the age of thirteen, of which most had transitioned to second level (ESRI, 2012). Their attitudes towards the school, their teachers and their peers were sought, together with their expectations for their long term educational success (ESRI, 2012: 1). As with the findings found in the first wave of GUI, social class was an important variable. Attitudes to school varied by both gender and social class. Children of mothers with higher levels of education and those from less marginalised socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards school. Those from lower-income families reported having more negative interactions with classroom teachers than those children coming from higher-income households (ESRI, 2012: 3).

In terms of general behaviour, there is a distinct variance between children from homes where non-employment is prevalent. Only 16% of children with highly educated mothers reported involvement with disciplinary issues in school versus 34% of children from marginalised families. GUI (2012: 6) reports that parents categorised as lower-income attended the school more frequently for meetings with teachers and principals regarding the performance or behaviour of the children than parents from higher socio-economic groups. Parents from higher-income groups reported to have more positive interactions with the school structure by being more involved in events facilitated at the school and were least likely to visit the school for disciplinarily purposes. The findings, however highlight very little variance in terms of attendance at parent-teacher evenings between different social classes (ESRI, 2012: 6). The GUI survey also finds that mothers who have higher levels of education have greater expectations of their children’s academic achievement. Such findings are evident in both the studies of nine and the thirteen years olds (ESRI, 2012: 7-8).
2.5 Policy Responses to Educational Inequalities

Up until 1990, little policy change occurred within the education sector since the significant changes that followed the *Investment in Education Report* (1966). The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) (2003) suggest that the 1980’s were dominated by a general awareness and political will for areas linked to inequality. However, progress was slowed by the economic crisis and efforts to introduce initiatives to allay the effects of educational disadvantage were impinged upon. The 1990’s however, witnessed a number of factors which contributed to greater societal awareness and a more pro-active level of State intervention. According to the CECDE (2003), this was attributed to Ireland’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) culminating with the nation’s improved economic situation. As a result, the last two decades has seen the introduction of a myriad of initiatives designed to target a broad range of problems within the education system ranging from pre-school to adult education.

The 1990s witnessed a trend in discourse on the issues pertaining to the alignment of education in Ireland with other international States and raising the standards to compete with the rest of Europe (CEDCE, 2003: 68). Focus was placed on introducing legislative reform which culminated in the introduction of the Education Act, 1998. This legislative Act was the product of the Government Green Paper ‘Education for a Changing World’ (1992) and the subsequent White Paper in 1995 (Conaty, 2002: 34-35).

2.5.1 1992 Green Paper for Education, *Education for a Changing World*

Despite thirty years passing since the OECD’s *Investment in Education* programme, the 1992 Green Paper placed a significant emphasis on education serving the needs of industry. One of the key policy aims of the Green Paper was to create an environment which equips pupils for life and for work in an enterprise culture and for citizen participation in Europe (DES, 1992). These aims were reiterated by Fr
Simon Clyne, former President of St Patricks College of Education Dublin, when he stated;

Public education, by reason of its political remit, leans towards a pragmatic and immediate approach to the transmitting of values, attitudes and fundamental skills. The unspoken assumption of the Green Paper the real aim, enveloping the six keys aims is to unlock the gates to various forms of employment and economic development. The personal development of each person’s full potential remains unexamined and thereby not accounted for (INTO Forum, 1992: 19).

The 1992 Green Paper received praise in many respects for having a primary focus upon reducing disadvantage in schooling. The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) (1993) welcomed the aim of establishing greater equity within the education system, which the CPA state is of central importance when combating educational disadvantage. However, the Agency argued that the Government’s Green Paper had an individualistic thrust that:

[perhaps the most fundamental criticism of the Green Paper is its lack of a clearly articulated philosophy and vision of society which the education system aims to foster and develop’ (CPA, 1993: 12).

The CPA suggests that the Green Paper ignored the various significances and purposes that education has for different people. Furthermore it failed to intimate which mechanism is proposed for transmitting core values though the education system. However, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)\(^9\) (Murphy, 1992) welcomed the new approach which encompassed a holistic emphasis on religious, social, health and physical education. In addition, INTO praised the

\(^9\) The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), which was founded in 1868, is the largest teachers' trade union in Ireland. It represents teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland, and at primary and post-primary level in Northern Ireland.
The Green Paper’s proposal was restructure the education system by way of devolving the bureaucratic powers from the Department of Education to local executive committees comprising of school staff, management and parental representatives. The CPA raised concerns that without an intermediate administrative tier to act as a mediator between local agencies and the DES, schools may become overly concerned with meeting budgets and competing with other schools. This would relegate the importance of addressing issues such as educational disparity. The CPA (1993) also, whilst satisfied that inequalities formed a major focus within the Green Paper, expressed disappointment that the Paper did not specifically discuss ESL both in terms of its causes and consequences.

2.5.2 The 1995 White Paper on Education, ‘Charting Our Education Future’

The 1995 White Paper on Education titled ‘Charting Our Education Future’ followed the Green Paper (1992). In the forward by the then Minister for Education Niamh Bhreathnach, the key objectives were outlined to provide additional empowerment and policy direction for all partners in education. Within the policy framework, this Paper allowed for more flexibility in meeting particular needs and for the respect of legitimate rights and responsibilities amongst education partners at all levels. In this vein, it formulated a clearer definition of the role of the Minister and the DES in terms of policy provision (DES, 1995).

The White Paper contained policy proposals for equality which aimed to achieve greater access to supports for disadvantaged schools. However, it neglected to specify how this would be operationalised. The White Paper emphasised the responsibility that parents have for the cognitive development of their children by
referring to Article 42.1 of the Constitution. The White Paper recommended that greater information should be made available to parents. The proposal did not reference any supports to enable parents to play a greater role in the actual learning process of their children. Other than a brief mention of the HSCL programme in Chapter Nine, the document did not specifically engage with the issue of disadvantage in an in-depth manner (DES: 1999).

The Green and White Papers culminated in the creation of the Education Act (1998). The Act provided for the introduction of new measures and required that both schools and the DES put them in place. An obligation is placed upon the DES to provide statements in relation to the various roles that inspectorate, schools, principals and teachers should fulfil. The Act obliges the State to provide an education to every person, placing an impetus on inclusivity and requires the education system to promote partnerships between schools, patron, students, teachers and the broader community (Education Act, 1998: 5).

A further change in response can be clearly observed in the Education Welfare Act (2000). Similarly to the White Paper, the Act dedicates much of its content to clearly defining structures and functions of the departments, agencies and personnel. As for the child-centred aspects of this legislation, the central thrust relates to the importance of the minimisation of truancy and poor attendance. The Education Welfare Act presents the legislative framework for compulsory school attendance by providing a minimum standard of education based upon a school leaving age of 16 years or the completion of three years post-primary education. The Act also provides for the introduction of regulated alternative education to encompass home schooling, the establishment of an Educational Welfare Board (EWB). Consequently, the EWB currently operates to promote the educational welfare of children and provides standard procedures governing school attendance and expulsion (Education Welfare Act, 2000)

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10 The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Art 42.1).
2.6 Policy Precursors to the Home, School and Community Liaison Scheme

The 1999 White Paper on Early Childhood Education was one of the first official publications to explicitly link disadvantage with family dynamics. It suggested that not all types of disadvantage are visible. Variables such as family education and attitudes toward education may not be as obvious as more observable consequences of poverty, such as signs of financial hardship (DES, 1999: 3). The White Paper examined the existing resources that were available to help early childhood education and developed proposals to provide continued support for those most at risk of educational failure (DES, 2009). Also discussed in the White Paper is the Rutland Street Project which was established in 1969. It provided a purpose designed curriculum targeted towards maximising participation of disadvantaged families. The key word for this programme was ‘families’ rather than just ‘children’. One of the central tenets of the programme was to provide advice to parents in their own homes and to offer guidance on how best to assist and motivate their children (DES, 1999).

The DES explains that the Early Start Programme\textsuperscript{11} utilises much of the Rutland Street ideas in its curriculum and approaches. Much of the activities were developed in accordance with former staff of the Rutland Street Project and they helped ensure that the *modus operandi* is one that closely reflects the positive work and influence of the Rutland Street Project (DES, 1999). However, some of the shortcomings of the Early Start Programme were set out in the White Paper. Firstly, as attendance is not compulsory, in certain schools it remained low. Secondly, often teachers who were used to teaching on a much higher level, both linguistically and technically, were unable to identify with the needs and ability of the group in attendance. Thirdly and most relevant to this research, is that the purpose of parental involvement was often vague with no clear definition of what parents were supposed to do in relation their children’s education (DES, 1999).

\textsuperscript{11} The Early Start pilot programme aims to tackle educational disadvantage by targeting children who are at risk of not reaching their full potential within the education system. Early Start was introduced in 1994 and assists more than 1500 pupils and 40 schools (DES, 1999).
2.6.1 The Home, School, Community Liaison Programme

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is a central component of the Department of Education and Skill’s DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which aims to combat educational disadvantage, through a range of interventions and strategies, designed to improve educational outcomes for children. The scheme was set up in 1990 and was the brain child of its founder Concepta Conaty. The underlying vision and thrust of the HSCL Scheme is preventative; therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, coordinators and communities, in order to enhance pupils’ outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system (Tusla, 2018).

Responsibility for the services formerly provided by the Department of Education and Skills, then NEWB (National Educational Welfare Board) now rests with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The Department of Education and Skills remains responsible for the allocation of HSCL posts in the participating DEIS schools under the HSCL Scheme.

All DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post Primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 528 schools. The 400 full-time HSCL coordinators work primarily with the salient adults in the child’s life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative is the identification of needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured (Tusla, 2018).
HSCL Coordinators, as agents of change in schools, work in an integrated way with all other support services, particularly School Completion Programme staff and Educational Welfare Officers, to implement a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education for the most marginalised and educationally disadvantaged pupils. They also have a critical role in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation and review of the school’s DEIS Action Plan, particularly through parental involvement in education and relevant initiatives and interventions that are designed to improve literacy, numeracy and positive engagement (Tusla, 2018).

The HSCL programme is designed to bridge the gap between structural and individual causes of exclusion. This section examines why the HSCL was adopted, what assumptions this policy is based upon, whose interests are reflected within the said policy and how competing interests are negotiated. However, before exploring these issues it is important to gain an understanding of the rationale and background of the HSCL. Based upon creating collaborative approaches to schooling, the HSCL seeks to promote greater parental involvement in children’s education. The aim to create broader learning environments outside the school setting is facilitated through regular visits to family homes. According to DES (2005a), this goal cannot be achieved without centring the school within the community. Hence, DES regards the community partners and services as integral components within the learning experience.

The idea of partnership between the home and school is a concept by no means exclusive to the HSCL scheme. Todd (2007: 63) describes how a more involved relationship for parents with their children’s schools and local services has been an ever-increasing feature of education policy and practice in the UK over the last forty years. Todd explains that collaboration between children, young people, families and professionals is a key attribute in the UK Government’s long term strategy to establish a more inclusive education system through the promotion of children’s well-being. Todd also states that the Scottish Executive regards the integration of services as crucial to the planning process of policy responses to tackle exclusion.
Policy must ensure that children, parents and relevant voluntary organisations are fully involved (Todd: 2007: 3). Likewise, there is an overarching Irish governmental aim to transform the school system into one that is more responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities:

It is clear that from the Irish experience that educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children of the school – it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning’ (DES, 2005).

Smyth (1999: 195-201) describes how parental involvement amongst the disadvantaged tends to be significantly lower in urban disadvantaged areas. This indicates a need to encourage parents to be part of the system rather than being a subject of the system. Feinstein et al. (2004: 62-64) distinguish between proximal and distal factors which often determine the level of involvement parents have within their children’s school. Proximal causes are evident in five areas: verbal interactions between parent and child; effective parent-children relationships; discipline; expectations; and parents’ beliefs and attributions. Feinstein et al. (2004) define distal factors which pose problems in childhood development. These include: family structure; family size; teenage motherhood; maternal employment; and most relevant to this research, income and poverty and the effects of prior parental education. All of which are the central areas in which the HSCL attempts to address. This is aimed to be achieved through home visits, courses for parents to become involved with and the provision of access to a range of other community based supports.

Believing in parents as the prime educators of their children, Concepta Conaty recognised early on in her teaching career that it is necessary to reach out beyond the walls of schools and into the pupils’ homes and communities in order for schools to effect positive change in the lives of their students (Irish Times, 28th March 2009). Conaty’s experience of working with marginalised communities in Donnybrook and
Killinarden helped to foster a deep interest in these communities. It also illustrated that when coordinators and parents come into full appreciation of the limits of one another’s role the resultant mutual understanding has the potential to revolutionise the traditional models of Irish education (Conaty: 2002: 15). In line with this, the HSCL programme is a construct of multiple components designed to create a partnership between pupil, parent, school staff and the community. The programme attempts to achieve a bridging of the metaphorical gap between structure and agency. Thus, it is important at this point to examine in detail each component to gain an overview of the central objectives. Conaty (2002) states that the HSCL is a scheme which is targeted at the most marginalised within the designated schools. Conaty (2002: 69) explains that the programme operates on the basis of five core principles:

- To focus on the pupils most at risk of educational failure;
- To promote collaboration between the school, home and the community;
- To seek to promote the empowerment of parents;
- To aim to retain young people in the education system;
- To disseminate good practice.

The partnership outlined does not depend upon a dominant player within the parent and teacher relationship. The skills of both partners are regarded as complimentary in attaining the overall goal of challenging attitudes, practices and structures within the schooling system that place obstacles in the way of making primary and post primary educational success achievable for the most vulnerable (DES, 2005: 8-9).

The central thrust of the HSCL programme promotes preventative measures rather than curative ones. It envisages that the relationship the HSCL coordinator should promote is one of change from within the home which can reduce negative educational outcomes. These include absenteeism and in-school behavioural problems. This is a result of reforming the way the classroom hierarchical structure is perceived, departing information pertaining to continued learning and promoting the value of schooling to parents (Conaty, 2002: 72). With this in mind, the programme is adult focused but child centred. It seeks to change the negative attitudes that some parents have regarding their children’s education. The programme also seeks to change teachers’ attitudes towards those children who may
otherwise be regarded as difficult students. It aims to do this by enlightening them to the idea that the reason why such children do not recognise the rules of the game is not as a result of deviance, but rather due to the deprivation of core educational values in the home (DES, 2005: 10).

Archer (2003: 43) suggests that the documentation which outlines the theoretical and operational dimensions of the HSCL is not explicit; however, a rationale can be drawn from what is provided. Archer explains that pupils’ achievements are expected to be higher if greater parental and community participation occurs and interventions take place at the early stages of school. Schools can benefit from a broader range of responses if stronger bonds are built with the wider community through integrated interventions. Schools that utilise a whole-school approach are more likely to be successful (Archer, 2003). This evaluation of the HSCL programme found that in general most School Principals and HSCL coordinators regarded the scheme as making a significant impact in reducing the problems associated with educational inequality. This was measured through examining the increases in parental participation, levels of attendance, the schools’ level of community engagement and the behaviour of children within the school environment. It was however noted that more positive findings were evident from those participants working within primary schools (Archer, 2003: 75-94). Despite the findings showing positive feelings towards the HSCL programme, it concluded that the overall objectives of the HSCL were not clear in terms of guidelines (Archer, 2003: 110). A level of ambiguity existed that left the interpretation and delivery of each precept of the programme to the HSCL coordinators.

To encourage marginalised parents to participate in the HSCL, coordinators arrange activities that are initially non-threatening such as leisure activities and social meetings where they can get to know coordinators, teaching staff and make contact with other parents from similar and different backgrounds (DES, 2005b: 33). When a rapport has been established, parents can use the resources that are provided to enhance their own learning in curricular activities and to encourage greater participation in their children’s learning (DES, 2005b: 33). According to Conaty
(2002: 69) ‘the scheme focuses directly on the salient adults in the pupils’ educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves.’ The next step in the process is to introduce parents to formal learning and to allow them scope for personal development to enhance leadership and parenting skills. Parents can be a valuable resource not only to their children but also to other parents and coordinators. Advanced training is also available for participating parents which can provide access to positions that carry a higher level of responsibility such as working in areas of personal development training and even as home visitors (DES, 2005b: 77). Conaty (2002: 98) and DES (2005b: 88) explain that this level of involvement and interaction has led to the development and implementation of many school policies such as behavioural and homework codes of practice.

As well as direct support and the on-going promotion of interaction between the schools’ staff and parents, the HSCL seeks to network with other State agencies and local community based bodies including churches, youth groups, teams and clubs. This is done to maximise the services provided to marginalised families for the overall good of pupils, parents and the community (DES, 2005b: 56). As 85% of a child’s life is spent either at school or within the community, the HSCL committees’ role is to identify issues within local communities that impinge on child development (DES, 2005b: 56). Local committees often consist of school principals, HSCL coordinators, members of schools’ staff, parents, pupils, representatives from the local business community and both voluntary and State agencies. Conaty (2002: 70) regards parents as the cornerstone of committees. Parents who may not ordinarily become involved with dialogue within the schools structure are given the opportunity to have a voice and express their concerns and opinions. In addition, the schools form the centre point of the community, which goes some way to explain why local businesses and local policing, health and employment bodies have an interest in being part of this milieu. With a partnership dynamic, many areas of expertise can be drawn upon to offer solutions to real life practicalities. Policy change in this context does necessarily mean change at national level but may refer to local change within the individual school or an incremental change to the parental support system to maximise the benefits of the HSCL programme (Conaty, 2002: 78).
An additional element of the HSCL is structured around home visitation. This component is central to the HSCL philosophy as it brings the school into the homes of families with poor legacies of education (DES, 2005b: 22). It is suggested that low levels of parental participation or ability to help in a meaningful way in their children’s education may be attributed to a lack of belief and confidence that they can make a difference in their children’s learning and progress (DES, 2005b: 22). By providing support and reassurance, the home visitation gradually introduces parents into the school environment. Eventually, with the provision of education and training for parents to empower them to take control and play a significant role in their children’s education, parents are able to assist with the educational development of other vulnerable parents within the community (Conaty, 2002: 95).

It is not only through home visits that parents can become involved in the HSCL. Through a designated space within the school, parents are given the opportunity to meet and liaise with other families and teachers in a non-threatening capacity (DES, 2005b: 28-29). Parents can choose from a number of leisure-based activities and courses, which are designed to lead to progression onto courses of a more formal nature that will directly influence their abilities to make a greater impact on their children’s academic development (DES, 2005b: 22). The HSCL incorporates all current literacy initiatives, and together with its interactive approach it is anticipated that incremental changes can occur which allow parents to have adequate support to assist with learning activities both within and outside the current curriculum at both primary and post-primary levels (DES, 2014). Some parents are given work sheets to be completed with their children at home. The worksheets contain questions and discussion points regarding the reading each child is participating in whilst at school. Parents are encouraged to make reading fun for children by introducing pictures and illustrations as an aid to encourage younger children to remain interested (DES, 2005b: 38). Similar programmes have been developed for mathematics and science where subjects previously associated with complexities are treated with an element of fun. As with the literacy programmes incorporated into the HSCL programme, parents are given special support and training to maximise their participation in these subject areas (DES, 2005b: 22-25). As a result of parents’
involvement within the various literacy and numeracy resources, coordinators have reported that improvements have been made in terms of the performance of pupils in class, improved reading ability, greater attendance and higher educational aspirations (DES, 2005b: 25). However, it has been suggested that to effectively study and monitor the success of the HSCL it will have to be in place for two to three generations for it to break negative cycles of inequality (CSER, 2005).

The HSCL, as a policy that is broad in nature, allows coordinators to implement the various components of the programme in such a way to meet the specific needs of parents within the community. DES (2014) suggests that each HSCL coordinators should produce their own plans to incorporate targets and meet key priorities of the scheme in accordance with the strategic direction of the Education Welfare Services in the Child and Family Agency, Tusla.

2.6.2 The HSCL Coordinator

The role of the HSCL Coordinator is filled by a member of the school teaching staff and is assigned to the role on a full time basis. The HSCL Coordinator is based within the school however in some instances they may be shared between more than one. It is a requirement stipulated by the DES that the role is rotated every five years in order to provide as many members of teaching staff as possible with an understanding of the background, family and community life of the children that they teach (DES, 2018).

The HSCL proportion of the annual DEIS grant is allocated to each eligible school to provide targeted supports, through the development of collaboration and partnerships with parents who whose children are at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving. It is a requirement that a minimum of 10% of the annual DEIS grant allocated to each school is made available to the HSCL Coordinator to fund HSCL related initiatives. If the budgeted 10% is insufficient, additional may be provided from the remainder of the DEIS budget based upon the discretion of the school.
The courses provided as a result of the presence of the HSCL can range from leisure activities, personal development and parenting skills, further education as well as support with their children’s learning. In addition to funding courses the HSCL budget may be used to establish and maintain a parents room (excludes capital expenditure), support the adaption of the curriculum and teaching methodologies to meet targeted children’s needs, purchase appropriate resources for HSCL activities and pay appropriate travel expenses to the HSCL Coordinator for costs incurred during home visits, attendance of cluster meetings and continuous professional development courses (DES, 2018).

2.7 The Need for Integrated Policy

According to Considine (2009), it has become widely recognised that education has a significant impact on making the European economy the most competitive and knowledge driven in the world. In the EU document *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, the competitive advantages to be gained from investing in people and their education are identified as being key to reducing inequality and disadvantage and stimulating economic recovery (Considine, 2009: 297).

These ideas are reiterated by McCoy and Smyth, as cited in O’Toole (2013: 34), who suggest that education plays an integral role in developing human capital and is thus vital for long term economic prosperity. According to McCoy and Smyth, if one is to put aside the economic benefits, education can be considered as a strong predictor of adult life chances, influencing access to, and quality of, employment, income levels and health. Increasingly, cross national surveys (such as the PISA studies of 15 year olds conducted by the OECD) have been used by countries to compare themselves against international benchmarks. The importance of compiling such data is not to compare different education systems but to prescribe a platform for policy to be based upon (McCoy and Smyth, 2013: 34).
An earlier report by the Educational Disadvantage Committee\(^\text{12}\) (EDC) (DES, 2005c) found that a number of key areas within education policy need revision in terms of the education system’s ability to make an effective impact upon educational disadvantage. Some of the key findings include:

- The integration of strategy between government departments and other providers and agencies;
- Coherence of provision;
- Focus on target setting;
- Rigorous and systematic measuring and monitoring of outcomes and results;
- Targeted responses for the most marginalised;
- Focus on outcomes rather than compliance;
- Rewarding success as measured by achieving relevant performance outcome.

(EDC, 2005: 4-9)

The EDC report (2005) advocates ‘targeting’ as being crucial to addressing educational disadvantage. They suggest that greater collaboration with other government agencies for the purpose of sharing information pertaining to socio-economic data will help to assess the level of disadvantage experienced within different communities (EDC, 2005: 6). Within the EDC’s education policy assessment criteria, it is proposed that the use of pupil achievement rates should be included. In addition, the EDC report argues for the need to develop a national numeracy strategy that is available in all schools with high proportions of

\(^{12}\) The Educational Disadvantage Committee was established in 2002 under section 32 of the Education Act (1998). Its purpose is to advise the Minister of Education on policies and strategies to identify and tackle educational disadvantage (EDC, 2005).
marginalised children through a standardised approach by schools and departments (EDC, 2005: 9).

The EDC (2005) report has an important link to the HSCL, which is the primary concern of this research, as it recognises that educational disadvantage cannot be tackled by the education system alone. The report states that for a child to be fully engaged in the education process, both the school and the community must support and encourage parents and families to be involved. As such, the EDC (2005: 22) asserts that greater focus should be placed on creating more ‘joined-up thinking’ and planning at both local and national levels. Within the DES, greater collaboration is needed amongst departments including the National Council for Curriculum Assessment, the State Examinations Commission, the National Psychological Service, the National Council for Special Education, the National Education Welfare Board, the National Qualifications Authority and the Higher Education Authority (EDC, 2005: 22).

CSER (2005) suggest that to effectively tackle educational disadvantage, policy must provide interventions that penetrate equality deficits at multiple levels. Solutions at policy level, school level and at family level should incorporate an integrated approach and may also need to include other agencies such as health, social welfare and housing. DEIS is an action plan grounded on three key principles:

- Every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education;
- Each person should have the opportunity to reach his or her full educational potential for personal, social and economic reasons;
- Education is recognised as a crucial factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development.

(DES, 1995a).
2.8 Delivering Equality in Schools Programme

This action plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of young people from disadvantaged communities and draws together a multitude of responses to alleviate the problems associated with educational disadvantage. The DEIS programme was introduced in 2005, and comprised of two main aims. The first was to create a standardised system whereby levels of disadvantage could be more easily identified and reviewed. Secondly, it created a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) designed to bolster and unite already existing interventions for school clusters and communities with high levels of social and economic disadvantage (DES, 2005, p.9). DEIS was created with the aim of integrating already existing initiatives including the HSCL scheme. As well as operating on a continuum of measures to tackle disadvantage, DEIS policy is grounded in the belief that every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate and benefit for the education system. DES (2005: 15) purports that every person should have the opportunity to reach their full potential for personal, social and economic purposes. Finally, DEIS policy claims that education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development (DES, 2005a: 15).

The DEIS action plan was devised using a new procedure that identifies disadvantaged schools and deploys a number of distributed educational supports based upon each school’s need. Weir (2006) suggests that the schools considered for inclusion within DEIS were initially chosen based upon information provided by principals. An index is used to evaluate which schools qualify for extra resources under DEIS. This involves schools being required to show evidence of experiencing educational problems such as below average retention or poor junior cycle performance as well an above average enrolment of students from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Weir, 2006: 1). In addition, the index must contain at least one socio-economic variable such as the percentage of medical cards held within the school’s catchment area and the percentile of students in receipt of a grant for free school books (Weir, 2006: 1-2).
According to Barnados (2009: 12), the differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools are that schools included under DEIS have a higher prevalence of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. DEIS schools also have a greater concentration of pupils from Newcomer\textsuperscript{13} and Traveller\textsuperscript{14} communities, pupils with greater literacy and numeracy problems, pupils with emotional and behavioural problems, pupils with learning difficulties and families in contact with external agencies (Barnados, 2009: 13). To tackle the challenges faced as a result of disadvantage, pupil-teacher ratios are reduced in Urban Band 1 schools, which are schools that have the greatest proportion of disadvantaged children. Greater access to the HSCL was made available with 80 new coordinators employed by 2006 and the Schools Completion Programme (SCP) was rolled out to all DEIS schools that did not already have it. Also additional funding was made available, with €500,000 provided under the School Books Grant Scheme to support DEIS schools, €1m additional capitation to 670 DEIS primary schools and €1m additional capitation to 203 DEIS post-primary schools (DES, 2006: 28). In addition, greater access to a range of professional supports were extended, together with access to the School Meals Programme and access for all DEIS schools to literacy and numeracy programmes. Professional support is provided for the implementation of these programmes (Smyth et al. 2015: 8).

The need of clarity and a more unified method of service delivery, as recommended by the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005) is evident in the structure and purpose of DEIS. The HSCL does not operate as a standalone policy and relies upon the cooperation of other initiatives including SCP. It provides an effective link between supports both internal to and outside of the school environment, parents and the broader community (DES, 2005a: 57).

An updated version of the DEIS action plan was published in 2017 which has a greater focus upon the clarity of best practice (DES, 2017: 27). Within this

\textsuperscript{13} Newcomer communities are non-Irish families that have settled in Ireland from overseas countries.

\textsuperscript{14} Traveller communities are an ethnic group that whilst recognising many social aspects of modern Irish society have distinct cultural practices and values.
section of the document, proposals to establish a DEIS Development Unit are set out, which is designed to build upon the feedback provided by key stakeholders within DEIS schools. In addition, the 2017 policy document makes clearer identifications of those most in need of extra educational supports. In general, the most recent version of this action plan encompasses a more detailed and broader understanding of social inequality and the overall operation of DEIS.

2.8.1 Evaluating Policy Responses to Educational Disadvantage

Smyth et al. (2015) undertook a study designed to provide an evaluation of the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) policy framework. *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (Smyth et al, 2015) focuses on both primary and post primary schools. In addition, data is collected from schools, teachers and students. Questionnaires were circulated to all students attending DEIS schools in first and third year which sought to gain an insight into the students’ experiences of transition to post-primary school, their attitudes to school and their educational aspirations (Smyth et al, 2015a: 38).

The study reports on the overall performance scores of the Junior Cert and compares the increases gained in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. It finds that since 2005, the performance of pupils attending DEIS schools have improved. However, achievement scores are still significantly higher in non-DEIS schools without much variation. Whilst the overall performance across all subjects is described as positive, the most significant increase is observed in pupils’ improvement in Maths (Smyth at al., 2015a: 46).

According to Smyth at al. (2015a), a pivotal aspect of the DEIS programme is attendance. As such, the DEIS planning process requires schools to set targets for attendance and develop methods of achieving such targets. The findings suggest that the level of absenteeism in DEIS schools, when measured annually, is far higher than in non-DEIS schools with 21% of pupils attending DEIS Urban Band 1 schools missing twenty days or more.
Smyth et al. (2015a: 47) explain that all schools that participate in the DEIS programme have access to extra-curricular programmes which are designed to benefit students most at risk of educational failure. However, the findings presented in Smyth et al. show that not all schools that operate under the DEIS system have adopted these additional supports. Some of the initiatives in place include in-school programmes for pupils as well as the HSCL services which provide literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members (Smyth et al, 2015a: 47). In 2009, the DES Inspectorate published a document on effective literacy and numeracy practices which noted the successful steps certain schools had taken to implement such strategies. Despite the report being useful in its outline of good practice, it is difficult to generalise as the findings were based on such a small sample (Smyth et al., 2015a: 52). This evaluation found evidence to suggest that the reviews already carried out demonstrated a need for DEIS schools to employ a more targeted approach and also highlighted a need for schools to use a more uniform baseline to facilitate the planning and measurement of such targets (Smyth et al. 2015a: 55).

In terms of the policy implications of the Smyth et al. (2015) study, there is a need for a continued focus upon attendance. Despite a marginal rise in attendance, it remains an issue in DEIS schools when compared to non-DEIS schools. The DEIS evaluation suggested that greater focus should be given to other academic areas and that pupil outcomes should play a more crucial role within the policy programmes (Smyth et al., 2015a: 74). The findings in Smyth et al. also demonstrate that the various literacy and numeracy programmes available through the components of DEIS, including the HSCL, have made significant progress in benefiting marginalised families. Smyth et al. (2015a: 75) argue that greater exposure to such interventions are more likely to yield higher levels of educational achievement. However, despite such successes not all schools incorporated these programmes.
2.9 Policy Partners

Whilst this research focuses primarily on the HSCL scheme, it is important to understand from a policy perspective how this study relates to other programmes under the broader DEIS framework. The HSCL is closely aligned to the SCP and both programmes share many components. The SCP has a central purpose, as with the HSCL, to coordinate supports both internal and external to the school environment for pupils most at risk of disengagement and underachievement (Smyth et al., 2015b: 12). The SCP, as with the HSCL, utilises a targeted response and seeks to identify;

- Young people who are not regularly attending school;
- Children that do attend school, but are at risk of educational failure as result of a family history of early school leaving;
- From a minority group;
- Have a physical or mental disability;
- From a community with a tradition of early school leaving;
- Showing disruptive behaviour or breaching school discipline, have a history of poor attendance or may have severe literacy problems or learning difficulties.

(Smyth et al, 2015b: 50).

Smyth et al. (2015b) also present a summary of the SCP coordinators’ undertakings. In the SCP review, coordinators were asked about their perceptions of how well the SCP impacted upon the educational experiences of the children in the school. The findings suggest that 80% of coordinators felt that the presence of the SCP led to more positive school experiences and a smoother transition from primary to post-primary school. Also 70% of coordinators believed that a marked increase in attendance and Junior Certificate retention was attributed to the SCP. Furthermore, 60% of those interviewed noticed that after-school activities had increased and 40% felt that children were less excluded a result of their interactions with the SCP. However, only 20% of SCP coordinators felt that there was an increase in parental involvement (Smyth et al., 2015b: 142).
According to Smyth et al. (2015b) the reporting of measurable indicators on the success of the SCP, was a contentious issue amongst SCP coordinators. Many thought that it was difficult to attribute successes to the SCP as many of the pupils were involved in additional programmes designed to reduce the effects of inequality. Whereas, the official indicators specify the use of attendance and retention figures for evaluation purposes (Smyth et al., 2015b: 144-145).

2.10 The Operation of Initiatives to Tackle Educational Inequality

Studies conducted by O’Neill (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002) documented the interpretation of education policies designed to benefit marginalised communities. O’Neill (1992) focused on the social experiences of a working class neighbourhood struggling with poverty and unemployment. Through the case studies, O’Neill presented the strategies that the community employed to cope with life. When asked about education, 75% of parents had left school early and managed to secure work but that achievement was attributed to the social, economic and industrial climate of the time (O’Neill, 1992: 94). The majority of people interviewed in O’Neill’s study believed that education was important for their children. The reason for poor educational achievement in the community was described as complex as it related to a number of areas including the education system itself, schools and the social disadvantage caused by unemployment and poverty (O’Neill, 1992: 95).

O’Neill (1992) found that despite acknowledging the importance of school, 87% of those interviewed felt that school books were unreflective of working class lifestyles, 62% felt that teachers were challenged when trying to understand the social experiences of working class people, 46% of parents who were interviewed had experienced problems in assisting with their children’s homework, whilst 24% felt that school had too many rules and regulations. The cost of books and uniforms were reported as significant challenges to parents. Over 50% of parents had been called into the school to discuss their children’s behaviour (O’Neill, 1992: 95). All of these findings concur with themes that are evident in Hanafin and Lynch (2002),
with working class life being frequently misinterpreted by school bodies and policy makers.

Hanafin and Lynch (2002) gathered interview data from parents whose children were attending a school which benefitted from a number of interventions including the HSCL programme. The findings raised concerns in a number of areas. The first was in relation to parents’ aspirations for their children’s education. O’Neill (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002) suggest that education policy makes sweeping assumptions regarding the educational values of marginalised parents in holding that they fail to appreciate what is in the best interests of their children’s future. In Hanafin and Lynch (2002), families felt that they were poorly regarded by teachers because of their social class. It was also felt that they were presumed to have little or no expectations for educational attainment. Many parents acknowledged that their social stratification was a determining factor in their children’s educational outcome; however, most used their position to incentivise their children to do as well as possible and all recognised the value and importance of education (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002: 39).

Secondly, many of the families expressed that a feeling of blame was apportioned to them by the DES. Parents felt that poor achievement in schools located in areas where high concentrations of disadvantage exist was not solely due to bad parenting. Many respondents intimated that teachers working within these areas were often unable to relate to the needs of both pupils and parents (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002: 37). Many of the participants suggested that the schools in disadvantaged areas were under resourced as the cost of materials, books and uniforms made it tough for families to meet the basic prerequisites of full school participation. Programmes, in particular the HSCL scheme, have been accused of instilling blame on parents rather than examining the inadequacies within the school structure (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002: 37). The pressurising of parents to participate in informal and formal courses and forced integration with other parents creates an environment which bears a striking resemblance to the school system occupied by their children. This idea implies that the home visitation element of the HSCL, which is an integral part of
the programme, is open to criticisms such as the treating of parents with suspicion and poor trust in their ability to support, assist and motivate their own children. In these scenarios, those thought to be the victims of the poor structure within the policy making arena are now being held accountable for the failure of a system that perpetuates inequality and promotes middle class values (Gillies, 2005: 841).

The third way, in which parents felt considerably aggrieved, was in the area of school participation. Traditionally, to be a member of the school board one had to be able to have influence over both internal and external matters, being either the principal, nominated by the bishop or a member of the governing religious order. Modern education policy has made provisions for a parent committee whereby parents are party to the matters that concern the schooling of their children. The HSCL programme claims that the democratisation of schools is one of the central aims of its policy. However, whilst the policy sets out how the collaboration between parents, teachers and community representatives should be structured (DES 2005b: 59), opinions of parental involvement in Hanafin and Lynch’s study (2002) tell a rather different story. Parents interviewed expressed their disappointment with not only the tasks delegated to them by the committee and school boards but also with the level of power exercised by already influential figures within the school system. Many parents stated that the only responsibilities bestowed upon them concerned fundraising and had minimal involvement with little else. Many parents expected that they would be a part of a system in which they would be ‘a cog in a big nationwide machine’. They hoped that the parents’ committees to which they belonged would be intertwined in some way with the National Parents’ Council and that a more influential role could be adopted by them. Parents also intimated that an element of ‘cronyism’ influenced the way committee members were selected for membership of the school board (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002: 42).

As previously referred to, decision making at school level by parent committees was limited. The introduction and cost of uniforms, school tours, curricular and extracurricular activities were often discussed during committee meetings.
However, parents stated that when they contested a proposal they were often ignored (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002: 40). This highlights the challenges encountered by the education system when addressing the needs of disadvantaged families at ground level. It also demonstrates the difficulties that a traditionally middle class education system has in relating to the needs of marginalised communities.

2.11 Summary

It is clear that since the OECD *Investment in Education Report* (1965) a greater focus is now placed upon issues that pertain to inequality. Despite some criticism, the *IIE* Report created greater access to second level education and developed the curriculum in such a way that all social classes could gain the required skills to engage within the labour market. Since this period, tackling inequalities in school has encompassed not just access, but rather participation and achievement.

Policy responses in the past, such as the Green and White Papers, focused upon inequality but did not lay out a clear method for reducing its effects. Organisations such as Barnados (2009) and bodies such as the Educational Disadvantage Committee have made policy recommendations that focus upon key areas including ESL and the relationship that education has with poverty. Recent studies including the GUI Study (2009) and research commissioned by the ESRI evaluate current policy tools and give focus to the area of partnerships. All identify the need for education policy that incorporates collaborative relationships between families, community agencies and the school. The HSCL scheme provides this by not just making the school a friendlier environment but by providing courses to help parents assist in their children’s education. Integrated policies incorporate a broader understanding of challenges experienced by disadvantaged families. The limitations that teachers have in the school environment are acknowledged in Conaty (2002), and DES (2005a, 2005b, 2017). To tackle socio-economic marginalisation, policies must address the root causes of disadvantage, which occur outside of the school environment. It is through such interventions that teachers gain a more detailed understanding of the lives of the families with whom they engage. As highlighted in O’Neill (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002), the HSCL provides a window into
the private lives of families which some parents feel results in negative assumptions being made by educators regarding their educational values and their social class.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three explores the effects of poverty and its established link with poor educational achievement which can be ascertained by below par performance in standardised tests or the failure to complete the Leaving Certificate. Education plays a central role in influencing the political, economic and socio-cultural elements of society. It also determines patterns of occupational opportunities which lead to financial security (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). The conceptualisation of education forms an important component of this chapter. The increased understanding of the problems associated with disadvantage has resulted in the formation of policy to encompass a more inclusive pedagogy which allows for the greater participation of disadvantaged families.

The theoretical framework is focused upon the relationships between educational achievements and disadvantage. It is suggested that school alone is not effective in enabling some children to reach their full potential. Instead, it is suggested that Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, field and habitus need to be considered when trying to understand the limitations of the formal school environment. Social and cultural capitals are discussed in detail and literature focused upon the benefits of a broader understanding of education is developed, which focuses upon Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) ecological model. This suggests that children and families are better equipped to reach their education potential when active partnerships exist between the family, home, school and the broader community. The HSCL is a policy instrument that encapsulates Bronfenbrenner’s spheres of influence, which positions education in a setting which surrounds learners in all aspects of their lives, not school alone.
In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the need for the education system to prioritise making school a more open and inclusive environment. In this vein, schools for which disadvantage is not a common issue may adopt school only approaches. Alternatively, parent or community based interventions are effective in addressing educational disadvantage in schools with a higher frequency of marginalised students. The HSCL scheme adopts an integrated approach that incorporates these concepts to create a partnership model which achieves its aims though its complimentary elements.

The HSCL scheme has an ambiguous element to its delivery. The scheme allows coordinators to have a considerable amount of autonomy in areas such as course provision, dialogue with families and the structure of their day. Within this Chapter, debates concerning different concepts of education are presented. Differing approaches to addressing educational inequality are documented, ranging from school only policies to integrated policies such as the HSCL Programme that promote the importance of parental involvement in education.

The level of autonomy that HSCL coordinators need, in order to tailor the various initiatives to the needs of different cohorts of parents is discussed, which can be aligned to Lipsky’s concept of street level bureaucracy, which suggests that policies targeted at addressing educational disadvantage need to be flexible and have a bottom up orientation in their delivery. Finally, this chapter outlines the ways that educational outcomes are measured, suggesting that in many cases children and families from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have less expected of them in comparison with their more advantaged peers.

3.2 Education Policy Focused on Inequality

This section explores how educational responses are utilised to alleviate the problems associated with educational disparities. A bioecological approach to policy development is reflected in policy makers’ placement of a greater emphasis on partnership models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Hayes et al. (2017). The separation
of the school in tackling educational inequality and the home has become less desirable, with a strong focus on the role of parents as primary educators. Within this approach, the community is also understood to have an integral role in children’s educational development (Conaty, 2002: 31). Most parents care about their children’s education, welfare and well-being. Teachers and other education professionals capitalise on this latent good will when inviting parents to be actively involved in projects based in the home, school and broader community (Wolfendale, 1992: 7).

Evidence suggests that greater parental involvement in their children’s education increases literacy and numeracy levels amongst pupils (Crozier, 2011: 221). Sheldon (2003: 151) also acknowledges that inviting parents into the schooling process is an effective way to help boost student achievement. Unless schools make a concerted effort to involve families, family participation is less likely to occur amongst marginalised families. This suggests that the involvement of lower socio-economic families in educational structures is less organic than that of their more advantaged counterparts. Topping and Wolfendale (1985) suggest that compensatory education policies fail to normalise parental and community involvement in education.

Todd (2007: 106) explains that partnership models of inclusive education policies involve participation through professionals working both with children and parents to place them in a position where they understand each other’s perspective and are able to work together in planning and achieving goals. It is suggested that to tackle inequality in schools, problems cannot be seen as individual. According to Todd (2007:106), this individualist idea of education needs to be challenged. The remainder of this section examines how integrated partnerships between the school, home and community help alleviate the effects of disadvantage. The relevance of partnerships to the concept of education is also explored.
3.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research suggests that the formal education system is invaluable in producing social mobility and further opportunities, both within further education and the labour market. This research also asserts that schools alone cannot address the multifaceted problems associated with inequality. The Ecological model, as found in Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) (which is discussed in greater detail in Section 3.7.4 of this chapter), are best placed to develop the educational opportunities of children and their families. Central to this concept is that many challenges that children and parents encounter are a result of inequalities that occur outside of the school environment. Only through addressing the wider social problems that are encountered can progress be made in tackling educational inequality.

Collaborative approaches to educational development are crucial in making a real difference to children from marginalised families. In the literature, school only approaches are suggested to be ineffective when engaging families with poor legacies of educational achievement (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Partnerships which involve the home, the school and the community acknowledge the need for shared responsibility and provide advantages for all involved within the relationship.

Coleman (1966), Bourdieu (1977) and Freire (1970, 1998), as discussed further in section 3.5 and 3.6 of this chapter, all recognise that school only policies are limited in what they can achieve when attempting to alleviate the effects of inequality. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes how multiple social spheres positively influence development. Within this model the school is only one influential element, as the broader community and educational values within the home environment are considered to be most important. The research in this field suggests that integrated policy responses which incorporate the home, the school and the community are crucial to the effectiveness of policy. Through the empowerment of both children and parents, participation in school encourages the retention of students and an awareness of their own abilities in shaping their futures.
3.4 Poverty

Poverty does not always require a fiscal definition and in many cases it is not related to the financial status of individuals. Rather, it concerns the fulfilment of individuals’ rights and their relationships with social structures such as the education, health and welfare systems. Poverty often renders victims powerless and isolated from the wider spectrum of society and usually goes hand in hand with a loss of respect and dignity (Oppenheim, 1993: 6). Cappellari and Jenkins (2007: 166) refer to poverty in a more general sense, describing it as a lack of access to resources that enable a minimum standard of living in the society where one belongs. They argue that the definition of poverty adopted by the European Union is not only about low income but also deprivation. Today, poverty is termed as being ‘absolute’ or ‘relative’. ‘Absolute poverty’ is widely understood to mean not having the basic requirements to survive, whilst ‘relative poverty’ is defined as being without the means to meet the basic needs that others within one’s occupied sphere possess. Rowntree and Booth were some of the first researchers to make such distinctions in the late 1880s, when they established the scale, nature and prevalence of poverty in Britain (Considine and Dukelow, 2017: 201).

Townsend (1994) published a major study on poverty and distinguished between ‘relative’, ‘objective’ and ‘absolute’ poverty. In regards to ‘relative poverty’, Townsend refers to individuals, families and groups as being in poverty if they lack the resources to obtain a healthy diet and participate in activities. A further indicator is being unable to attain the living conditions that are customary in their own specific societies (Levitas, 1998:9). Often within this spectrum, families subjected to the long term effects of poverty and deprivation are considered to be disadvantaged when compared to those from more affluent circumstances. Constructing policy aimed at reducing poverty, according to Nolan and Whelan (2007: 148), requires a multidimensional approach. If poverty related policy is to be effective it must incorporate education, housing, regional development and health.

In current Irish society traditional indicators of poverty have become less reliable. Whilst traditional models of measurement as outlined by Townsend can still be used,
post Celtic-Tiger Ireland has created a new category of society that is now living on the socio-economic margins. A cohort of society now exists that is educated and processes cultural capital but has limited access to economic capital. This sector of Irish society is made up from those who have suffered significant losses as a result of the financial crisis. According to Ryan (2007: 14) this new concept of poverty has emerged within the context of crisis. During the recessionary period, greater numbers of people were dependent on one or more forms of social welfare assistance as unemployment has risen and those who may have been stereotyped as welfare dependant have been joined by those who in the ‘tiger’ years enjoyed privileged well paid and seemingly secure jobs.

3.4.1 The Relationship between Education and Poverty

The causes of poverty are vast; some would argue that the major causes of poverty are structural. The main cause of poverty discussed in this section is a low rate of educational achievement. The causal effects of poverty can be broken down into a number of areas. The first is one’s employment status. Being unemployed or in a low paid occupation creates challenges in providing basic needs. Low paid unskilled employment often carries very little security and permanency (Oppenheim, 1993).

Educational attainment is well recognised as a significant predictor of experiences in later life. A reciprocal relationship exists between educational achievement and poverty whereby poor educational credentials frequently results in unemployment or low wages. It also increases instances where low parental income results in the limitation of children’s educational achievements (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, 1997: 61).

In terms of the study of child poverty, children are not categorised as being poor as individuals. Rather, they are regarded as being at risk of poverty due to their families experiencing poverty. The needs of children can present a heavy financial burden on parents’ who are already struggling to cope on low incomes (The Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs, 2009: 11). Children who come from homes that are encountering material poverty often encounter problems that affect their development including hunger, malnutrition, pain and disease. The communities which they are members of often experience physical decay, crime, gang activity,
and drug related problems (Kellaghan, 2001: 8). Issues associated with socio-economic disadvantage are not restricted to instances of extreme poverty. Ireland’s system of free education often masks the considerable costs of uniforms, school books, voluntary contributions and money to pay for extracurricular activities (ICJSA, 2009: 12).

The relationship between education and poverty can be examined through the human capital approach. This suggests that education is an important instrument for reducing poverty. Human capital theory correlates the investment in education and economic growth. Education and training impart skills and productive knowledge to transform people into more valuable human capital (Tilak: 2001: 12). Tilak asserts that a strong linear relationship exists between education and income with wages being greater when education levels are higher. Hence, it is suggested that educational poverty, which includes low participation, early school leaving and low rates of achievement, generally results in income poverty. The incidences of income poverty as a result of educational poverty are highest amongst households with low levels of literacy. This declines consistently by increasing levels of education (Tilak, 2001: 17).

Njong (2010) reiterates the correlation between education and earnings. However, Njong explains that education increases the possibility of employment and that where employment is attained, higher educated individuals earn considerably more than their less educated counterparts. Education also produces effects that benefit societies as well as individuals. The external influences of education include increased social cohesion, political stability and the creation of opportunities for external capital. This reduces poverty at a macro level and positively effects health and general well-being at a micro level (Njong, 2010: 3).

3.4.2 Education as a Means of Tackling Poverty

When economic limitations reduce families to only having enough resources for basic survival, it is inevitable that children will not be able to maximise upon the full benefits of education provision (Boldt et al, 1999: 13). Boldt et al. (1999: 13) suggest that poverty and educational disadvantage have a close relationship as the
existence of one of these factors often perpetuates the other. Subsequently, the experiences that one has within the education system are often shaped and influenced by the profound effects of poverty (Nolan and Whelan, 1999: 28).

Kelleghan et al (1995: 39) suggest that the best way of measuring the consequences of educational disadvantage is to evaluate pupil performance. Under this concept, the effects of educational disadvantage can be observed through literacy, numeracy and retention rates which are key benchmarks used within the Irish education system (DES, 2005a: 34, 2017). In addition to acknowledging the school based indicators of disadvantage, Boldt (2007: 25) states that schools need to be more community orientated when addressing disadvantage, as its origins are often located beyond the school environment. Evidence links income poverty with a disadvantaged quality of home environment. The relationship between poverty and education is not simply an issue of material resources, access to books or private tuition. In addition to traditional indicators, confidence, entitlement and a sense of belonging within the education system are traits of the more advantaged socio-economic classes. Conversely the consequences of deprivation include a sense of failure and unconfident learning identities (Reay, 2017: 16).

3.5 Forms of Capital

The level of capital possessed by children and families is said to be the most influential factors in terms of educational achievement (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), Bourdieu (1986). Depending on the field in which it functions, capital can be presented in three fundamental guises. Firstly, as economic which is immediately and directly convertible to money and can be institutionalised into property rights; as cultural capital which can be converted in certain conditions into economic capital and maybe institutionalised into educational attainment; and as social capital which is made up from social obligations which is convertible in certain conditions to economic capital and institutionalised in the form social class hierarchy (Bourdieu 1986: 16). The link between poverty and educational achievement has been discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter. Both cultural and social capitals are essential to the theoretical underpinnings of this research.
3.5.1 Economic Capital

Poverty manifests itself in many elements of life. Areas of paramount importance include barriers accessing health care, housing and vital infrastructure. One’s social circumstances cannot be only attributed to the institutional frameworks in operation in society. Both social and cultural capitals are based upon non-monetary factors; however, both can be converted into economic capital through educational achievement, social networks and occupational success. However, economic capital also impacts upon educational achievement as a result of being in a position to purchase resources that can facilitate educational achievement (Bourdieu, 1977; Leonard, 2005; Reay, 2017). Such resources include private schooling and tuition, educational materials such as books and also leisure pursuits which also aid in the social development of both children and families.

3.5.2 Social Capital

Social capital can be described as the qualities that individuals possess and the fabric which connects them with the community. Unlike economic and material capital, which provides individuals with greater access to resources and facilities and greater participation within society, social capital is held by all, however, at varying levels. Social capital may also be described as ‘an aggregate concept that has its basis in individual behaviour, attitudes, and predispositions’ (Brehm & Rahn, 1997: 1000). The higher the level of social capital one possesses the more likely the individual is to participate in the wider society due to being equipped to engage with education, employment and political and social participation (Webb et al, 2002: 23).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 114) champion the idea that the education system reinforces social inequalities and in effect does little to narrow the gap between marginalised children and those from higher socio-economic classes. They suggest that in most cases it is unlikely that schools can bring about significant change in a pupil’s social capital, as the education system represents aspirations of the dominant classes. As the dominant group control the economic, social and political resources
their culture is embodied within the schooling system (Jenkins, 1992: 110-111). Bourdieu and Passeron can be regarded as trying to encourage one to think of cultural capital in the same way as one considers economic capital. The manner in which the dominant hegemony structure institutions favours those who possess high levels of social capital. This creates a benchmark which disadvantaged students find difficult to reach due to a disassociation from the value system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977:12).

Those who are not holders of the dominant cultural capital are not restricted from ‘gambling’ for capital in order to improve their place within a field or to seek greater freedom for social mobility (Webb et.al, 2002: 23). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) however, assert that when some level of success is attained, non-dominant children and their families tend to make the wrong choices in areas including education, vocation and occupation leading to employment offering either low wages or low prospects (Webb, 2002: 107).

This attempt to acquire a higher degree of social or cultural capital is complex. Bourdieu defines social capital as:

[…] the resources that individuals or groups gain by the virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119).

Bourdieu suggests that in most cases, social capital is transferred from one generation to the next. This is not in a genetic sense but through the continuation of the same social conditions. In addition, Bourdieu identifies the role of ‘habitus’. Habitus is what is inherent in an individual, including taste, habits, attitudes, linguistic ability and often aspirations. For an individual from a non–dominant background to succeed in school, a significant increase in social capital is required through the development of a higher habitus (Robbins, 2002: 15). This unnatural
The shift has been described as ‘embourgeoisement’ in social class terms, or in ethnic or cultural terms the word ‘assimilation’ best applies. Both of these terms affect the individual’s habitus and form the basis for much of Bourdieu’s research on education (Robbins, 2002: 165).

As a result of varying levels of habitus and social capital, children belonging to non-dominant social groups often have less expected of them by both their families and the education system. These children tend to achieve lower results in school tests and State examinations (Robbins, 2002: 166). Hence, expectations are adjusted accordingly and failure is automatically institutionalised within their habitus. An example of this can be observed in Willis’ (1977) study on the aspirations of a group of working class children. Willis suggests that children from marginalised or ethnic minority backgrounds fail to consider that they are intelligent enough to expect to attain highly paid or high status jobs. The lessons of academic failure teaches these pupils their limitations and to accept their inferior status. They may then move into occupations with limited prospects. The children in Willis’ study worked against the system, defying school rules and regarding bad behaviour as a badge of honour rather than working towards self-improvement (Willis, 1977: 94). Due to the interpretations of working class aspirations, many children instead express frustration with education and subsequently reject anything school related. This may be done by expressing themselves through negative actions against institutions, systems, neighbours and society as a whole for failing to recognise them as equals (Gough et al. 2006: 134).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 123-124) and Lareau and Horvat, (1999: 37) explain a situation whereby the teachers identify better with those students who already have well developed academic and linguistic capabilities. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 73) assert that schools reward success and thereby reward those students who acknowledge the criteria and importance of that success, together with the authority of the schools and the teachers. Success throughout the schooling process may be stratified through a currency of social capital. High attainment is difficult without a bank of this currency at a pupil’s disposal. Schools systematically favour those who
have already acquired certain levels of social and cultural capital through their home lives and social networks. Middle class children tend to fit into the formal school environment without any major obstacles. They are perceived to speak correctly, have the prerequisite manners and etiquette and can identify the benefits of doing well in examinations (Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 65; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Criticism of the idea that underachievement is organically passed from one generation to the next has come from many quarters. In Gillies’ (2005) opinion, much of the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the area of social and cultural reproduction and social exclusion is an attack on the vulnerable. Gillies explains that many are victims of a modern capitalist society where policy fails to address issues pertaining to poverty and instead applies unconstructive labels and assumptions. Hence, the excluded are blamed for their own situations. Gillies (2005: 849) assert that all too often the ‘underclass’ theory is applied in an attempt to blame the poor for their plight:

In short, often government approaches to social and educational exclusion more than often resemble a punitive prescription for compulsory moral integration, rather than a genuine attempt to address the material basis of disadvantage (Gillies 2005: 65).

Gillies’s sentiments are reiterated by Reay, who asserts that working class parents have become increasingly responsible for reversing educational inequality and overcoming the structural restraints that impede achievement. The responsibility for educational success has been recast as more of a family matter and less of a collective social responsibility (Reay, 2017: 67)

Lareau and Horvat (1999: 42) suggest that parents’ cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they demonstrate compliance with school standards and in their interactions with schools’ staff. Cultural capital, for non-marginalised
families often includes possessing large vocabularies, the ability to pay for school-related expenses and a sense of entitlement to interact with teachers as equals. Crozier (1999) suggests that in most cases teachers control the nature of their relationship with families. This results in marginalised families being involved in subordinate positions. Lareau (1987) suggests that working class parents, as with their children, are often ill at ease when placed in the school environment. Dialogue with school staff is usually limited and formal where as middle class parents exude confidence and control over teacher-family relationships.

Coleman (1966: 27) and Ball (2003: 93) propose that policy based interventions are futile when tackling problems of inequality and trying to increase social capital. They suggest that initiatives to advance the less dominant sectors of society will result in the middle classes mobilizing other forms of capital to maintain class position and security. Ball (2003) states that common interventions often take the form of an investment in private educational supports which are out of reach for most families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This may include private tuition in a particular subject or perhaps through a private career advisor. As well as being able to advance a child through financial interventions, Ball (2003: 93) asserts that middle class parents have the ability to act upon aspirations and goals pertaining to achievement in a more effective manner. This is a result of having an understanding of the system which enables parents to manage the educational development of their children.

Inequalities within the education system have been a challenge for policy-makers since the beginning of the formalised modern education system. Programmes based upon cultural deprivation, compensation and linguistic disadvantage, amongst others, are flawed in a number of ways. Taylor et al. (1997) assert that such initiatives detract attention from issues of poverty and exclusion. They instead focus upon the presumed deficiencies within the family, community or child. Taylor et al. state that policies fail to critically examine the ‘structure of school, its programmes, its curriculum, pedagogy and organisation and the resources of schools in the poorest neighbourhoods’ (Taylor et al. 1997: 126-127).
3.5.3 Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital was developed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) in order to analyse the impact of culture on the class system and on the relationship between action and social structure (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 154). Bourdieu and Passeron were concerned with the contribution made by the education system and the socialisation of families and how they lead to the reproduction of power structures and symbolic relationships between classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, 487).

According to Bourdieu the concept of cultural capital can exist in three forms: the *embodied state* such as the long lasting dispositions of the mind. The embodied state can refer to the legacies of education within different generations of a given family, including the effects that a poor experience by a parent detrimentally affecting the educational experiences of their children. The second form of cultural capital Bourdieu refers to is the *objectified state* which relates to pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc. It is assumed that access to educational materials is limited amongst less socially dominant households and common place in homes where high level of cultural and social capital are present. Thirdly, the institutionalised state relates to a form of objectification which according to Bourdieu (1986) is based upon educational credentials.

3.5.4 The Embodied and Objectified States of Cultural Capital

Most properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that they are linked to the body in some way and presupposes embodiment. This embodied capital, when combined with economic capital, cannot be transmitted to habitus instantaneously. Such developments occur over long periods of time and involve a series of repeated exposures to different forms of behaviour. In an earlier publication Bourdieu (1977) suggests that as long as education is not clearly institutionalised as a specific autonomous practice, practical mastery is transmitted through practice. A child often imitates actions of adults rather than models of behaviour, so it terms of learning, children are less likely to identify with the
formalities of the school environment if school values are not promoted in the home. It is also noted that whilst actions are able to pass from practice to practice without the need for discourse or consciousness it does not mean that the acquisition of habitus comes down to a mechanical learning alone but also enables children to adopt systematic principles and rationale within practice (Bourdieu, 1977: 88).

The objectified state is concerned with material objects such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments etc. Bourdieu (1986: 20) suggests that cultural goods can be appropriated materially, which presupposes economic capital and symbolises cultural capital. To possess such goods one only needs economic capital; however, to make the best use of them, embodied capital is required either in person or in proxy. In the case of learning materials such as books it is suggested families with lower levels of economic capital are ill-equipped to purchase such cultural goods or indeed use them to their full potential. The value in material terms of cultural goods such as art objects and those belonging to the field of education is illusionary, as the value only becomes meaningful when individuals acquire the tacit codes for understanding them (Bourdieu, 1986: 20).

The objectification of cultural capital in formal academic qualifications has the potential to lessen the advantages of the properties cultural capital derives from being embodied, however it is noted that the link between economic, embodied cultural capital and higher levels of educational achievement are ever present. Academic qualifications provide individuals with a certificate of cultural competence and provide institutional recognition (Bourdieu, 1986: 21). Also by possessing embodied cultural capital enables one to be comparable during selection and assists in converting such capital to other forms of capital including economic.

3.5.5 Habitus and Educational Values

The concept of habitus is used to explain how objective structures and subjective perceptions impact upon human action (O’Brien and O’Fathaigh, 2005: 68). Cultural capital and social attitudes are grounded in what Bourdieu refers to as
‘habitus’. Bourdieu (1977a) states that habitus constitutes ‘a set of durable, transposable dispositions’. Social values and practices are first acquired within the home or family and have the qualities of both habit and habitat. Habitus is a generative capacity that predisposes individuals to classify and act in distinctive ways (Bourdieu, 1998: 8). Bourdieu (1986) discusses the ways in which taste varies within different social classes. However, one’s habitus has a correlation with ambitions, career aspirations and realising the means of obtaining the qualifications to achieve their goals. Bourdieu describes habitus as:

[…] a socialised body. a structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or a particular sector of that world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world (Bourdieu, 1998: 81).

Reay (2004) suggests that this quote reveals the addendum in Bourdieu’s work which commonly seeks to emphasise constraints and demands that impose themselves upon people. While habitus allows for individual agency it also predisposes individuals towards certain types of behaviour:

The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted… this is because the effective of habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990: 77).

According to Reay (2004), individual histories are vital for understanding Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, especially in terms of education. Although habitus is a product of early childhood experiences, in particular socialisation with family, it is perpetually restructured by individual encounters with external influences. School, in particular, acts to provide a general disposition towards cultured
habitus; however, it also has the potential to develop new creative responses that are capable of transforming the social conditions in which it was produced (Reay, 2004).

3.5.6 The Field of Education

A field for Bourdieu (1983) is a setting where agents and their social positions are located. The social position of an agent in the field is dependent upon interactions between the specific rules of the field, individual habitus and level of social capital. Multiple fields exist within societies and interact with each other whilst having a hierarchical relationship. In terms of this research the field in question is the cohorts of society that are predominantly socio-economically marginalised and their educational environments. Bourdieu (1998) suggests that tastes, appreciations and values are embodied not just within the individual but also within the field in which they occupy.

Wacquant suggests that fields are historic constellations that arise, grow, change shape and sometimes wane and perish over time (Wacquant, 2006). In this regard, it is important to consider that each field has a degree of autonomy which provides an opportunity for a field to insulate itself from external influences in order to uphold its own values and criteria for evaluation over those of intruding fields. In terms of education and the formal school environment Bourdieu suggests that it is quite normal for children belonging to more dominant socio-economic families to have within their field, an appreciation for not only education and its symbolism but also the rewards of high achievement (Bourdieu, 1983).

The purpose of field theory in sociology of education is to assist in identifying and interrupting patterns of inequality and to provide a basis to move forward into more educationally and achievement based fields. This concept suggests that cultural deficit exists between the fields of the advantaged and less dominant societies. For example, in the discussion regarding cultural competencies, it is
suggested that some individuals are more disposed to attain than others. Achievement is based upon the field in which they occupy, therefore if their poor performance in school is explained by their field, habitus or cultural capital, it is suggested that to gain similar success, features within the field need to be attuned to acquiring the cultural capital of the middle class (Wacquant, 2006).

3.5.7 Cultural Capital and School

Within the area educational sociology, it is widely accepted that endowment with different forms of capital influence children’s success (Roth, 2013: 335). Schools are not socially neutral institutions but reflect the experiences of the dominant social classes. Children who enter school from dominant classes are equipped with key social and cultural cues, whereas working class children must acquire the knowledge and skills to negotiate their educational experiences (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu (1977) suggests that social, linguistic and cultural competencies characterise the upper-middle and middle class, therefore advantaging children in formal educational settings. Children with less capital can find it difficult to obtain the natural familiarity of those born into dominant classes therefore hindered from achieving highly within the education system.

Cultural capital consists of informal academic standards, which are also social class properties of the dominant social classes. Such attributes can present as informal knowledge of the school and the broader education system, traditional humanist culture, linguistic ability, personal style (ease in company, naturalness, aloofness, creativity and distinction) and material choices (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 155). Lamont and Lareau also provide a critique of the concept of cultural capital. They suggest that what is considered to be of high culture such as the appreciation of fine goods, large houses and other materially items needs to defined as a high cultural signal by a large group of society. This allows for the most dominant within society to set certain standards in order prevent their dominance being threatened. Lamont and Lareau (1988: 156) state that the institutionalised or shared quality of these signals makes them salient as status markers.
The achievement of educational credentials presents as a strong marker for the level of cultural capital held by an individual. Often, cultural capital is measured by the family structure and intensity of parent-child interactions, parent’s contact with the school and in terms of the social networks of parents and pupils (Roth, 2013: 335). Bourdieu did not focus upon parental participation within children’s schooling; however, such participation suggests that parents understand the benefits of proximal relationships with teachers. According to Lareau (1987: 73), many researchers suggest that lower and working class parents do not value education as highly as middle class parents, whilst other researchers suggest that poor levels of parental involvement can be traced back to the unequal nature of the institutions themselves citing that schools often make middle-class families feel more welcome than less dominant families (Gillies, 2005; Reay, 2017). This can be aligned with Bourdieu (1977) who asserts that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of society, especially parents. Schools make use of particular linguistic structures, authority patterns and types of curricula. Bourdieu maintains that the cultural experiences in the family home facilitate children’s adjustment to school and academic achievement, thus transforming economic capital, objectified capital and cultural resources into cultural capital (Lareau, 1987: 74).

3.6 Purposes of Education and Theories of Educational Inequality

This section examines various concepts of education in terms of its ability to level or perpetuate inequality. Some of the concepts discussed focuses upon a functionalist approach, which suggests the education can be regarded as a useful tool for selection by employers and higher education. Other concepts suggest that education contains a hidden curriculum, therefore supplying suitably skilled personnel for the industrial world thus replicating the social inequalities that have always existed in the adult world.

Parsons (1970: 244-247) applies a functionalist approach to education. He suggests that the purpose of education is to enable children to move from the functions and patterns of the family environment to the universal standards required in modern society. Parsons regards schooling as a system driven by meritocratic principles. In
this context, education is thought of as a social leveller whereby children’s sex, social class and race are not determining factors in their educational achievements. Status can be achieved through hard work, innate and gained knowledge and the recognition of the rules and regulations determined by the education authorities and teachers. Illich (1970: 76) described western model of education as systems where ‘individuals with a schooled mind conceive the world as a pyramid of classified packages accessible only to those who carry the proper tags’. Illich argues that the concept of formal education should be scrutinised when placed in the hands of institutions due to the link between industry and social capital, the development of education policy and curricula.

Illich (1970) vehemently suggests that the core elements of knowledge required for life are instilled in children outside of the formal education system. Illich (1970: 30) criticises institutionalised education as being pre-occupied with provision of custodial care, where children are taken from the streets and deprived of the freedom of self-enquiry and discovery. Furthermore education is used as means of selection whereby children are channelled into specific occupational roles, rather than being able to expand their knowledge in natural ways. This idea of passive consumption is one of Illich’s major criticisms of formal schooling. Illich argues that formal schooling instils implicit notions of social order and hierarchy and teaches children their positioning within society. In addition to being a critic of modern education systems Illich also offers an insight into a utopian ideal of how an alternative education system could potentially work. Instead of having schools where capitalist values are passively instilled in pupils’ minds, Illich envisages a system whereby learning resources can be utilised outside of the controlled environment of the school, such as in public spaces, museums and libraries (Illich, 1970: 75-79).

Gatto (2005: 2) explains that six subliminal lessons are taught within the United States education system. The first lesson is ‘confusion’ through the random mix of subjects taught in school which are often out of context and without consistency. This impedes children from gaining genuine knowledge. The next lesson is that of ‘class position’ which imparts the recognition of systems of hierarchy. This is an
important life lesson as it is within this lesson that children are taught to accept their place in society and to defer to their social betters. Thirdly, education systems teach ‘indifference’ for which Gatto (2005:5) uses the example that no lesson is that important that it can continue after the bell. This undermines the real importance of the subject which is being taught. The fourth lesson according to Gatto is that of ‘dependence’ where students are taught to be both emotionally and intellectually dependant on authority figures. Next, ‘self-esteem’ is regarded as provisional and is based upon how superiors regard children. Opinions are usually based upon exam results, grades and report cards. Finally, pupils are taught that ‘constant surveillance’ is normal, through the transfer of the school environment to the home though discipline and homework (Gatto, 2005: 1-20).

Gough et al. (2006: 147) argue that subliminal neoliberal influences that steer education policy result in the provision of the most basic education and training, equipping individuals for unskilled labour. This is as a consequence of neoliberalism primarily focusing on cost rather than quality. Thus, education policy is preoccupied with swelling the labour market and keeping wages down rather than developing long term skills. Consequently, families who want more for their children need to invest in private alternatives to basic schooling (Gough 2006: 147). Equality of education is not just a matter of access, whereby children from less privileged social backgrounds are given the opportunity to cognitively develop through the teaching of curricula. It also concerns the way in which schools interact and identify with students and parents from lower socio-economic classes (Ball, 2003: 20-21). Educational achievement is not just a matter of how intelligent a child is or how hard working a child may be, as advocated by meritocratic principles. Instead, a child’s family background is far more likely to be a determining factor when it comes to academic success (Ball, 2003: 110-147).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest that education has evolved to realign its goals to match that of the needs of industry. This concept is based upon a correspondence principle, where the structure of the school system directly corresponds to the structure of the capitalist workplace, teachers are equated to managers, pupils to
workers and the curriculum is the workload. Bowles and Gintis (1976) demonstrate how American society has embraced the capitalist model of schooling in terms of correlating direct links between the free market and the education system. Bowles and Gintis (1976) state that the education system fosters and promotes a belief that economic success is dependent upon the possession of technical and cognitive skills, which enable members of society to conform with the rules, regulations and efficiencies that are required within the modern industrial world (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 180). They also suggest that the term ‘meritocracy’ is a facade, which acts as a smokescreen to disguise the fact that most education systems perpetuate and reproduce social, ethnic and sectional inequalities.

Ball (2003: 14-24) asserts that as well as accepting the status quo the education system reproduces inequalities. Throughout history the dominant classes have sought to justify economic privilege and look to stabilise social order. Furthermore Ball argues that in the case of education, hierarchical divisions of labour have ensured that individuals are encouraged to conform to the standards set down by the capitalist system. For a hierarchical system of this nature to be a success, rewards must be in place including generous salaries and status which match the level of work required for each rung of the hierarchical ladder. Society ensures that the most prestigious positions are secured by the most qualified individuals (Bowles and Gintis, 1970: 103). This enables one to understand how the meritocratic system utilises the educational system as a selection tool by matching and aligning pupils to particular occupations.

Bowles and Gintis (1970: 103) also suggest that linking education to economic success legitimises the perpetuation of inequalities. This first occurs through the promotion of competition between individuals. Many parents view their children’s performance as reflective of the quality of their parenting skills. Secondly, successful outcomes of the schooling process are based on results and grades rather than participation in the education system. This assumes that all children are equipped with sufficient social capital, ambition and motivation attended within the family sphere. Thirdly, failure within most education systems has the ability to stunt
students’ aspirations by instilling an often false sense of their own capabilities. This has the effect of channelling pupils into employment positions which may not reflect their potential abilities. Hence, this is a causal factor of under achievement (Bowles and Gintis, 1970).

Educational development is crucial to the cultivation of individuals’ emotional and psychological well-being (Cohen, 1990). However, policy-makers do not place importance upon these associated benefits. Rather, cognitive skills which are linked with technical skills are commonly favoured as they can be aligned with the needs of the industrial world. Cohen argues that whilst technocratic principles are important within modern day meritocratic education systems, the purpose of school is to equip children from all social backgrounds with a greater experience and understanding of the world (Cohen, 1990: 276-283). During the 1970s, the application of free-market principles to the education system in the UK went beyond the promotion of capitalist values in secondary schools. Not only was the Thatcher administration eager to enshrine work values within schooling, but it also sought to dispel the advantages of traditional non-vocational learning. Poster campaigns promoted slogans such as ‘If you want more than a job get more than an education’. Messages such as this insinuated that work related technical skills were more valuable than continuing one’s education to a higher academic level. These messages were mostly targeted at working class families and they ultimately led to the *Great Education Reform Bill* (1988), also known as the ‘Yuppies Bill’, which did little to reduce inequality (Cohen, 1990:50).

Meritocratic principles can be regarded as unavoidable. They serve as a selection tool, promoting those who have achieved the highest results, demonstrated above average aptitude in a specific area or as a reward for hard working and diligent individuals. Hall (1969: 259) suggested that a person’s occupational setting is closely aligned with their social status. He stated ‘[...] occupations are used in common social interaction as a major means of locating an individual within the social system’. He suggested that occupational status displaces other socially stratifying indicators such as race, ethnicity, gender and class; it can be completely
disassociated with social capital and social class related inequalities. It is however, possible to gain occupational success through progression via promotion, even without a rich bank of qualifications which allow individuals to begin employment at higher positions. Hall (1969: 261) expands upon this concept by explaining that whilst education may create an opportunity to gain employment, it is social stratification which will gain a person a position of authority or power within an organisation. Social stratification comprises social capital, socio economic status and I.Q. This demonstrates the role of class and social inequality in the effectiveness of education’s role in facilitating social mobility. It also questions whether education can be used as an effective tool to combat social and class disparity.

The ‘hidden curriculum’ not only facilitates the needs and ideals of the industrial world but also applies underlying coercion within the provision of suitable curricula, which is used to maintain social control. Dahl’s (1957) concept of power suggests that governments manipulate the actions of the less powerful to strengthen the interests of those who hold power. Freire (1970: 53-55) also describes a similar concept where the curriculum does not necessarily focus upon the instilling of capitalist values but instead creates an environment where pupils become depositories for education. He suggests that the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed; in other words teachers pass on the symbols and values of the dominant groups within society.

Lukes (1974) implies that power is held by all social actors. However, political bodies use power to inhibit individuals and communities from contesting the issues that perpetuate powerlessness. Hayward (2000) states that power is not simply used as an instrument to wield authority over others, rather it should be perceived as the barriers that prevent the ability of individuals to make decisions. This works in such a way that the vulnerable are socialised into identities that determine social positions. Such a concept can be applied to the area of education where the hidden curriculum can be regarded as a means of institutionalising the social class positions of those within it.
3.7 The Roles with in Education

This section examines the roles that the school, home and community play within education. Firmly rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model all three reside within the micro-system. Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Epstein (1986), Epstein and Salinas (2004) and Epstein and Sanders (2006) all acknowledge that the role of education extends beyond the school gate. This section finally presents how the role of partnerships between all systems within the ecological model, are effective in creating inclusivity within education and learning.

3.7.1 The Role of the School in Education

Traditionally, it was the school’s responsibility to educate and prepare children for further progression. The concept of the school as the primary educator of children is now being tested and expanded upon. In schools which are ill prepared to teach and develop children from less dominant classes, a ‘narrative’ relationship exists between teacher and pupil (Freire, 1970: 52). Within this relationship teachers depict reality as if it was motionless, static and predictable and it is this narration that leads students to compartmentalise such information (Freire, 1970: 53).

It has been documented in Jeynes (2005: 261) that parental involvement in their children’s education is vitally important for raising the educational outcomes of struggling urban students by reducing the achievement gap between marginalised students and those more advanced scholastically. In a longitudinal study based upon the 1970 British Birth Cohort, Flouri (2006: 51) found that despite some differences in educational expectations between sons and daughters at different ages by both fathers and mothers. The study found that parental interest and involvement in children’s education is very important.

The importance of supporting parental involvement in children’s education is also highlighted in Cullen et al., (2010) who conducted a study of 162 Parent Support
Advisers. The PSA role was piloted in 2006-2008 in the UK and offered preventative and early intervention support to families where there were concerns about children’s school attendance or behaviour. The study found that the PSA initiative was very successful in general; however, as with Flouri (2006), found discrepancies between the level of involvement between mothers and fathers. Cullen at al. (2011: 494) suggest that whilst some structural barriers exist such as men being more likely to be in full time employment many of the barriers that limited fathers involvement in their children’s education related to traditional social attitudes which considers women to be more caring, with child issues being primarily the concern of mothers.

It has been suggested that school only approaches to addressing inequality fail to incorporate a working class perspective. The absence of this dimension within policy discourse has led to poor insight in the area of poverty related barriers to education (Lynch, 1999: 41). Research conducted in the U.S. has shown that schools often have little effect on pupil outcomes, as children spend the majority of their time outside of the school environment (Coleman, 1966). However, evaluations of education policy in Ireland (Smyth et al, 1999, 2000, 2012) suggest otherwise. It is stated that pupils must be retained in school for as long as possible, therefore according to Smyth (1999: 3) the debate should focus on whether school effects upon educational development can be just as important as family background.

Much of the rhetoric within modern education policy is child centred; however it is concentrated on parental involvement. Todd (2007) suggests that children’s voices are rarely heard within the decision making processes of schools. Often greater consultation with both children and parents can result in greater participation. However, developing interests in education is not always straight forward. Getting adults to take young people’s views seriously, trying to satisfy all who are involved and dealing with unrealistic expectations are cited as being the most frustrating elements of school policy making (Todd, 2007: 42).
3.7.2 The Role of the Home in Challenging Educational Inequality

The home environment is an important influence on student achievement and behaviour. It has been suggested that certain parenting styles, disciplinary approaches, parental monitoring, family solving strategies and levels of conflict within the home, are predictive of achievement and delinquency amongst juveniles (Snyder and Patterson, 1987). According to Hornby and Lafaele, (2011) many of the changes to family structures are unrelated to parental attitudes towards education but have the potential to negatively impact upon the support they can provide. They state that family structures are now marked by an increase in working hours, greater numbers of parents who are dual earners and an increase in the numbers of family separations. It is also suggested that fewer extended family relationships exist and communities face increased fragmentation. The combined effects of these factors suggest that many families are operating at higher stress levels, have lower incomes and less time on their hands, thus making it difficult to optimise involvement within the education of their children (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011: 45).

Parental involvement in school, as part of a partnership model, often occurs within the family home. Wolfendale (1992: 37) suggests that when considering the home as a place for learning, it must be regarded as complimentary to the school. Wolfendale explains that learning is about gaining information, acquiring understandings of concepts, making connections, gaining specific skills, solving problems and self-inquiry. The importance of the home being promoted in learning lies in the concept that learning happens as a result of both incidental and intentional actions (Wolfendale, 1992: 37).

Goodall and Montgomery (2006) illustrate that parental involvement, both in school and in the home, can be regarded as a continuum. This continuum begins with parental involvement within the school as parents engage with children’s learning and progresses to parents being confident as educators. To be most effective, parental engagement should be rooted outside of the formal school environment, in an attitude that fosters children’s learning within the home. This
continuum is characterised by how parental actions are informed by the school, or based on information provided by the school. However, it is the choices and actions of parents that have the greatest influence upon educational development (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 405).

Johnson and Ransom (1980: 180) find that the role of the home in secondary education as described by parents is that it simply provides what the school cannot. It is suggested that the home provides supplementary resources ranging from television to private tuition. In addition to these, sports, hobbies and classes providing specific skills training are considered to be important elements within educational development. Such activities are considered, by parents, to be just as important as school based initiatives. Other family supports are available in many homes, which include guidance and support from parents and older siblings. Supports such as these are regarded by parents as being important, as often children identify more with others closer in age or generation (Midwinter, 1980).

Integrated policies that incorporate the family home are vital in developing not just the family’s knowledge of the school and their own capacity to enhance their children’s educational development but also to develop the teachers’ and schools’ social understandings of the challenges encountered by marginalised parents. As well as viewing the social conditions of the family, the liaison teacher who visits a home has a secondary role which is to interpret the situation and convey the circumstances to class teachers and other staff in the school (Bailey, 1980: 265-266). Bailey also suggests that it is possible to draw parallels with the work of liaison teachers and that of a social worker as they become aware of general environmental factors such as poor housing, poverty, unemployment, cultural difference which in most cases militate against the progress of the child (Bailey, 1980: 267).
3.7.3 The Role of the Community in Challenging Educational Disadvantage

When considering the school as a part of a learning community, it should be viewed as part of an organised programme of education, where family and community partners collaboratively work on activities that are attached to overall school goals (Epstein and Salinas, 2004: 12). Professional learning communities that incorporate teamwork between teachers, principals, and staff can be effective in improving instruction, reducing teachers’ isolation and assessing pupils’ progress. However, it is the school learning community that includes parents and community partners that make the most significant impact upon the learning experiences of children and their families (Epstein and Salinas, 2004: 12).

Evans (2004: 80) suggests that disadvantaged neighbourhoods have less social capital than wealthier neighbourhoods. Residents in disadvantaged communities often have weaker social ties, experience lower levels of interpersonal trust and perceive that there are lower levels of instrumental support and mutual aid available to them. It is also stated that young people growing up in marginalised areas experience less social cohesion compared with those in more affluent neighbourhoods. Putman (1995) connects the level of social capital within the community to the ways in which families are able to participate within their neighbourhoods. One of Putnam’s primary indicators of active engagement in civic society is based upon one’s involvement in active leisure pursuits. These sentiments are contested by those who suggest that the social capital of communities is not only associated with the amenities within them. Leonard (2005: 614) explains that in a study conducted in areas containing high levels of poverty and deprivation, communities were often labelled as ‘dreadful enclosures’. One of the areas focused upon was located in Northern Ireland and embedded into strong, tight and collective social networks. This was not attributed to physical amenities but instead to the broader political context where Catholic identity provided cohesiveness. The second community in Leonard’s study was located in Dublin and was categorised by social isolation and distrust as a result of the uneven benefits of the Celtic Tiger, which had torn apart this working class community. The former example demonstrates the ability of communities to establish strong networks as a way of challenging the State’s
inability to provide employment and opportunity. It is important to understand that this level of bonding capital is regarded by Leonard as a political strategy. This provides an example of the important role the state can play in restricting or facilitating the environments where social capital may flourish.

The geographic locations in Leonard’s study demonstrate the links between family and community and the ways that the development of social capital is often dependent on the community ties within a place rather than the family. Despite the strong bonding social capital exhibited in the Northern Irish example families were unable to make effective ‘bridges’ into the wider community. This suggests that the relationships fostered within the poorer neighbourhoods have use value as opposed to exchange value where more long term solutions to disadvantage can be fostered (Leonard, 2005: 616).

The community is depicted positively by Paz (1990), who states that ‘Communities are untapped reservoirs of human potential’. For school policy which has equality at its focal point, educational success is dependent on the initiatives being rooted in the community. Conaty (2002) suggests that in the same way as children require healthy and strong bodies for physical development; their success within the education system is based upon healthy and strong communities. Education should provide consequential and appropriate learning opportunities for children, families and the broader community for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life and allowing children to grow up in an enriched environment (Conaty, 2002: 45).

A school learning community, according to Epstein and Selinas (2004), offers a range of benefits to both pupils and families. They explain that schools can target pupils at risk of educational underachievement with courses that can be attended during lunch breaks or after school. However, optimum community partnership should also incorporate the families and extended families of those attending the school. Both schools and communities have a vested interest in becoming true
learning environments for children and parents. Epstein and Selinas (2004: 17) suggest that as a result of this mutual interest, all parties share the responsibility of systematically strengthening and maintaining their family and community engagement initiatives.

According to Midwinter (1980: 204), the lesson of the suburban school is that language, values and aspirations are more appropriate for learning in the setting of a school’s catchment area than in the formal school environment. Making schools more apposite to one’s own culture through the integration of parents and community organisations can create a more natural environment for the pupil. Midwinter suggests that much of what children learn is done outside of the school, which acknowledges the family role as being crucial in childhood learning. In addition, the community has an educative role which rejects the Victorian model of education where a child is withdrawn from their community, offering an education within a vacuum (Midwinter, 1980: 206).

Todd (2007: 85) states that community regeneration cannot succeed without the school playing a central role as part of a coordinated strategy. Within this context of the community, Todd (2007) refers to the ideal of community involvement within education as the ‘extended school’. This structure has benefits for both the child, family and the community. For the child, the community extends learning opportunities and helps to reduce individual barriers, creates community engagement and provides a social education though the provision of extra-curricular activities. For families, the extended school provides learning support, parenting skills and family support as well as providing a broader range of supports to assist with housing, child protection and health related issues. Finally the contribution which the formal school makes to the extended school is one of support, development of cultural attitudes to society, learning and initiatives to combat social problems. As a result, the extended school has a positive impact upon local crime rates, community safety, housing, leisure and transport issues and provides employment opportunities (Todd, 2007: 86).
3.7.4 The Partnership Role in Education

A substantial body of literature has developed and explored the relationship between family involvement in children’s education and their educational achievements (Levine and Sutherland, 2013: 240). In the twenty-first century there is an increasing recognition for the importance of early intervention in order to limit the effects of educational disadvantage. Central to children’s outcomes is the involvement of parents in the home (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). In addition to family demographics such as parent’s age, level of parental education and employment status, an important aspect of such involvement is based upon the availability of resources in the home (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Since the 1990s inclusive education has stimulated considerable international interest. One of the core themes within this area is that of child, family and community involvement. In the past decade, Irish schools have undergone much change in terms of diversity. In addition, developments in relation to addressing social and educational disadvantage have become more focused on the creation of promoting parental partnerships and whole school responses. Day and Prunty (2015) explain that despite a concerted effort by schools to promote the greater involvement of families, many parents experience unwillingness on the part of schools and related service providers to share information and involve parents in decision making about the provision of their children’s education.

The reasons why parents want to become involved with their children’s education is outlined by Walker et al. (2010: 29). The first key reason outlined suggests that parents are aware of the importance of their role as primary educators; however, in some cases need support to fulfil it. Such involvement is categorised into home and in school supports. Both are regarded as important, however school based activities for parents tend to be more difficult to achieving good participation levels. The role of partnership does not only place expectations upon families to become active within children’s learning. Walker et al. (2010: 30) state that schools need to be flexible and understanding of the needs of parents that are less at ease with formal learning environments. This can be achieved by developing teacher attitudes towards parents, thus making the school a more welcoming environment, increasing
school staff’s socio-cultural awareness and develop more iterative homework so both children and parents can learn in tandem.

Epstein and Saunders (2006) explain that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when the home, school, and community work together to support students’ learning and educational development. Overlapping spheres of influence have been used to explain how educators, parents and communities connect to collaboratively foster positive attitudes towards education and create more inclusive educational environments (Epstein and Saunders, 2006: 87). By the school working in tandem with families and community partners, educators are better placed to provide behavioural and other educational supports to children and parents that cannot be offered within the school environment (Sheldon and Epstein, 2002: 5).

Children grow up and develop as part of society; the people, places, objects and ideas they encounter help form the basis of their educational and personal development (Hayes et al, 2017). Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains that laboratory based approaches, such as the school environment, when used to measure children’s educational development tend to be isolational. This model of practice fails to take into account the actual environments within which humans most frequently occupy.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the most appropriate method for understanding children’s development is through the bioecological model. The bioecological model is an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time. In this model, development is defined as the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 793). Levine and Sutherland (2013) state that the social bioecological model highlights the fact that children are shaped by their interactions with proximal (family) and distal (community) factors.
The first version of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development categorised the development of the individual within four main systems: the micro-system; meso-system; exo-system and the macro-system. In order to understand the intricacies of the model an understanding of each component is required. The micro-system refers to the relationships that children have with immediate family members such as parents and siblings, they are considered the most influential within the educational development of the child. The micro-system in which families occupy is also subjected to the influences of the exo-system. This component of the ecological model is constructed from the community partners who work directly with individuals and families. These often include neighbours, school staff and other local community based agencies which focus upon the wellbeing and development of children and families. Influencing the exo-system is the macro-system, which is made up from statutory agencies such as government departments. Within the exo-system the mass media is regarded as having the potential to shape the development of individuals and groups by influencing socio-cultural behaviour. In the case of this study, the Department of Education and Skills, TUSLA and the HSE provide legislation and policy to support marginalised families. Newspapers, radio and television have a significant impact upon how societies act and view the world. The macro-system refers to the attitudes, beliefs and ideologies that are present in society and the social institutions (Hornby, 2000: 107-113).

The most recent addition to the model is the ‘chrono-system’ which refers to the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life-course of the person (Bronfenbrenner 1995; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; 2006). In effect, the chrono-system recognises that experiences and reactions to experience often change over time. The chrono-system also considers the effect of socio-historical conditions on the development of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1998: 1020). This framework identifies the factors and critical domains that influence educational development, but more importantly, examines the interactional nature of the various relationships that occur between child and parent, parent and school and school and community.
As well as Bronfenbrenner (2005), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) conceptualised the nested elements of the bioecological model into micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono-systems, they analyse the model by using four key elements: Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT). Within this approach, each element must be examined individually and in terms of their interaction with each other (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), (O’Toole, 2016).

Fig 4. Social Ecological Model of Educational Development (Hayes et al., 2017:14).

Bronfenbrenner (1999) explains that the process component of the PPCT analytic tool involves the application of the bioecological model to a set of processes of reciprocal interactions between active evolving persons, objects and symbols within their immediate and external environments. These proximal processes often include parent-child relationships and other encounters that children and families experience on a daily basis with schools, playgroups and other community based organisations. For this model to be effective, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggest that interactions within the different influencing spheres must occur on a regular basis and over a long period of time. This is necessary as the relationships that are formed by families need to become more complex, as repetition is not considered to
be useful within human development principles (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 798).

Human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1995: 620).

Bronfenbrenner (1999) states that the outcome of proximal processes, the relationship that individuals have with their immediate social contacts, is often dependant on the quality of the social environment in which they occupy. Proximal processes are posited as having greater impacts in more stable and advantaged environments. Bronfenbrenner (1999) and O’Toole (2016) explain that most human beings, at all socio-economic levels, especially parents have the capacity to respond to the needs of their children. However, the situation is different with respect to enabling their children to acquire educational knowledge. It is in this domain that parents must possess the required knowledge and skills to offer assistance to their children, or have access to educational resources outside of the family environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999: 8).

In regard to the person component within this analytical tool the individual is not viewed as a passive recipient of experiences within settings and ‘processes’. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006: 795), three types of person characteristics can be identified as being most influential in shaping the course of future development through their capacity to affect the direction and power of proximal processes that occur during life course. The first relates to person specific characteristics, which is described as one’s disposition. Individuals or groups of individuals can set processes in motion which will either continue or develop their proximal status (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 795). For example agents may have a particular outlook that will either hinder their developmental mobility or restrict them rendering them static in their original
position. The second determining feature of the person component of PPCT is that of resources. A person’s resources refer to attributes such as ability, knowledge and skills (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 796). Being in possession of these is required for the effective functioning of proximal processes. The final characteristic of the person is demand. Demand invites or discourages reactions from the social environments within the bioecological model that can foster or disrupt proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 796).

The best known component is the ecological context as it contains the initial four distinct concentric and nested systems of development (Krishnan, 2010). As discussed above, Bronfenbrenner drew attention to the various contextual influences within the development of children (Hayes et al., 2017: 25). The context differentiates between each of the nested environments of Bronfenbrenner’s model. The bioecological model rests on the assumption that biological factors and evolutionary processes do more than simply set limits on human development (O’Toole, 2016). They also impose imperatives regarding the environmental conditions necessary for a person to achieve their full potential (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). This provides the necessity to investigate which environmental conditions are supportive to children. As Elder (1998) suggests, not even great talent and industry can ensure life success over adversity without opportunities.

The most recent addition to the ecological model refers to the chrono-system which also relates to the fourth component of the PPCT analytical model, the dimension of time. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) does not develop this concept in depth, where as time has a prominent place in the more recent version at three successive levels micro-time, meso-time and macro-time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 786). Micro-time can be described as the continuity and discontinuity in the ongoing episodes of proximal processes. For example micro-time can be described in the development that is occurring during the course of a specific activity or interaction such as engaging in classes or helping with homework. Meso-time is the periodicity of such episodes across broader time
intervals such as days, weeks or months, suggesting that for development occurring in micro-time it can only be effective if exposure is prolonged. Macro-time focuses upon changing expectations and events in the larger society both within and across generations (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006: 786). This is of particular importance to this research as it can be aligned with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). It suggests that poor educational legacies and levels of attachment with the education system can be transmitted from one generation to the next and through constant exposure to positive educational experiences an attempt can be made to disrupt such cycles.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) acknowledge that some micro and macro ecological environments are limited in the resources that they provide. Hayes et al., (2017) suggest that environments without robust support structures are increasingly present in contemporary family life; challenges posed by the ‘growing hecticness, instability and chaos in the principle settings in which human competence and character are shaped – in the family, child-care arrangements, school, peer groups and neighbourhoods’ (Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006: 796). Often policy interventions are required which are based upon similar foundations to the bioecological model, as found in the second community in study described by Leonard (2005) (See Section 3.7.3). The HSCL in Irish schools may be regarded as a commitment to such principles.

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) suggest that school staff have a crucial role in determining the degree to which school, family and community contexts overlap. Educators can increase collaboration by implementing activities for the following six types of family and community partnership:

1. Parenting or helping families establish home environments to support children as students;
2. Communicating or designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication;
3. Volunteering or recruiting and organising parents to help the school, including supporting other students;
4. Learning at home or providing families with the information and support to help their children with homework;
5. Decision making and including parents in school decisions and developing parents as leaders;
6. Collaborating with the community and identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen schools, students and families (Sheldon and Epstein, 2002: 5-6).

During the earlier years of a child’s educational development, schools focus on the process of weaning children away from the comfort and security of the home (Johnson and Ransom, 1980: 181). The concept of loosening the bonds that children have with their families during primary school changes at secondary level. Creating a closer relationship between the home and school are now considered to be of great importance. Such relationships according to Wolfendale (1992: 32) are reciprocal, as both teachers and parents have aspirations for children’s welfare, education and career progression. As parents become more involved in education through greater exposure to school activities (both in the home and in the school), they become progressively informed and knowledgeable about education. The existing literature suggests that non-school factors which determine educational achievement include the socio-economic background of pupils, family structure, parent’s level of educational achievement and parental involvement with the school. Harris and Goodall (2008: 279) suggest that it is the latter that is most influential in children’s achievement and attainment.

Being able to create constructive relationships between the home and school is a complex process according to Todd (2007: 63). However, many schools demonstrate a commitment to transforming the school system into one which better responds to the needs and aspirations of parents. Todd (2007: 64) suggests that parents should be active and central in the decision making process and have a voice in relation to policy implementation within the school and community
setting. Parents have equal strengths and equivalent expertise as educators, as they also know how to teach their own children. Therefore parents have the potential to provide valuable services and share the responsibility for the provision of education with coordinators, thus creating a sense of mutual accountability (Wolfendale, 1985: 14).

Parental involvement in children’s learning can be regarded as means of realising their own capacities and skills. Whilst many home-school approaches to tackling inequality, including the HSCL, are child centred they depend upon developing the complementary skills of families (Conaty, 2000: 69). Wolfendale (1985: 12) expresses the importance of parental participation as stronger bonds provide a means of obtaining the acquisition of reading skills from beginner to higher levels and the familiarisation with reading and study. Greater parental involvement within the education field also provides an opportunity for families to gain knowledge about contemporary education delivery methods, as the style and format of teaching and learning has evolved over the years. As well as parental involvement providing parents with an insight into the intricacies of teaching methods, it assists parents in building relationships with teachers and coordinators and conversely allows teachers to gain knowledge of the family contexts outside of the school environment. Parents also have the potential to offer teachers support and foster greater appreciation for the school amongst siblings and other family members whilst also developing coping mechanisms to assist in other aspects of their lives (Wolfendale, 1985: 13)

McCoy and Byrne (2011) draw on two theoretical perspectives in attempting to understand the educational choices that families make after the completion of second level education in Ireland. The first of which refers to pushed from behind approaches, which similarly to habitus, are based upon the assumption that mechanisms related to cultural processes, such as norms, beliefs and sub-cultural values shape preferences, expectations and choice. The second perspective focuses upon rational action theory, which by and large, does not invoke cultural or normative differences between social classes in order to explain differing educational
orientations and preferences. In the latter individuals and their families are viewed as acting rationally in the context of their personal circumstances, as choosing among the various educational choices available to them on the grounds of their perceptions and evaluations of the costs and benefits and the probability of achievement. Such theoretical approaches are of pertinence to this research as they focus upon the expectations of students from marginalised social backgrounds, by both parents and the education authority (McCoy and Byrne, 2011: 150).

McCoy and Byrne (2011) found that despite greater numbers of pupils transitioning to higher education the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are still under-represented. As well as parents’ education being a predicator of children’s educational achievement, their findings suggest that higher stream classes had greater access to university open days than those from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds. They also maintain that career advice often steers such students towards applying for PLC courses rather than higher education programmes (McCoy and Byrne, 2011: 152).

As mentioned previously such involvement is often difficult to achieve. Hornby (2000) explains that many teachers feel that the parents they most want to see, due to being most in need of support, seldom come into the schools. Hornby explains that increased parental involvement leads to more positive parental attitudes towards teachers and schools, thus leading to greater improvements in students’ attitudes and performance. Parents that demonstrate greater participation within the school often expect more from both their children and the school. This translates into children being motivated and encouraged to reach their full educational potential (Hornby, 2000: 2).

Crozier (2000: 121) suggests that parent and teacher relationships are not always of an equal nature. Often working class parents prefer a separation between home and school and generally trust teachers in departing the required knowledge for their children to progress in school system (Lareau, 1987: 74). Lareau also
explains that working class parents often feel that actively involving themselves in the school makes them appear as being ‘pushy’. Alternatively, middle class parents often embody an attitude which can be perceived as having the upper hand on teachers, where they can make more positive representations to the school on their children’s behalf (Lareau, 1987: 74). The impact of parental engagement can be evaluated through changes in parents’ educational values, aspirations and a continuous presence of enthusiasm for education. Families can put these new educational values into practice by promoting the home as a place of educational development (Harris and Goodall, 2008: 279).

3.8 Cultural Deficit within Education Policy Thinking

Despite increasing higher education participation in Ireland, lower socio-economic and ethnic minority groups remain under-represented. The homogeneity of the teaching profession is an international phenomenon with most teaching bodies consisting of a majority of professionals from similar socio-economic backgrounds (Keane and Heinz, 2015). In this context, the homogeneity of teachers tend to be white, female and from skilled working class and middle class social backgrounds. According to Hyland (2012) the teaching profession in Ireland is less culturally and ethnically diverse than other OECD countries.

Internationally there has been an increase in research which focuses upon the life worlds of teachers (Devine et al., 2013). Teachers hold a complex set of beliefs about a wide range of professional practices and the people, structures, systems and theoretical paradigms that underpin them (De Corte, et al. 2008). It is suggested that factors that determine coordinators’ attitudes and understanding of the school and the community, often result in a mismatch between expressed beliefs and classroom practice (Devine et al. 2013: 85). Such research points to teachers having lower expectations of students from working class and minority social backgrounds as well as a tendency to teach the basics with less innovative and cognitively challenging approaches (Devine et al. 2013: 85).
Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that strong relationships exist between social class and academic achievement. A number of studies have highlighted how important it is for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to have teachers of their own social backgrounds as role models who can instil positive attitudes towards school and learning and provide a culturally relevant pedagogy (Heinz, 2013: 140). Studies conducted with student teachers in Ireland indicate that primary school teachers mainly come from farming and middle-class backgrounds, she also maintains that is harder to define the socio-economic backgrounds of teachers in secondary schools.

The perceived absence of an understanding and recognition of working class life and values is illustrated in O’Neill (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002). They concur with the thoughts of Coleman (1966), Illich (1970), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Gatto (1992), who suggest that schools perpetuate social inequalities that exist in the adult world and do little but teach children their position in society. They suggest that children from marginalised families have little chance of competing with their more socially dominant peers. Gatto (1991) refers to the education system as representing the interests of the middle classes by suggesting that education teaches more about class order than cognitive development. Gatto also argues that the school and classroom structure teaches children to defer to their betters. Whilst the same rules and standards apply to all children of all classes, it is those from the more advantaged classes who recognise the boundaries of authority and recognise what they need to do to maintain an advantage over their peers. The development of self-esteem is regarded as a central purpose within the education system (DES 2005a, 2017). Gatto (1991) explains that self-esteem amongst children is based upon what teachers and other pupils think of the individual and perceptions are largely based upon comparisons to one’s own social and educational identity.

Both O’Neill’s (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch’s (2002) work are closely aligned with the thoughts of Freire (1998:70) who states:
The importance of identity of each one of us as an agent, educator or learner, of the educational practice is clear, as is the importance of our identity as a product of a tension-filled relationship between what we inherit and what we acquire.

Freire (1998) explains that when inexperienced teachers take up teaching positions within urban disadvantaged areas, often they are professionally challenged by the contradictions in language, class-specific tastes, values, discourse, semantics and syntax. However, Freire suggests that teachers should overcome these challenges, even though they may seem contradictory to their own educational and social values. This is not necessarily an issue of cultural deficit, where one culture is perceived to be greater than another, but a set of cultural values that are just different and require respect. If teachers are unable to accept these differences, alienation may occur if everything that is indicative of a pupil’s social identity and development is critiqued. Such respect however, does not in any way mean that teachers should adopt cultures that are radically different to their own but that respecting them is the fundamental means of creating change (Freire, 1998: 71). Freire also holds that there is a strong tendency to consider what is different from our own cultural practices to be inferior. Also, practices that are representative of a teacher’s social class are perceived to be not only good but better than those associated with lower socio-economic values. This results in the creation of intolerance and ‘the irresistible preference to reject differences’ (Freire, 1998: 71).

In attempting to understand the relationship that coordinators have with children and their families it is important for teachers to have an understanding of the socio-economic contexts of the community in which the school is located. Maclean and White (2007: 48) suggest that the concept of teacher identity should be considered as a ‘process of identification’ in recognition of the relational interplay between the teacher and the social setting. As teachers participate in a variety of of practice settings, teacher identity is shaped by involvement within these communities and equally communities are shaped by teacher practices (O’Brien and Furlong, 2015: 381). For teachers to be able to identify with families, is according to Bourdieu
(1998: 33), reflective of the absence of forms of capital that are significant to the social setting. The presence or absence of the requisite capitals may enable or prevent teachers from being able to identify with the needs of children, families and colleagues (O’Brien and Furlong, 2015: 381). The teaching profession has long being considered to be an occupation largely made up from individuals from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and has been the focus of many thinkers in this research (De Corte et al., 2008; Hyland, 2012; Devine et al., 2013; Doyle and Keane, 2018). Freire (1998: 58) asserts that teachers need to appreciate the personal circumstances of their students:

Progressive educators need to convince themselves that they are not only teachers, this does not exist, we are not only teaching specialists. We are involved in the teaching of maths, geography, syntax, history. Our job implies that we teach these subjects with sobriety and competence, but it also requires our involvement in and dedication to overcoming social injustice.

Roberts (1980: 41) also explains that working class parents are often represented as uninterested and even discouraging towards their children’s education. Researchers, schools and policy makers have drawn attention to the modest aspirations of less advantaged pupils and their families suggesting that they are accepting of failure. It is commonplace for teachers to work upon developing home-school relations if they are to be successful in engaging parents. Roberts (1980) and Gillies (2005) argue that it has become acceptable to blame parents for their children’s school performance and low aspirations instead of examining the structural causes that perpetuate such obstacles. Rather than trying to reform the children’s culture, a greater focus should be placed upon reforming teachers’ attitudes and making the curricula more relevant to working class interests. If teachers find working class attitudes an obstacle rather than a base from which to build on, teachers need to re-examine their ideas and understanding of what constitutes concern, interest and encouragement (Roberts, 1980: 50).
Similar sentiments are reiterated by Todd (2007: 77) who asserts that low achievement of children is all too often regarded by teachers as a failure of families to prepare children with the appropriate aspirations, verbal and numerical skills to be ready for school or further academic and career progression. Todd notes that much of the rhetoric within policy documentation reminds families of their responsibilities and outlines the consequences of failing to meet the required standards. Such a tone intimates that families are to blame for under-achievement and not the education system (Todd, 2007: 78). Borg and Mayo (2001: 246) suggest that the neo-liberal agenda only superficially addresses the oppressive reality in which disenfranchised families are living, turning parents and their children into objects of rehabilitation.

Lasky (2000: 856) suggests that power and culture impact upon teachers’ perceptions of parents. Lasky explains that the relationship between teachers and parents is complex due to teachers regarding their methods of practice as being correct and proven. Any challenge made to a teacher by parents is considered a threat to their ability to conduct their duties. Teachers in Lasky’s research felt a sense of professionalism, where they held power and authority over parents by virtue of their expert status and specialised training (Lasky, 2000: 850). It is also suggested that in professions such as teaching, the power held by teachers is incorporated into institutional settings through human relations. Teachers often are in a position to judge parents based upon their own standards of culture, choices made, linguistics and educational capabilities (Lasky, 2000: 853).

The educational choices that parents make are in most cases well thought out and considered regardless of socio-economic status. Ball and Vincent (1998) argue that the educated choices that are made by parents are not entirely exclusive to the middle class. Cahill and Hall (2014) found in their study that working class parents are very actively involved in the choosing of which secondary school to send their children to and were confident in their reasoning for doing so. Some parents stated that they felt most schools were the same and it was up to parents and children to ensure that the highest possible levels of achievement are
obtained. Others felt that local schools, (despite not always having the best reputation for both results and discipline), were a more preferable choice as they were located within their community, indicating that the availability of local resources and the cost of travel required consideration. In addition, Cahill and Hall (2014) suggest that schools with high concentrations of disadvantage provide a level of comfort, as the need to compete with more advantaged families is limited.

The work done by mothers to develop their children’s educational potential may not always be observable to those outside of the home environment. The educational work is interwoven with the wider emotional care work engaged in on a daily basis, thus hidden and assumed by others, including the education system, as part of mothers’ natural caring role (O’Brien, 2007). Care work is often focused upon the emotional wellbeing and happiness of children and the decision making and organisational work involves supporting a child’s schooling and developing cognitive capacities incorporated within emotional support.

In terms of the communities that families occupy, those experiencing the effects of educational disadvantage have often been described in general terms as ‘having’ social problems and levels of deprivation and childhood adversity are described as being off the ‘Richter scale’ (Doyle and Keane, 2018: 2). Frustrated and often fearful residents contend that the impact of violent and drug related crime and gang activity are engaged in by a minority of the community; however, the representation of such communities by mainstream media have consistently pathologised poorer communities and its residents (Devereux, Haynes and Power, 2011). Such areas are vulnerable to stigmatisation due to the significant social problems associated with them. Research from the field of urban studies found that stigmatising poor neighbourhoods and their residents detrimentally affected people’s everyday lives and compound other factors such as the general lack of opportunities associated with poverty and disadvantage (Doyle and Keane, 2018).
3.9 The Ambiguous Nature of Policy Formulation and Delivery

As with most forms of public policy, implementation rather than formulation can often be problematic. Implementation of education policy provides a good example of the variances that exist between the policies at discussion level and the realisation of such interventions at ground level. Unlike other public institutions which rely upon selection and benchmarking mechanisms, such as means testing and the utilisation of strict criteria to decide upon who is entitled to a given set of benefits, education policy may be regarded as ad-hoc and difficult to quantify (Lipsky, 2010). Symptoms of poverty and disadvantage are often invisible and targeted interventions need to be handled on a case by case basis with sensitivity. Conaty (2002) suggests that differences exist amongst schools due to the social dynamics of those whom they serve. These differences refer to the socio-economic status of the school’s community, different financial challenges and in many cases different challenges at management level. These variances result in the need to tailor policies to suit the particular needs of each individual school. This section examines how ambiguity occurs within policy implementation and reconciles the evidence with the implementation of integrated policies such as the HSCL.

3.10 Policy Implementation

The types of policy that produce the greatest levels of ambiguity are usually policies that operate a bottom up approach. According to Matland (1995), if local implementers do not have the opportunity and freedom to adapt the policy to meet the needs of their community, policies are most likely to be ineffective. For some areas of public policy, this level of autonomy is integral to making vital decisions in deciding the futures and outcomes of the recipients. For integrated policies such as the HSCL, this freedom at street level gives vital clearance for HSCL coordinators to use discretion when needed, as the role specifies that coordinators should be able to encourage parental participation using various resources and practices based upon need.
Lipsky (2010) suggests that ‘Street Level Bureaucrats’ are socially constructed by their activities and practices which are influenced by their peers, direct hierarchical superiors and societal expectations. For Lipsky (2010: 46), this is problematic for the ‘Street Level Bureaucrat’ when defining the roles of an individual and the goals that they are expected to meet. However, contrary to this view, Meyers, Glaser and MacDonald (1998) suggest that client behaviour serves as a mediating factor in how street level service providers interpret and implement policy. Critics of bottom up policies may argue that conflict can often arise at ground level. This is a result of the absence of strict hierarchical order, which provides opportunities for interpretation and manipulation of policy components creating competitive practices amongst workers who want their role to have greater prominence (Jewell and Glaser, 2005). HSCL coordinators can be compared to ‘Street Level Bureaucrats’ whereby they perform a role within the policy system that allows them to interpret, select and deliver the programme across Irish schools based upon their own assumptions of need.

3.10.1 Drivers of Ambiguity

Jewell and Glaser’s (2005) analytical framework provides a means of understanding how policy ambiguity affects the decisions made by front line service workers. Within this framework, role expectations, authority, workload, client contact, knowledge, expertise and incentives are important variables when considering how certain policies remain so ambiguous. Role expectations refer to the brief passed to the front line workers and the values and mission within it. If one is to align such thinking to the HSCL one may observe how the brief is to help create a more equal education system utilising a collaboration with the school, families and local community partners, which will inevitably differ between schools. With words such as ‘disadvantage’ being ambiguous in its own right, policies to address such issues will predictably also be ambiguous.

As mentioned above, the role of the ‘street level bureaucrat’ is not just defined by hierarchical systems or even by colleagues, but also by the service users (Meyers, Glaser and MacDonald, 1998). In the case of this study, the service users refer to the
families of children attending DEIS schools. The workload according Jewell and Glaser (2005) describes the amount of work assigned to each individual. Ambiguous policy may determine that one individual is busier than another due to circumstances including varying challenges in certain roles, larger volumes of work to complete or more clients to serve within a given sector. Within this policy arena each person charged with delivering policy may have different levels of power and autonomy; this depends upon the level of cooperation with management in the institution in which they work. As with each individual, communities have individual characteristics that often cannot be likened to others, thus making top down policies impossible to implement. The quantity and quality of contacts made with policy recipients impacts upon the achievement of policy goals. The level of understanding one has for the aims and objectives of a given programme leads to a more comprehensive style of delivery. A deeper knowledge of the core underpinnings of the brief, in the case of this research, the sociological underpinnings of disadvantage, has a direct effect upon the delivery of policy.

3.10.2 The HSCL as an Ambiguous Policy

The HSCL and the wider DEIS initiatives can be regarded as ambiguous policies. DES (2014) sets out 15 roles which HSCL coordinators are expected to fulfil. This study appreciates that a standard level of training and ongoing support is provided for coordinators; however in many cases implementing such duties into practice is often fraught with ambiguity. Whilst the programme stems from a central authority, the Department of Education and Skills, top down decisions are transmitted via hierarchical networks and fall upon HSCL coordinators to exercise discretion within their bottom up delivery.

3.11 Measuring Achievement and Success

The bottom up nature of the implementation of the HSCL creates difficulties in benchmarking its success. Conaty (2002) discusses how HSCL could be improved and draws upon the words of W. Burkan (a professional trainer) who suggests that
the HSCL requires organisational change so that it can be led from a top down perspective but engineered from the bottom up.

Lipsky (2010: 40) asks rhetorically ‘is the role of public education to communicate social values, teach basic skills or meet the needs of employers for a trained workforce’. Schools in advantaged areas often measure success by the number of pupils who progress onto further education or gain the greatest amount of ‘good’ grades. Smaller goals may be achieved throughout the academic year through the school obtaining higher levels of attendance and punctuality or positive feedback from school inspectorate bodies (Kellaghan et al, 2005). Unlike many industries, success within the public institutions is difficult to quantify, especially within the education system. According to Lipsky (2010: 40) ‘[a]lmost every writer on educational administration notes the problem of the multiplicity, ambiguity, and diffuseness of goals’. If a policy does not have clear measurable goals then it is suggested that each of its variables or components needs to be understood and the reasons why they are important should also be clear (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Matland (1995) suggests that goals within ambiguous policy are largely dependent upon the actors involved. In the area of education in disadvantaged schools, each teacher may have their own teaching styles and differing levels of enthusiasm. These factors culminate in personal views of achievement being used, as the common indicators of success are not always present. The socio-geographic locations of each school may possess very unique differences, as disadvantage can be observed at various levels (Matland, 2005).

It is clear that policy formulation is not uniform and needs to be able to adapt to specific situations. Within the context of educational disadvantage it may be conceived that each socio-geographic location can vary in terms of the level of supports that are required. When devising policy to alleviate disadvantage it is understood by many, including Roberts (1980), Freire (1998) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002), that policies and initiatives provided in areas with high proportions of disadvantage often fail to capture the essence of working class life. In such cases presumptions are often made regarding the social and more specifically the
educational values that some families possess, thus making policy delivery a complex task for teachers.

From a historical perspective, Ireland has witnessed radical changes in the way schools operate. With a strong focus on equality, the provision of the skills to assist children in reaching their full potential and enabling parents to support their children’s learning, such change represents a departure from the system that failed to provide a second level education to all children. The ambiguous nature of modern education policy serves as a welcome change as it encompasses new and broader understandings of learning and involvement (Conaty, 2002). In addition, integrated policies such as the HSCL programme can be regarded as an attempt to address the concept of the hidden curriculum that reproduces educational inequality in the classroom.

3.12 Summary

Poverty is not only measured in material terms but also in the level of participation one has with societal norms which the majority consider to be acceptable. Poverty is understood as being the inhibiting effects that limit disadvantaged individuals and families from achieving their full potential. Educational achievement provides a significant predictor of children’s experiences in later life. A pattern exists where low educational outcomes lead to fewer chances of gaining secure employment. It is suggested that the long term unemployment and poverty of parents often results in the limited school achievements of their children, thus creating intergenerational patterns of inequality (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997). This concept has been widely recognised and, according to policy makers, the school alone cannot address all of the problems associated with poverty and inequality (DES, 2005a).

From a theoretical perspective, education has the potential to improve one’s life chances though providing the skills and knowledge to enter employment and benefit from further and higher education. However, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Gatto (1992) and Ball (2003) schooling in its traditional form often fails to
provide disadvantaged pupils with an opportunity to succeed. This is as result of the school system replicating the already existing social structures of the adult world and only those children with higher levels of social, cultural and economic capital tend to benefit from school. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that this is due to more advantaged families possessing a greater understanding of the more nuanced values of education, having the educational capabilities to offer practical help with school work and the ability to provide economic capital to source private tuition and learning materials. It is suggested that it is not only the formal school system that perpetuates inequality. For Robbins (2002), a significant increase in social capital is required for children from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds to succeed in school. This is often difficult to obtain which leads to lower expectations of said children (Willis, 1977).

Education policy has undergone a significant transformation in recent times. The inability of the school to bring about significant change in regards to inequality has led to more emphasis being placed upon the creation of partnerships between the school, the home and the local community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Epstein and Sanders (2006) explain that families, schools, community organisations and the mass media provide overlapping spheres of influence. It is in these spheres where educational development occurs both internal and external to the school targeting the areas where inequality originates.

Parents have been identified as having key roles to play in children’s educational development. Many of the educational challenges that children encounter are a result of factors that occur outside of the school environment. Enabling parents to play a more positive role in the schooling process has benefits for both children and families. Poor legacies of education amongst families as well as low levels of self-esteem are considered to be key focus areas of modern education policy. Such direction enables schools to foster partnerships with parents to enable them to create learning environments in the home and benefit from community supports.
Communities also play a crucial role in school partnerships. It has been suggested that the school provides an effective means of regenerating disadvantaged communities. This is achieved through strengthening social ties and increasing social capital within the area. As with the need for children to have healthy strong bodies to be able to learn and thrive, it is suggested that having strong learning environments and communities is just as important.

Bottom up approaches towards education policy delivery allow for the tailoring of initiatives to suit the specific needs of the community. In this sense, any one local community is regarded as being different and unique with special needs that are distinct from other communities. Lipsky (2010) suggests that this level of ambiguity often results in blurred lines and allows for accountability to be passed from government departments to the individuals charged with the delivery of policies. This can also have detrimental effects upon the measurement of success as indicators are not uniform, thus allowing those implementing policy to judge how well they think they have performed.

The delivery of policies, in particular initiatives that foster partnerships, allows for teachers to view life through the lens of those with whom they engage. Friere (1998) suggests that many teachers are unable to comprehend the cultural values of families from lower socio-economic classes and fail to understand the normative behaviours of working class life. Often parents are portrayed as uninterested and even discouraging when discussing their children’s education (Roberts, 1980). However, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) suggest that very few parents, regardless of social class, do not care deeply about their children’s educational achievement and according to O’Neill (1992) most families want more for their children than they had themselves.

Tackling educational disadvantage now encompasses a broader range of responses. Policy now adopts a more collaborative approach. Educational thinkers, such as Roberts (1980), Wolfendale (1985), Todd (2007), have documented the valuable roles that both parents and the broader community play in a child’s education. Involving parents in decision making within the school helps parents realise their
own potential in advancing their children’s educational development and assists teachers in understanding the challenges that marginalised parents encounter.
Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how the data was collected and analysed. A social constructionist paradigm was used to underpin this methodological approach. The subjective nature of social constructionism allowed for the voices of HSCL coordinators to be heard in relation to their experiences of tackling educational disadvantage and working with marginalised families. Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate means of collecting data. This provided additional scope for participants to digress onto topics on which they were not directly questioned, but that ultimately proved very important to this research. Through a purposeful research sample a cross section of coordinators serving in both rural and urban communities were represented as well as a varied range of schools from a geographic perspective. Whilst the sample and interviews provided the necessary information to offer solutions to the central research questions, the limitations that such a methodology has presented will be discussed. Finally, this chapter describes the way the data was sorted and analysed using *NVIVO* software.

4.2 Aims and Objectives and Research Questions

A significant body of literature exists which explores the relationships that families have with the education system. Studies conducted by O’Neil (1992) Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and Doyle and Keane (2018) all present the perspectives and voices of marginalised parents. The aims of this research are to capture the experiences and challenges within the role of the HSCL coordinator, to include their perception of the HSCL’s ability to alleviate disadvantage and their understanding of how partnerships with families and communities contribute to reducing inequality in Irish second level schools. Utilising HSCL coordinators’ views the objectives of the study are to:
• Examine how the HSCL is being implemented in schools around the country;
• Assess the effectiveness of the HSCL in reducing the negative consequences of educational disadvantage;
• Explore perceptions of roles within the HSCL partnership.

This to fulfil the aims and objectives of this research four key research questions will be used:

• How the HSCL is being implemented in schools around the country as perceived by the HSCL coordinators? This provides information on how the core principles of the HSCL are understood by coordinators and demonstrates the variance in policy delivery between schools.
• What do HSCL coordinators regard the role of the home and the family within the HSCL partnership as being? This question examines how the home is promoted as a place of educational learning. The home also provides a valuable means of viewing life from the position of marginalised families, thus allowing HSCL coordinators to communicate the problems associated with disadvantage to their colleagues.
• How do HSCL coordinators understand the roles that the community occupies within the school partnership model? As with the home, this question presents the multiple ways that local community agencies assist with the delivery of HSCL. The means by which local community agencies and statutory bodies influence the development of children, demonstrate how Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Human Development is applicable to this research.
• What ways do HSCL coordinators perceive their role as being the effective? The purpose of this question is to obtain an understanding of how the overall effectiveness of the HSCL in reducing the negative consequences of educational disadvantage is regarded.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

All interviews were conducted with coordinators and not with children or vulnerable adults therefore it was not necessary to refer this research to the National University
of Ireland, Galway’s Research Ethics Committee. This however, does not dismiss the need for this thesis to take account of all necessary ethical considerations. Prior to interviewing each participant, the set of questions which was to be asked during the interview was mailed to the HSCL coordinators in schools which operated the programme. The purpose of this was to provide as much detail as possible and to provide an opportunity to clarify any questions or concerns that arose for any member of the sample. If coordinators had any objections to the question[s] an opportunity was provided to withdraw their participation from the research.

The initial letter that was posted to all HSCL coordinators, who were listed by the Department of Education and Skills and contained the full contact details of Dr Michelle Millar, the academic supervisor for this research. The letter stated the ways in which the data would be stored, processed and used. The confidentiality of all participants was guaranteed and the names of coordinators are omitted from this research and replaced with pseudonyms. This was necessary to ensure that the often sensitive information that was shared is protected and to safeguard the identities of the families and communities. During the interview stage all coordinators confirmed that they did not hold any objections to the use of a voice recorder to capture the data.

4.3.1 Advance Access to Interview Questions

A decision was made to provide the interview questions to the participants in advance of the interview. Such an approach is in accordance with common practice within the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway when scheduling qualitative interviews. In addition, authorisation was granted by the research supervisor on this project to provide interview material in advance. There is a limited body of literature on this element of the research design process, therefore a more pragmatic approach was chosen. The rationale behind the providing the research questions in advance was to give HSCL coordinators an opportunity to mull over the questions in order to seek out pertinent references and to generally prepare more detailed answers. As some of the questions required coordinators to consider
the sociological underpinnings of their role, it was envisaged that this may cause
difficulty if not given time to consider their answers.

As many coordinators had been working within the role for a considerable time,
advanced access to the questions also provided time for coordinators to reflect and
recollect instances where relevant examples based upon their past experiences could
be drawn upon in response to the questions. Having an opportunity to review
questions in advance also decreases anxiety without the fear of not having an answer
for any of the questions. In addition, having access to the questions prior to the
interview provided the interview participant with an opportunity make an informed
decision on whether or not they could answer the questions or object to the nature of
a particular question.

There was however, a general concern that by providing the research participants
with the questions before the interview would generate responses which were
rehearsed or overly scripted. The findings however, does not suggest that this was
the case, as the discussions still provided rich conversation that digressed from the
initial questions as anticipated.

4.4 Theoretical Paradigm

A social constructionist epistemology was used to underpin this research. According
to Creswell (2014) social constructionists believe that individuals seek an
understanding of the world in which they live and work and to develop subjective
meanings of their experiences and observations. Constructionists view social
phenomena as being created rather than being discovered by the mind. The data
collection in this study focused upon gaining knowledge and understanding of how
HSCL coordinators view the HSCL and those who engage with the scheme. Using
an ontology of this type allowed for multiple meanings and realities to be presented
and documented.
The concept of multiple realities within the constructionist paradigm can be applied to the qualitative nature of this research, as the interpretation of the various policy components can be viewed ambiguously. This draws parallels with Straus (1973: 308, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) who carried out research on the organisational practices of a psychiatric hospital. Straus found that the characteristics of tasks and duties tended to be less like commands and more like understandings; as such the social order of the hospital was based upon agreed patterns of actions and engagements with multiple parties (Bryman, 2008: 19). In this regard, the school structure shares many similarities with the social order of the hospital. Comparisons also arise between the engagement of doctors and HSCL coordinators with families and the community. Education traditionally involves different challenges and interactions on various levels. The Piagetian view of constructionist theory within education and learning suggests that teaching is focused upon higher levels of understanding and analytical capabilities. For this process to work, learners must be actively engaged in reconstructing their existing understandings by altering their cognitive maps (Richardson, 1997). Teachers facilitate this in two ways; the first creates an environment in which learners undergo a certain level of cognitive dissonance, and secondly, devising tasks that are aimed at reorganising cognitive maps. These two principles can be translated to instructional practices such as hands-on activities, the engagement of learners in tasks that are meant to challenge their concepts and thinking processes; and certain forms of questioning that encourage reflection on individual beliefs, turn beliefs into hypotheses and provide a non-threatening atmosphere where introspection can occur (Richardson, 1997).

When examining the multiple components of the HSCL, this research finds that many different views, attitudes and levels of interaction exist among teachers, coordinators and parents. Many parents and learners have preconceived ideas regarding their place within the education system and low levels of self-esteem and confidence contribute to such opinions. It is the role of the HSCL coordinator to alleviate such anxieties by introducing families into the formal school system in a gradual and relaxed manner.
In practice the social constructionist paradigm allows the researcher to present these perceptions of the reality of teaching children and relating to parents in socially disadvantaged communities. In keeping with the constructionist framework, it was important for the semi-structured interview questions to be kept as broad and open-ended as possible, in order to allow each participant to construct the meanings of the situations that are encountered. As well as subjectively presenting the realities of others, social constructionists also position themselves within the research and are able to interpret the data in such a way that reflects their own cultural, historical and personal experiences (Creswell, 2013: 25). In essence the constructionist approach allows the researcher the opportunity to acknowledge social contexts in conjunction with individual meaning. The acknowledgement of this realist ontology provides for an opportunity to apply a pragmatic approach towards knowledge development (Creswell: 2013, 2014). Constructionism recognises objective reality and its influence, whilst still providing a relativist position, that is the belief that there are multiple realities and all are meaningful (Andrews, 2012), as with the multiple realities that are presented in this research.

4.5 Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the most effective way of gathering a rich sample of data. The information sought concerned the practice of policy and the levels of engagement that the HSCL coordinators have with families. Practices that fall outside of policy remit are of particular interest. The implementation of the policy tends to be ambiguous as it provides an opportunity for HSCL coordinators to respond to educational challenges as and when they arise. Guidelines provided in Conaty (2002) and DES (2005, 2005b), provide a broad outline of the role of the HSCL scheme, as result the disparities that exist between policy and practice will be presented.

When embarking upon a research topic such as this, often the interview is the best method to gather information. Unlike the quantitative approach, qualitative interviews seldom have an interest with just seeking validity or reliability as key measuring concepts. Qualitative researchers are drawn to the fluid, evolving and
dynamic structure of emotions and experience (Corbin and Straus, 2008: 12). Less emphasis is placed upon answering a specific set of questions and instead a focus is placed upon the interviewee’s own perspectives and feelings (Bryman, 2008, p.437). Under the umbrella of qualitative interviewing there are various interview techniques, some of which are more useful than others in certain situations. It was decided that the semi-structured interview are the most suitable method for this area of research. This decision was based on the fact that whilst they allowed closer access to the participants’ experiences, they also provided some level of guidance and a thematic perspective.

According to Bryman (2016), unstructured interviews allow for the depth validity of each interview; focusing on providing the space for the interviewee to elaborate their story without stemming the flow of dialogue. If a closed interview was utilised then the data collected would be more suitable for quantification, whereas the semi-structured qualitative interview does not generally (Bryman, 2016: 244) allow for coded responses and drawing numerical comparisons. The data required for this study was gathered through relatively specific questions, with ample room for participants’ elaboration. The same questions were asked to all participating interviewees. Not all individuals felt the same way and shared the same experiences of their role within the education system which is why any divergence from the set questions is very welcome.

4.6 Sampling

By means of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2008: 375), a sample group with a direct reference to the research question being posed were targeted. Random sampling was not appropriate as a pattern was not explored; instead communities within specific geographical locations or schools in geographical location with high concentrations of social, economic and educational disparities were of specific interest.

An initial list was obtained from the DES website which listed all 192 schools that received DEIS supports. A formal request for a meeting was sent by post to each of
the HSCL coordinators within DEIS schools; the request also contained a sample of the proposed questions to enable them to gain an insight into the general themes within this research.

To gain a more in-depth and broader conception of the challenges and experiences of HSCL coordinators a broad geographic sample was required. Participants were interviewed from Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Louth, Monaghan, Tipperary and Westmeath. As well as gaining a cross-country sample it also provided for representation to both rural and urban schools.

4.6.1 Participant and School Profiles

Table 1 below shows the profiles of the research participants and the school that they work. It can be seen that the majority of HSCL coordinators interviewed were female with only 22% of the sample being male. The sample represents schools located in urban, rural town and rural areas which was of significant value to this research in order to highlight the ways that disadvantage affects different communities.

To provide the reader with a clearer picture of the workload of the HSCL coordinators, the size of the school has been defined based upon the number of pupils enrolled. Schools with less than 200 enrolled pupils are consider to be small, between 201 to 500 medium in size and large schools consisting of more than 500. The table below indicates that whilst all sizes are represented 74% of the HSCL Coordinators interviewed work within medium size schools.

Types of School

There are many types of post-primary school in the Irish education system, which provides a measure of choice to parents. The second-level sector comprises voluntary secondary schools, community schools and comprehensive schools,
which are generally denominational (for example, Roman Catholic or Protestant). Vocational schools and community colleges are non-denominational (DES, 2018).

**Voluntary secondary schools**

Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed. They are usually under the trusteeship of religious communities, boards of governors or individuals. The Education Act 1998 obliges secondary schools to have boards of management that comprise of parent and teacher representatives. The national organisation representing the boards of management of these schools is the Joint Managerial Body. Voluntary secondary schools may be fee-paying or non-fee-paying. Fee-paying schools are not eligible for Government funding to assist with running costs. Non-fee-paying schools that participate in the free education scheme get a range of grants and subsidies from the State. In the past, voluntary secondary schools provided a more academic education but increasingly, they provide a range of academic, practical and vocational subjects (Citizens Information, Avail On-line).

**Vocational schools and community colleges**

Vocational schools and community colleges are owned by the local Education and Training Board (ETBI). The boards of management for these schools are sub-committees of the ETB (ETBI. Membership of the boards includes ETB representatives and parent, teacher and community representatives. Vocational schools and community colleges are largely funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Initially, these schools were orientated towards providing an alternative to university education and instead provide a technical education and developing manual skills (DES, 2018). Today, they generally provide a wide range of both academic and practical subjects. Vocational schools are also the main providers of adult education and community education courses. The national representative body for the Education and Training Boards is the Education and Training Boards Ireland (Citizens Information, Avail on-line).
**Community and Comprehensive Schools**

Community and comprehensive schools were established in the 1960s in order to provide a broad curriculum for all the young people. Many of these schools were established as the result of the amalgamation of voluntary secondary and vocational schools. They offer a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects. They are managed by boards of management which are representative of local interests. The schools are financed entirely by the Department of Education and Skills. The representative body for these schools is the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (Citizens Information).

**Level of Experience**

Coordinators were not asked directly to describe their level of experience as either a teacher or a HSCL coordinator; however, in many cases the length of tenure was discussed in general conversation either before or during the interview. Very few coordinators quantified the exact amount of time served within their role. More general terms, such as “I have been in this position for years” or “quite some time” were used to denote length of time served. For the purpose of the table below participants’ level of experience is indicated as ‘experienced’ for HSCL coordinators that indicated that they had been in the role or the teaching profession for a long time and medium denotes a lesser amount of time spent in the role.
<table>
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<th>Sex</th>
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<th>No. of Pupils Enrolled</th>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>School Gender</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
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**Table 1 Participant Profiles**
4.7 The Questions

The questions were of a semi-structured nature and focused on everyday practices. It was hoped that an insight into how they regarded their daily duties would demonstrate how theory and policy documentation translate into practice. The initial section of the interview was designed to capture their understandings of their role and discuss the overall aims and objectives of the HSCL programme. The purpose of the second part of the interview was to gain a greater understanding of the home visitation component and find out if HSCL coordinators have challenges in raising parental participation. It also sought to ascertain their awareness of their own capabilities to engage families with appropriate agencies and supports. Thirdly, the interview hoped to present any challenges that HSCL coordinators may have in creating a school wide understanding of obstacles that many marginalised families encounter. The final part of the interview focused on gaining an understanding of how HSCL coordinators interpret the sociological underpinnings of the programme. Space was allowed for them to elaborate on their estimations of the overall success of the HSCL programme and other DEIS initiatives.

As a result of having a relatively small sample size it was decided not to conduct pilot interviews. Instead, a selection of academics and researchers within the School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway and the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre were asked to review the questions in terms of their potential to generate useful data, their ethical integrity and their suitability for semi-structures interviewing.

4.8 The Responses

The responses offered a nationwide perspective. However, despite a number of phone calls to follow upon on the letters sent, participation from any schools in the southeast was unattainable. As expected Dublin based schools provided the majority of HSCL coordinators willing to participate in the interviews. Schools in the south provided the next largest number of positive replies. Representation of schools in the
North, West and Midlands was also provided through expressions of interest in participation.

All other HSCL coordinators who were initially contacted but did not reply were contacted again at a later date. Arrangements for interviews were then made with those who made contact at earlier stage. In many cases no contact was made so it was deemed that those coordinators did not have an interest in being part of this study. It should be noted that despite the absence of a reply from many, only one respondent objected to the nature of the questions.

4.9 The Interview

Each interview was conducted on a one to one basis. In most cases, the location of the interview was at the school in which the interviewee was employed. However, in some instances this was not possible. In one case, a meeting place was arranged outside of the school environment at the HSCL teacher’s request. Consent was required to record each interview and all interviewees consented to being recorded. They were also asked to consent to the use of the voice recorder in conjunction with a conference phone. Detailed field notes were also taken.

4.9.1 Telephone interviews

Other coordinators found it difficult to commit to an exact time due to their work load and requested that the interview take place over the phone. Traditionally semi-structured interviews are conducted face-to-face and because of importance of personal contact in qualitative interviews, material collected using telephone interviews are often discounted (Vogl, 2013: 133). Often in the absence of visual communication, telephone interviews appear less personal and more anonymous. However, Vogl, (2013: 133) suggests that conducting semi-structured interviews via telephone can be useful in preventing distortions in discourse and create a more focused exchange due to the shorter duration of the interview. Carr and Worth (2011: 514) also suggest that as well as telephone interviews being more focused,
they also assert that telephone interviews are less circumstantial than face to face interviews, providing an information exchange with less distraction or digression.

Another reason for utilising telephone interviews, which is pertinent to this research, is that they provide access to hard to reach respondent groups. According to Cresswell (1998), respondent reluctance is a well-known fact in interview studies. Telephone interviews provide an opportunity to obtain data from potential participants who are reluctant to participate in face-to-face interviews or from those who are difficult to access in person (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004: 109).

Not all studies have found telephone interviews to be as effective as the face-to-face interview and it is likely that the nature of the research questions and sample are important considerations (Carr and Worth, 2001: 514). The disadvantages of conducting telephone interviews include difficulties in achieving rapport with participants and an absence of visual cues to aid interpretation of speech (Robson, 1993). In addition, participant fatigue tends to be a challenge during telephone interviews with 20 to 30 minutes being considered the maximum before fatigue sets in (Lavrakas, 1987).

It is for these reasons that telephone interviews were only used when suitable times to meet in person could not be arranged between the researcher and the participant. Interviews were only arranged during the participants working hours, which provided a relatively small time frame for arranging mutually suitable times to meet. In most cases face-to-face interviews were arranged without any issues. However, in some cases respondents found it difficult to commit to a time that fitted in with their daily schedule or were difficult to make contact with. In these situations telephone interviews were arranged.
4.9.2 Field Notes

As Bryman (2008: 417) suggests, because of the frailties of human memory, there is a need for researchers to take detailed notes based upon their observations. In the case of this research detailed field notes were taken regarding initial perceptions of the school environment, its location and size. In addition to this any conversation that occurred prior to the interview commencing, that provided information on the school demographics and coordinators experience, was also noted. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed the researcher to control the interview; however, if the conversation strayed off topic significantly additional notes were taken.

Despite not asking personal questions regarding age and length of time served within the teaching profession, material was gathered through informal discussion either at the beginning or end of the interview. When analysing the interview transcriptions, the field notes were as a means of adding context to the interview findings. The consultation of these notes allows the researcher to construct an image of the research setting and the field in which experiences are located. Such information related to school sizes, location and type, sex of participant and the level of experience each HSCL Coordinator had.

4.10 Interpretation of Data

Thematic analysis was used to provide an in-depth description of the complete set of qualitative data. Thematic coding enabled the researcher to record and identify passages of text taken from the interview transcriptions which were linked by common themes. This enabled the indexing of the rich text into categories to establish a thematic framework (Gibbs, 2007). Thematic analysis is easily adapted to the pragmatic constructivist epistemological position used in this research, where themes are data driven rather than preconceived or predetermined (O’Malley, 2018). The thematic coding starts by using each interview question as an initial title for each theme. The semi-structured nature allowed for the participants to digress onto topics
which were not specifically asked but not unrelated to the research questions providing the sub-themes for the indexing of the data.

Bryman (2016: 602) explains that the use of computer aided qualitative software has aided and made less cumbersome the physical task of writing marginal codes, making copies of transcriptions and field notes and pasting them all together. In order to manage and store the interview data, all transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo 11. NVivo is software programme that provides an effective means of ordering the data. Coding is a fundamental subjective and interpretive process undertaken in most qualitative research, therefore according to Creswell (2006), the utilisation of software to aid this process is only justified as a means of data management.

Each node coded represents a strand or theme of conversation allowing for the data from each interview to be categorised. Each node path originated from the initial question and each type of response or digression formed a sub-node. Once the data was coded and filed within NVivo the findings could then be presented. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents at some level a patterned response (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 780). The process of thematic analysis starts when the researcher begins to notice, and look, for patterns of meaning in the sections of the transcription or sections that contain issues of potential interest. It is suggested that thematic analysis in not a perfect science, there is no one right way to complete such a task. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a detailed six point guide to help understand the different processes involved. They state that thematic analysis is not a linear process, but rather a recursive and iterative process, where movement back and forth is required (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This section will outline each one of the six phases in relation to this research.

Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data.

When collecting data via interactive means, often analysis can occur as result of prior knowledge of both the data and the field in which it resides. In the case of this
research, it was presumed that HSCL coordinators would experience challenges within their role, often as a result of the effects of disadvantage among parents. Regardless of this it is important to immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This research primarily worked with verbal data and transcribing the semi-structured interviews were at times iterative and time consuming; however, this task provided an excellent opportunity for the researcher to be refamiliarised with the data (Reissman, 1993). Time spent transcribing also informs the early stages of analysis by providing the researcher with a more thorough understanding of the data. Furthermore, the transcription process facilitates one of the first opportunities to interpret the data (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999).

Phase 2: Generating initial codes.

This phase commences when the researcher is familiar with the data. At this point, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher will generate an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what aspects are of particular interest. In the case of this research, expected responses were drawn upon and common responses were noted. HSCL coordinators who expressed challenges within their role or answered the questions by describing scenarios and actual experiences of interactions with children and families were noted separately. The initial themes identified at this stage resembled the interview questions and represent the initial responses to the semi-structures interview questions (Appendix 3).

Phase 3: Searching for themes

This phase begins when all data has been transcribed and initially coded into the main categories of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This stage involves sorting the various codes into more specific themes based upon common responses to the questions posed. After re-reading the interview transcriptions and reviewing the first level of overarching themes in NVivo, the process of generating sub-themes within these began. Key themes that emerged are related the participants’ opinions of the many aspects of the HSCL. For example, the overarching theme relating to home
visits can further categorised into perceptions of the home visits in terms of general, positive and negative experiences (Appendix 3).

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

As the write up of the findings chapter progressed, an opportunity was provided to align themes in a more linear fashion which allowed for greater comparisons to be made. This phase also enabled the researcher to eliminate or amalgamate less significant themes which were identified in the earlier stages of analysis. This is in keeping with Braun and Clarke (2006: 90) who suggest that at this stage some initial codes may be discarded whilst others may be used to form new themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Phase 5 begins when a satisfactory thematic map of the data is generated. As mentioned above, thematic analysis is an iterative process and this stage, again, provides a further opportunity to refine the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that this stage is concerned with identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. It is important by the end of this phase that key themes are describable in just a few sentences. In this research, the overarching theme of defining equality from an educational perspective is interpreted as the ways that coordinators understand the challenges encountered by the families whom they work with. These were often demonstrated through descriptions of actual instances where coordinators have provided interventions.

Phase 6: Producing the report

This phase of the research involves the final analysis and write up of the report. Its purpose is to tell the complex story of the data in such a way that the reader is convinced of is merit and validity (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The findings and the discussion are presented as two distinct chapters. The findings chapter presents the voices of those interviewed under four overarching components; the role of the
home, the role of the school, the role of the community and the overall effectiveness of the HSCL.

4.11 Validity and Reliability

A number of strategies were implemented to ensure the validity of this research. The use of multiple approaches is recommended by Creswell (2014: 201) who suggests that the use of multiple validity strategies enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of findings and convince the reader of their accuracy.

The initial measure utilises construct validity which, as with predictive validity models, pre-empts a deduced hypothesis (Bryman: 2008: 152). Examples can be found in chapters two and three of this research, which provide detailed descriptions of the links between poverty and education and the multiple dimensions of marginalisation that need to be addressed through the delivery of education policy. Prior to conducting the interviews, it was expected that coordinators would express the importance of creating and maintaining close relations with parents and the difficulties that arise in doing so. It was also predicted that the challenges that some parents face would also surface.

Other validity measurement indicators in this research include the use of rich descriptions of the conversations with participants. According to Creswell (2014), the benefit of this is to transport the reader to the setting where the interview took place. Within this model, descriptions of the school are included and in many cases distinctions were made with regards to the urban or rural settings of schools. This was done whilst still protecting the identity of the research participant and the school in which they are employed. Additional depth to the data collection was added when particular questions were difficult to answer and the interviewees required elaboration of some questions.
Peer debriefing also added validity to this research, both at the formation stage of the interview questions and after the data was collected. The initial findings were discussed to ascertain the effectiveness of the content in addressing the research questions. Such measures are consistent with Creswell, (2013, 2014) who emphasises the importance of being able to use at least two strategies to ensure that the narrative designed in the interviews is sufficient to provide meaningful and useful data (Creswell, 2013: 251).

4.11.1 Reliability

As with the need to ensure that research contains validity it is important to take the necessary steps to monitor the reliability of the research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) raise concerns over research that evaluates public policy. They suggest that research that incorporates a constructionist world view often creates a sense of advocacy throughout the researcher’s interactions with the participants. Advocacy is regarded as a ‘daunting spectre’ as it challenges the usual stance of distanced, disinterested and neutral researchers who aim to only present the truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 991). The importance of being able to view the world through the eyes of others is reiterated by Bryman (2000). It is suggested that face to face interactions are the most effective means of understanding and providing a voice for the innermost thoughts of the research participant and to acquire social knowledge one must ‘participate in the mind of another human being’ (Bryman, 2000: 385).

To minimise the risk of bias it was necessary for this research to include detailed field notes and voice recordings of all interviews. The process of data collection via interviews with HSCL coordinators was recorded on a high-quality voice recorder and promptly uploaded to a hard drive to be stored safely and later transcribed. This method of collecting material is recommended by Creswell (2013) who suggests that detailed field notes should accompany the transcriptions to assist with any discrepant or trivial information collected as well as ensuring the authenticity of the voice recordings during the coding and analysis of the data.
4.12 Limitations

The methodological design of this research is an effective way of presenting the daily experiences of those responsible for the delivery of the HSCL. However, this does not suggest that such methods do not have limitations. Despite a constructionist paradigm being the most suitable for this research, the findings are very much grounded in this particular study. Given the individual nature of social constructionism, presenting multiple truths and realities, the conclusions to the research questions cannot automatically be transferred to other research areas.

The essence of this study is to provide a voice for coordinators, as studies exist that present the views of those whom the HSCL and other DEIS initiatives serve. Such research fails to objectively evaluate the performance of HSCL coordinators and the way other key stakeholders within the school, family and community partnership view the HSCL. Hence, the remit of this research is to provide research that includes the often missing voice of coordinators. Relating back to the nature of semi-structured interviews and the constructionist underpinnings of this research, the coordinators’ understandings of the questions varied slightly in some cases. For example, when asked about their understanding of what disadvantage was, many were able to answer without further prompts, whereas some of the longer serving participants were not as familiar with the sociological concepts associated with inequality.

4.13 Summary

This chapter outlines the approach to investigating the central research question and associated objectives to this study. To address these problems a social constructionist paradigm has been applied which underpins and guides the methodological aspect of this research. This subjective viewpoint is of significance as it allows for the multiple and potentially different opinions and voices of the coordinators to be presented.
Semi-structured interviews in this case are the most useful means of gathering data which recognises the importance of coordinators’ voices in this discourse. Qualitative interviewing of this nature provided direct answers to the central questions as well as additional information that have formed many important elements of the discussion. A method of purposeful sampling was employed with the intention of gathering data from a broad geographic locus of DEIS schools. The interviews cover three areas; coordinators’ interpretations and practices of the HSCL, how the HSCL is effective in tackling educational inequality and the means employed to evaluate the success of the scheme. The responses are classified into common themes and then juxtaposed with the policy aims and the theoretical underpinnings of educational inequality.

Using thematic coding, the data was organised into common themes and sub-themes. Within these categories, the interview questions formed the initial theme and were then dissected into smaller sections to identify common responses. As with other qualitative research projects, the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis was used to make the storage of such rich data easier to index and later access. Nvivo was used in this study due its suitability for coding both large and small data sets. The researcher’s requirement to manually input themes and nodes emphasises the need for attention to detail and familiarity with the data, thus adding to the validity and reliability of the study.
Chapter 5

Findings

5.1 Introduction

The data presented in this chapter was collected through twenty four semi-structured interviews conducted with HSCL coordinators. A thematic approach was used to analyse the data, with the results of the analysis presented herein. To gain an insight into the delivery of the HSCL programme and how parental engagement with the various parts of the scheme is perceived. Interviews were conducted with a sample of HSCL coordinators from a broad range of geographical locations including urban and rural based schools. The findings present the views of HSCL coordinators working in schools with high concentrations of marginalised children.

The interview findings can be summarised into four main sections which are guided by the four central research questions which relate to the school, the home, the community and the effectiveness of the HSCL in reducing the effects of educational disparity. The first section explores the coordinators’ experiences within the school. Each of these themes is explored and the opinions, coordinators’ concerns and understandings of each theme are presented to explore the effectiveness of the HSCL in alleviating disadvantage.

5.2 How the HSCL is Implemented in the School Environment

The school plays an integral role within the HSCL scheme, as it is in this environment where many of the supports made available to parents and students are facilitated. The HSCL, whilst focused upon parents, is child centred; therefore the most obvious activities of the HSCL can be seen improving attendance and retention figures. Within this section the themes that emerge emphasise the fact that much of the HSCL teacher’s time is spent monitoring and remedying issues pertaining to attendance. Within the central objectives of the scheme, coordinators also endeavour to promote the school as a welcoming place to families, who the coordinators believe
that without the presence of the HSCL would not normally regard the school as being a comfortable or inviting environment. The interactions within the school environment range from meeting school staff and other parents to partaking in courses that enable parents to play a more effective role in their children’s learning. This section will then focus upon the challenges that coordinators encounter which range from changing negative perceptions of the school to managing issues relating to accessing and managing the funding of programmes in times of financial hardship.

5.2.1 Coordinators’ Perceptions of the HSCL Objectives

The findings in the section present the ways in which the objectives of the programme are interpreted and implemented by coordinators. As a broad initiative, the HSCL provides a multitude of supports for families and their children; however the nature of the scheme allows coordinators to identify and prioritise the needs of its school’s community. For Noreen, the focus is very much based upon attendance and retention, as these factors have the greatest impact on increasing opportunities in adult life:

Getting the kids in and getting them to stay is my main priority. To maximise the opportunities of all students we offer the Leaving Cert Applied and as a result our dropout rate for the Leaving Cert is definitely improving (Noreen).

Others explained that much of their time is taken up by the monitoring of logs and registers:

We have to prevent children from leaving the school during the day if possible. Even if they have a genuine reason such as an appointment, we have to do so much to persuade them to return to school after. Getting children to stay on at school has never been so important and it is worth investing so much time (Phillip).
Trying to get parents to support teachers is also stated as being a central plank of the HSCL. Often coordinators feel that families demonstrate a high level of apathy with regards to their children’s schooling, especially within the areas of homework and behaviour in the classroom. Trying to get parents to assist in these areas is not always easy:

The parents we have here in the school have had poor experiences with the school when they were young. Now they are living in terrible conditions, they spend all of their time trying to make ends meet, I know it sounds terrible but schooling or home work just isn’t a priority in their lives (Caroline).

The focus upon parents rather than pupils is a common theme throughout the findings and other coordinators explain in detail why they believe parental experiences within their own education to be a factor in such avoidance of the school:

School used to be an awful place. No one cared about the children or families that were not well off. Often poor people were neglected and written off and these experiences are not easily forgotten. This is why my role is so important, to make parents feel that they do matter (Anna).

Many coordinators regard this level of apathy as being normal amongst disadvantaged families:

When you have this level of disadvantage it’s always hard to get parents in. I’d love to say that they were enthusiastic but I can’t, my colleagues in neighbouring schools are always looking for ideas to tackle this apathy (Tanya).
Cliona explained that Concepta Conaty, when devising the HSCL, suggested that a key objective of the HSCL should be to provide the ‘friendly face of the school’ that would put families at ease in their interactions with school staff and school policies.

The main objective is to form an important link between the home and the school; we are the friendly face of the school. It helps to break down barriers with parents who ordinarily would not come anywhere near the school (Cliona).

Others stated that the HSCL provides a means of changing the image of the school from one of authoritarian values to one that offers support and understanding:

Traditionally the school was a place to be feared, it was a place where coordinators demanded respect. Now we try to create an environment where respect is mutual, and we do that through creating an atmosphere of understanding and shared responsibility (Cliona).

The role of the HSCL coordinators for some often exceeded creating a more hospitable image of the school. They suggested that everything they do should be based upon reducing the inhibitions that many disadvantaged families have and to increase their confidence through encouraging parents to feel part of the school and to expect more from it:

By making parents feel that they belong here is important to me, if they have a sense of belonging, inhibitions will be reduced and they become more involved with what we have going on. Informed parents develop higher standards and learn to expect more from themselves, their children and the education system (Kieran).
It is the opinion of many coordinators that one of the objectives is to build the confidence and self-esteem of families involved with the school, as in many cases parents feel that they are not able to help with their children’s education:

The HSCL serves as a means of building self-confidence in adults who feel powerless within society. We try to raise their self-esteem and make them feel that they are of great importance to their children’s education, the school and the community (Tanya).

Coordinators discuss two emerging strands in relation to the ways in regard to the programme’s objectives. The first strand is focused upon the pupils, stating that the primary function of the HSCL is to improve on school attendance and retention, acknowledging the link between early school leaving and reduced opportunities in adult life. The other emerging theme defines the objectives of the HSCL as being centred on breaking down the barriers that exists between marginalised parents and the school. By creating a more welcoming, relaxed and inclusive atmosphere within the school, it is envisaged that parents will learn skills that will help to promote the values of school to their children.

5.2.2 In-School Educational Supports

The themes in this section suggest that there is a variation between the types of parental course provisions within schools participating in the HSCL. The courses are designed to assist parents with the development of skills that enable them to help their children with their school work. Many of the courses have a strong focus on literacy and numeracy; however, such courses are reported by the coordinators as being unpopular with the parents. However, courses that focus upon less academic areas, such as arts/crafts and cookery are regarded by the coordinators as a more effective means of attracting parents into the school environment. In addition, courses are also offered in many schools, which focus upon personal development
and parenting skills, all of which are directed at breaking down the negative attitudes that coordinators perceive parents to have in relation to the school, which impinge upon their children’s educational achievement.

Deciding upon which courses are to be offered in the school tends to be at the HSCL teacher’s discretion. Many coordinators decide upon which courses to provide based upon the needs of the families whom they support:

[…] we try to find out what the needs of the parents are first. When I first started I had to decide what the parents needed. I started a parenting course and to my surprise nobody turned up, I was devastated (Tanya).

Other coordinators based the courses which they provide upon the absence of other services within the community:

Usually within this community, parents experience similar difficulties. Often literacy and numeracy issues, as well as an inability to communicate with teachers are common. So if we provide a course to benefit one family then it is likely that the rest of community will also benefit (Mary).

A common theme that emerged suggests that in many cases courses that are based upon literacy and numeracy are less popular than the courses designed to promote social interactions amongst parents:

Arts and leisure based programmes are usually most successful and parents will remain at them due to the social interactions and friends they make. Even though these courses may not be regarded as educational as others, they are very important (Ciara).
It is evident that the parents, in the coordinators’ opinions, benefit most from the maths and reading classes; however they are less likely to attend such courses. Phillip commented that:

Courses such as Maths for Fun and other literacy based courses tend to only attract those parents who would be considered outside the target group, so to encourage greater attendance cookery, craft, fitness courses and other non-threatening programmes are required (Phillip).

Phillip also explained that whilst literacy and numeracy courses are important there is often the need to begin with personal development and parenting programmes. Often those living in marginalised communities do not have high levels of self-esteem or confidence, so by providing courses to work on these areas are very important.

The principal course would be English and that’s twice a week and another one we have starting shortly is called Steps Towards Personal Excellence. It is, for example, about thinking skills, and to get in touch with the way they (parents) think to allow them to get more out of themselves. A lot of these things start with negative thinking and we look to improve self-esteem, I work closely with the School Completion teacher. This course came from the Pacific Institute based in America. We would have all done a training course into how to facilitate this course. We are trying to get them to replace negativity with positivity. We also operate Parents Plus which was developed by John Sharry which helps parents with tips and strategies for parenting (Phillip).

Many coordinators describe facilitating courses which have a stronger focus upon personal development. A popular course amongst the parents, as perceived by the coordinators, is called Parents Plus. This course’s aim is to develop parents’ ability
to manage different challenges that arise within parenting. Many explain that parenting courses have been made available in the school. These programmes are delivered by coordinators, however in most cases, these courses can be problematic as the school does not want to appear judgemental. For many families the school is represents part of the wider statutory system. Negative views of the school are based upon negative interactions with other statutory agencies such as the Education Welfare oard and the Department of Social Protection.;

[…] at the moment we are planning a transfer programme for parenting skills, however we have to be careful as we do not want to come across as being judgmental. We have to devise the course in such a way that it can be delivered in a positive way (Michael).

A common response from coordinators is that the courses which are most popular with parents are regarded as being less threatening. Such courses place minimal focus on the formal learning of school based subjects. The coordinators base the popularity of each course on parental attendance levels:

It suddenly dawned on me when thinking about this, parents vote with their feet. I put on a range of courses ranging from book clubs to dancing. They turned up in droves for craft and line dancing so I kept them on (Tanya).

In many cases it is the courses that are more explicit about learning outcomes that attract the fewest parents. Coordinators are positive about courses that promote social engagement with other parents and school staff. Courses such as these are important, as once an initial contact has been made a relationship can be further built:
We encourage parents to attend soft courses like baking, cookery and photography as they are non-threatening as they do not emphasise numeracy or literacy so they tend to be more relaxed (Cliona).

These findings suggest that whilst in theory some courses provide an opportunity for parents to develop skills and attain educational accreditation, quite often it is perceived by the coordinators as a significant achievement just to create an environment within the school that parents are comfortable being in. Non-threatening courses such as cookery, at surface level may not seem academically challenging but they do provide an opportunity for parents to socially engage with other parents, build relationships with support networks and meet school staff, thus de-formalising the parent and teacher dynamic:

For parents that have had issues with their own school experiences, entering the school can be daunting. Just by getting parents into the school where they can familiarise themselves with school staff and other parents is very important (Gillian).

Many HSCL coordinators consider cookery and arts and craft classes to go a step further than merely bringing parents into the school environment. Coordinators consider such classes to contain elements that can develop numeracy and literacy skills implicitly. These courses are perceived as having a multifaceted purpose in providing opportunities for parents to develop both socially and cognitively:

It can be described in layers, the first layer is just building up relationships with parents and the next layer after that is encouraging parents to enrol in courses that provide more of an educational platform so they can move on and can do things for themselves such as improving their literacy and numeracy skills (Tanya).
Mary explained that parents are involved with the design and photography of a cookery calendar that is being produced in her school. This has ensured that parents are gaining skills in the cooking, writing and through the sale of the product, thus giving them the opportunity to develop both literacy and numeracy skills:

A lot of the activities that I get parents involved with work to develop literacy and numeracy, in a very applied manner. I have parents working on the new school prospectus; they are responsible for the pictures, text and arranging things with the printers. Of course I do support them always (Mary).

Kieran facilitates a history course for parents within his school that incorporates visiting various places within tours, thus making learning interesting whilst implicitly developing literacy and problem-solving skills. Kieran expresses concern that placing an excessive focus upon literacy and numeracy may discourage parents from becoming involved:

I worry sometimes that we focus too heavily on literacy and numeracy, it may put parents off. The National Literacy Programme makes too much of a buzz word of these issues. If I run cookery, gardening or computer course there’s literacy, numeracy and science contained within them as well as the history trips (Kieran).

A minority of coordinators explain that courses which promote academic or personal development such as literacy classes are not offered in the school at all. This reported as being a result of various reasons, but mainly as a result of poor attendance by parents, limited resources and facilities, so therefore there is reliance upon local community partners to run such classes:
I don’t really provide any courses in school as we are very small. At first we ran a beginners computer course and cookery course which were initially well attended – by middle class parents mostly. Such courses were funded by St Vincent de Paul\(^{15}\) (Ciara).

Other coordinators are concerned that the uptake of courses that are not based upon core educational principles, and focus more upon social and leisure elements, fail to encourage parents to be ambitious in relation to themselves and their children’s educational development:

At the end of the day the HSCL is here to level the playing field. Sometimes parents don’t enjoy learning the fundamentals, but if they are to give their children the best chance they need to. Arts and crafts are effective as an introduction but it is maths and English and developing more positive attitudes to education that will work. We are not forcing them to partake in the programmes, but if the HSCL is to work they need to be in here learning how they can help their children (Michael).

The findings in this section suggest that the courses provided for parents within the school receive a mixed reception from parents. Based upon coordinators’ explanations of the types of courses provided and the level of attendance associated with such courses suggests that parents need considerable persuasion to involve themselves in programmes that provide literacy and numeracy support. However, less formal courses provide a comfortable and relaxed space for parents within the school environment which the coordinators believe helps to break down the negative impressions that some families have regarding school. It is suggested by a few that courses designed to promote the school as a more welcoming place for parents, are useful but are limited in their ability to develop the skills that can achieve the greatest impact upon children’s educational achievements.

\(^{15}\) The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) was founded in Ireland in 1844. It is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland.
5.2.3 Non-Educational Supports for Parents and Children

As mentioned above, a core tenet of the HSCL is to minimise the apprehensions that many parents have when entering the school environment. As well as the facilitation of specialist learning and development programmes, considerable work has been done to provide relaxing physical surroundings to put families at ease. One of the primary means by which HSCL coordinators have made the school more welcoming is the provision of a designated room for parents. Most schools have allocated such a room where parents can meet both formally and informally with one another and with subject teachers. In many schools this area occupies a dual purpose, first as a room where courses are run and secondly a comfortable office space where parents can come in to have tea or coffee or just talk with one another. Some coordinators explained that this room can also be utilised by students to come into to have hot drink and something to eat.

This space for parents varied from a basic room or kitchen to others that were equipped with televisions, comfortable furniture and cooking facilities. Patrick described the typical facilities in most DEIS schools and the functions for which it is used. He explained the importance of such space at second level where parents don’t normally have need to visit the school frequently, unlike at primary level where the parents visit the school daily when dropping off and collecting children from school:

There is a basic parent’s room in the school. It doesn’t have a huge amount of facilities, but it is a nice comfortable room that parents can come into. At secondary level, we don’t find that parents generally need to be in the vicinity of the school unlike at primary level, so the parents now can come in and have a cup of coffee and leave when their children finish school (Patrick).
Other coordinators describe the multiple functions that the room serves. For some the parents room provides an area where students can come to if they need to speak to a teacher in private. In addition, the room also is considered to belong to pupils and parents alike:

We have now changed things to make the school a better place for them to come into. We have this room here which is the teachers meeting room and the parents room. The kids can come in and get a cup of tea and a biscuit we can offer this because we have the stuff here as a result of coffee mornings that we run for parents. It makes the school a more welcoming place to come into (Chris).

Other than the parents’ room the findings suggest that there is very little provided in schools that parents and children can share. However, Chris explained the importance of after school clubs and opening up the school to the wider community, rather than keeping it locked up; vandalism of the school is no longer a problem. The school has been turned into a community space as opposed to only opening during school hours and closed off to the community.

The use of sports facilities and the utilisation of schools beyond normal hours remains a common theme throughout. Some coordinators regard supervised activities outside of school hours an effective means of keeping pupils out of trouble and in touch with school:

When we are running after school projects such as music and sports clubs, we and parents know where the children are. Often children in this area spend a lot of time hanging around on the streets and we try to avoid this. There is always a risk that if they get into trouble they drop out from school. So the schools essentially act a tool for crime prevention (Noreen).
In summary the findings suggest that the task of encouraging parents to participate in school based courses can be difficult. HSCL coordinators acknowledge that families have many reasons for keeping a distance from the school. In addition, they are of the opinion that by offering courses that appear less formal with less emphasis on literacy and numeracy, they are an effective way of making the school a less threatening environment. It is suggested that despite parents needing to be eased into the school setting gradually, courses to help with their own educational development are gradually introduced to parents. In many cases it is the parents who least need assistance that are most likely to attend. Even courses such as arts and crafts, cookery and gardening all encompass learning values. For some coordinators this approach has not been successful leading to the cessation of all parental programmes and leaving their provision to local community partners. The poor attendance of such courses has led to frustration amongst many HSCL coordinators.

5.2.4 Encouraging Parental Participation

It is suggested that it can be a challenge for coordinators to actively encourage parents to become involved with the various components of the HSCL. The benefits may not always be obvious to the parents, thus high levels of participation are not prevalent in many disadvantaged areas. Coordinators suggest that often parents may need to have the programme explained in detail on a one to one basis; others may need the programme outlined in such a way that jargon is avoided and explained in a language that is more understandable. However, this is not a generalisation of all parents that have children attending schools in disadvantaged areas, as coordinators report that many do understand the rewards of participation and are very keen to be involved in whatever capacity they can. The findings in this section explore the teachers perceptions of if and how much persuasion is necessary to achieve parental involvement.

HSCL coordinators report that some levels of persuasion is required in order to build rapport and trust to gain parental involvement. Many suggested that
You have to tread carefully and not appear to take an overly official approach. Often casual invitations for coffee and social gatherings provided the starting point for most HSCL coordinators (Patrick).

Being careful, sensitive and taking things slowly is regarded by the coordinators as being key to encouraging greater participation. Some coordinators feel that many of the families that they work with are reluctant to accept help, as there is a sense that they are being judged by the school and other parents:

[… we find that parents do not actively become involved. There are a lot of factors at play with anything that you try and provide. Most of them immediately fear that they are being judged especially with the parenting courses. Even if they are on the floor they still have some level of pride, they are still concerned what others will think (Anna).

Coordinators believe that a general unwillingness by some parents to become involved in school based activities is not always a result of being uninterested in their children’s schooling or not having a desire to improve their own educational abilities. Noreen believes that the school in general is not a welcoming place due to its location. It is located between two feuding housing estates, therefore resulting in increased security levels within the school, creating a less welcoming environment:

Even to come in here is quite intimidating with all the locks and buttons, to me that’s not welcoming. If you go to the front of the school there is a lovely entrance but the entrance leading on to one of the estates is just a tiny gate which is kept locked during today. If anybody wants to get in or out I have to be notified (Noreen).
Some coordinators do not regard the level of apathy displayed by many parents as a result of the school environment. Many describe parents as not regarding the school as being important, due to experiencing other serious social problems that take priority:

We have parents with all kinds of problems in here. We have domestic abuse victims, parents with addiction problems and parents that are alone because their partners are in prison. Many parents have so much on their plates school just isn’t an issue (Cliona).

The level of persuasion needed to be exercised by HSCL coordinators, in order to achieve greater involvement of parents tends to be high. Coordinators suggest that this is due to the fear of school or other parents judging them as being either incapable of helping their children or bad parents; this is especially evident when delivering parenting courses. Other coordinators made reference to the school environment where often parents have their own fear and apprehensions based upon their own educational experience. However, for some coordinators the school’s physical appearance and security measures fail to create an environment where one is comfortable in entering. The wider cumulative problems of disadvantage often render the school as not being a priority.

5.2.5 Child Focused Interventions.

Thus far, the findings primarily concentrate on the levels of support that are given to parents and families in general, whereas this section explores how the HSCL and DEIS in general, positively discriminate to level the playing field for children in school, regardless of the socio-economic status of parents. Many of the supports that are directed towards children include the provision of extra Special Needs Assistants and support hours. The presence of additional supports such as breakfast clubs, where children can have something to eat and drink when they arrive at school, are provided as a result of level of marginalisation within the schools’ community. For
some coordinators, by making subject teachers aware of sensitive issues that are effecting students is considered to be an effective implementation. Another theme that emerges suggests that in some schools the presence of the HSCL has led to very little support for pupils as the purpose of the programme is to help parents to help their own children.

Most coordinators explain that many of the supports associated with the HSCL are there to assist parents rather than children. However, many describe specific additional supports which are available in DEIS schools such as the School Completion Programme, which provides a multitude of practical supports are targeted at children. The Breakfast Club supports are reported as being very important as many coordinators explain that children are arriving at school hungry:

First of all there is no doubt that there are additional hours available or support, and as well as that we would have a lot of additional hours for SNAs, there is a lot more emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The Breakfast Club here is ran by the Schools Completion Programme and I pop in most mornings as it is important and it is a very good support for children and then they can have their breakfast for free where they can get a roll or a sandwich. We also have the homework clubs and that comes under DEIS. We are also involved with the Schools Completion Programme and I would look after the families participating in the programme. [...] to be fair to DEIS I do not know where we would be without it, where would we get those extra hours from? (Mary).

Most coordinators express that they work closely with the SCP and rely heavily upon the resources available to it. Another common theme that emerges from the findings concerns the allocation of Special Needs Assistants and support hours; however, it is explained by Ciara that they are not provided as part of the HSCL, but instead as a result of the broader DEIS policies:

We get extra SNAs here as we are a DEIS school, it’s great that we have them or I don’t know how we would manage. I don’t think we have extra as a result of the HSCL more as a result of being a DEIS school in general (Ciara).
Some coordinators mention that being a DEIS school meant that more SNAs are needed. Many coordinators explained that the amount of SNAs that the school is allocated, by the DES, is inadequate, due to the high levels of needs within their schools:

We have two SNA’s shared amongst the 12 children – it’s crazy. It’s hugely frustrating as there are a lot of children here that would really benefit from the extra support but it is becoming practically impossible to get another SNA (Noreen).

Other coordinators explain that they operate maths and reading programmes that attempt to make traditionally difficult subjects more enjoyable for the pupils:

We realise that it’s not just about pupils getting homework done; we need to support them with school work. I facilitate lunchtime classes where pupils can come if they want and I will go over topics in a less formal manner (Frank)

Other coordinators focus on the provision of emotional support for children experiencing difficulties in the home. Making other teachers aware of the pupils’ difficulties, is considered to be an important aspect of the HSCL teacher’s role, as it allows for the pressure amongst students to be reduced during difficult times:

The HSCL can help when a problem becomes evident. The students can come and talk to me or a school councillor and I can liaise with their teachers and family on their behalf, and usually if teachers have an idea that there is personal issues at play they can reduce the pressure upon work load and gain a better understanding of why behaviour and performance may not be up to par (Judy).

Such initiatives are common amongst HSCL coordinators, as it is in the classroom that problems that children are experiencing can be identified. Abnormal and emotional behaviour often indicates to teachers that there may be an issue that needs further investigating:
I have had many instances where children have been tearful in the classroom. Often the teacher would report it to me and I would take the child to one side and try and find out what is going on. Sometimes it may be bullying other times it is because there is something going on in the home (Erin).

Erin introduced a system for staff, with children in mind, which provides a list of the students who needed a little more attention for whatever reason; students are added to and removed from the list accordingly. Erin is of the opinion that something as simple as the list can make a big difference in terms of preventing children distancing themselves from the school during difficult times:

Children experiencing such problems can be put back on the right track often by a simple remedy. This prevents us having to try and persuade them to come back to school when they get overwhelmed, perhaps just mentioning to a teacher that it may be a good idea to keep an eye on a particular pupil. However discretion is always needed and often the teacher doesn’t need to know everything. We have a list that I put up in the staff room so all of the school staff knows when there is an issue, but are unaware of the personal and often sensitive nature of the problems that students endure (Erin).

Many teachers however, feel that the provision of child focused supports is inappropriate, as the HSCL is designed with families in mind, to prepare them for helping their own children and learning and to deal with their own problems:

We generally don’t have any additional supports for children – and we shouldn’t. The idea behind the HSCL is to equip families to help themselves and realise their own capabilities (Kieran).

Other coordinators suggest that they have very little interaction with pupils. Other DEIS supports are designed to work alongside pupils:

That’s what we have the SCP for. They work with the children to free up my time to help parents to help their children. My schedule is limited and whilst I
will not turn a distressed child away my time is best spent working with course provision and home visits (Frank).

Whilst some coordinators suggest that many extra SNAs are available, they do not specifically state that they had materialised as a result of the HSCL. Some coordinators intimate that the additional supports arise as a result of the more general DEIS initiatives and others attributed many interventions to the SCP, which is present in all DEIS schools. Coordinators also have the autonomy to steer school policies in such a way that schools can implement a more comprehensive system of support for both parents and their children.

5.2.6 Funding

Whilst coordinators work hard to design and arrange the delivery of courses within the school and arrange activities for children to participate in, such initiatives are not just dependent on the will of parents to attend. This section explains how HSCL coordinators access their proportion of DEIS funding that is allocated to the school. Many coordinators do not have access to the budget as funds have to be directly sought from the principal, which in the opinion of many coordinators is not a problem. However, in some cases, by not having direct access to the budget, impinges upon the teacher’s autonomy in distributing funds amongst the various HSCL resources.

Most HSCL coordinators explained the HSCL programme is entitled to 10% of the overall budget which is allocated to school due to being supported by DEIS. This funding is used to stock the parents’ room, facilitate courses and organise trips for families. Despite this, many report having very little access to these funds and rely on the good will of people to come in and help:

A lot of what I do is provided by good will and people power rather than on money. I don’t really have any money. I know that I am entitled to 10% of the DEIS but I never see any of it (Caroline).
Other coordinators describe similar experiences when accessing the budget. Accessing funding is generally difficult as the funds are controlled by the principal. However, many express that they have developed good working relationships with the principal:

Apparently we are supposed to get 10% of the DEIS budget but I have never asked any questions about it. If I go the principal and tell him that I am having a coffee morning or whatever he would say ‘go for it’. It is different in DEIS schools where they have to fill out countless forms just to get low amounts of money (Noreen).

Other coordinators explain that they, too, had knowledge of what level of funding that they are entitled to, but instead, considered themselves lucky to receive funding. They attribute any money received a result of having an understanding principal rather than a resource that they, as HSCL coordinators, are entitled to:

I am blessed with my school principal, he is very understanding and he takes on DEIS and gets it. He is very experienced and gives me a lot of independence. However there is nothing I can do without consulting him first but he always gives me the go ahead (Erin).

The findings suggest that the ways in which coordinators access funds has a determining effect on the facilities and resources that they are able to provide. Despite having a specified level of funding available to them, coordinators are only allocated portions of this budget on a needs basis. Some coordinators state that they have never asked or been offered funding to facilitate the programmes associated with the HSCL. Instead some have to rely upon local community partners for either funding or to run courses on the school’s behalf:
You have to be very resourceful. Often we have the facilities but we can’t afford the tutors to run the course. We have to rely on community partners such as SVP or other volunteers to teach. Often the large school in the city centre organises university students to deliver courses on a voluntary basis (Ciara).

Being resourceful is a common theme amongst coordinators. For those that do not report have any issues accessing funding often find that the budget is not enough to fund all of the facilities relating the HSCL:

The community has recently funded a tutor for a computer course and first aid courses. We are lucky as we have many supports provided by the government such as community support workers who provide the homework clubs (Anne).

The findings suggest that despite the ability of coordinators to be innovative in terms of matching courses and activities to the needs of the school community, much depends on being able to access the HSCL’s proportion of the DEIS budget. Despite most coordinators reporting that their school principals understand the needs of families, they acknowledge that the HSCL budget is rarely adequate and are reliant to some degree on community or state agencies to provide extra supports. Often, funding received is considered to be an act of goodwill from principals rather than funds that are designated for the HSCL from the Department of Education through DEIS funding.

5.2.7 Impacts of Reduced Funding

As with most of Ireland’s public services financial cut backs and austerity measures have carried with them negative consequences impinging upon the services and supports that such institutions provide. Many HSCL coordinators feel that these cut
backs may not necessarily effect the facilities in the school, but have impacted upon their role in terms of their interactions with statutory agencies on behalf of families. Whilst some coordinators explained that the HSCL remains relatively unaffected.

Many respondents explain that they are always searching for extra help and assistance from any organisation willing to assist:

You are always looking to partners for help; recently the mental health organisation rode in behind me which helped a lot. I notice here in the school more cut backs are evident such as reduced hours for SNAs. With the embargo on recruitment we don’t have a school councillor or career guidance person until next year (Mary).

Even though most coordinators state that their principals demonstrate a clear understanding of the HSCL and provides as much funding as possible as and when it is needed, some coordinators explain that all expenditure is very closely monitored;

Everything is now scrutinised to an alarming level. My phone bill is now €30 per month as I am in touch with schools and parents all the time. I will be asked about it and it will be assumed that I have made personal calls (Gillian).

The cut backs that are evident within the school make the task of operating the HSCL difficult, however, Erin is more concerned with dangers that cut backs which occur outside of the school environment pose to vulnerable families, as in many cases social workers work closely with HSCL coordinators:

The most painful thing that we are witnessing is within the social work sector, where social workers seem to have been briefed to close as many cases as possible. We had a case the other day where a support worker came to see me,
as soon as she came in I expected her to say they looked forward to working with us in the future. Instead she said that her purpose for being there was to liaise with schools to see if social work related cases can be closed – it’s not the social workers fault but the HSE (Tusla) seems to be hell bent on closing things at the moment (Erin).

Not all coordinators feel that cut backs are negatively impacting the functioning of the HSCL. Many are of the opinion that whilst acknowledging that financial issues do matter, the HSCL is primarily about being able to create effective relationships and do not necessarily depend upon material resources:

I have been using the same books for the last six years because they were chosen correctly. As long as you have good relationships with parents funding isn’t usually an issue (Judy).

Other participants find the idea of cut backs as a result of cut backs in education spending insignificant, not because they do not see this as a serious issue, but as a result of having so little funds initially;

Cut backs make very little difference here. I have very little funding in the first place. If I had more money I could run more courses. To be honest it’s not about money, it’s about the building of good quality relationships with parents (Chris).

In the face of reduced capital, coordinators have to rely upon the support of community and state agencies to facilitate the components of the HSCL that ordinarily would have been covered within their budget. Impacts upon the work that coordinators do with social services are considered to be the most serious consequence of reduced funding. Some feel that they have been unaffected by cut backs. They regard themselves as their greatest resource or because they had so little access to funding in the first place.
5.2.8 Summary

The most common theme in relation to how coordinators regard the objectives of the HSCL is to form an effective link between the home and school. Through various interventions designed to make the school a friendlier and more inclusive place to be, coordinators have explained that parents can meet with school staff and other parents in order to break down barriers put up as a result of their own educational experiences. For others, the primary objectives are based upon the idea that the HSCL is parent focused but child centred. By emphasising attendance and school completion acknowledges the important role that school plays in maximising opportunities for children in adult life.

Though the facilitation of a broad range of courses, coordinators equip parents with crucial skills to enable them to assist in the development of their children’s education. Enticing parents to attend literacy and numeracy courses can be difficult, so coordinators often start by introducing parents to courses that focus upon hobbies and social interaction and gradually introduce them to more educational programmes. The provision of parenting and personal development courses for parents are also provided in many schools; however coordinators stress the importance of promoting these to parents in a sensitive and positive method.

Despite the HSCL being predominantly focused upon the provision of supports for parents, some coordinators explain that the scheme ensures that children have the opportunity to come to dedicated staff members if they have personal issues inside or outside of the school. The HSCL can be regarded as a vessel for communicating such issues to other members of staff in order to provide a greater understanding of what is going on in children’s lives. This information is passed on in a discreet manner and often provides useful explanations for abnormal behaviour or academic performance.

For the HSCL to be effective, coordinators rely on more than just parental participation. Common themes that emerge in this area suggest that for the HSCL to
work as it should, coordinators should have a good working relationship with the school principal. The school head, in all cases, controls the funding and distributes it to the coordinators on a needs basis. However, some report having very little access to funds. It is these coordinators that have felt the effects of cut backs in educational spending least, as they have always had to be resourceful with regards to tapping into community supports. Cut backs within the state agencies such as social services present the most significant challenge to coordinators, as the welfare of the children and families that they engage with is now potentially compromised. The ways that coordinators engage with the local community, voluntary and state agencies will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

5.3 The Role of the Family, Home and Community

This section presents how coordinators regard the school and community based components of the HSCL. This section also presents the various ways that support is provided to parents in their own environment, the home. The key themes in this section suggest that the purpose of the home visit is to open the dialogue between the family and the school, which is championed by coordinators as being the core tenet of the HSCL. Most participants report that they visit all parents at least once but after that home visits are targeted. Targeted visits are based upon children’s performance and behaviour, as well as any causes for concern that coordinators have regarding the welfare of the pupils or parents. However, rather than just opening a line of communication and promoting the home as a place of educational development, coordinators spend much of their time engaged in tasks, that in many cases fall outside of the HSCL remit. The home visitation, whilst providing valuable assistance to many marginalised families, often places coordinators in a situation where the bonds of trust that have been built are jeopardised due to the need to act on the best interests of the child.

5.3.1 What Home Visits Provide

Coordinators express the importance of meeting parents as early as possible, in many cases at the beginning of the first-year of secondary school. They often make an
effort to visit as many homes as possible to introduce themselves and to make families aware of the various programmes available for both parents and children. Cliona provided a brief account of the way she initiates this process:

When the first years come in September I just take a few days to drive around and introduce myself and tell them that I am working as the Home School person, and if they ever want anything to let me know and that they can contact me. I might give them a little book with all of the details for all of the courses and tell them that I will be having a coffee morning in October and they are invited. The key is to start in first year. Generally you prepare them for the range of reasons that you could be going out to them and usually they would invite you in for a cup of tea (Cliona).

Often the home visit provides an opportunity for HSCL coordinators to observe the lives of the families which they work with and observe the different ways that families view education. Mary stated that they try to visit every first year family:

I may only visit them once but that gives me a good idea where my first years have come from, and if something arises I can go back to revisit (Mary).

Kieran also stated that the home visit is a valuable learning tool for coordinators, as in many cases the issues experienced by families living in marginalised communities are often not understood by those employed by the Department of Education:

Most of the staff in here has no idea what it is like to live in this kind of poverty. Coordinators are often very surprised when I explain what is going on in the homes of many of the families in this school (Kieran).
This emphasises the need for visits to be carried out in a casual manner. Often by making this crucial part of the HSCL seem as unofficial as possible has helped create a relaxed meeting and enabled parents to feel less apprehensive when interacting with school staff. This teacher stressed how important it is to be casual and upbeat with families and explains to parents at open evenings that “one of these days you will see me flying around your estate knocking on doors just to say hello” (Tanya).

However, instances where coordinators carry out a casual visit are rare, with many explaining that the real reason behind a home visit often relates to more serious issues. Often much time is dedicated to monitoring attendance and punctuality logs, registers and investigating the causes of absenteeism. Home visitations provide an opportunity to discuss these issues with the family and decide upon which course of action is necessary to address the problem. After the initial visit for many, visits are conducted as a targeted approach usually generated as a result of issues that have occurred in the classroom or if there is a concern of the welfare for the child or parents:

Overall I have a target list of parents that I am engaging with, that is why I study the attendance logs. I am not concerned with students that miss the odd day or two but I am concerned about the students who are on the target list. The list would have around forty people on it and I would want to know if they’re not in and why they’re not in. The majority of the parents do not see me in an authoritarian kind of a way (Cliona).

The importance of speaking and interacting with parents in a causal manner regarding such issues is important, as a more formal approach may lead to the creation of barriers between the school and the home;
We have also the Education Welfare Officer who would be a lot more concerned with attendance and in extreme cases prosecute parents; they would be a lot more official (Cliona).

Most coordinators, however, explain that visits to homes occur if concern had been raised by the care team over a pupil’s behaviour of general well-being. The care team in schools in made up from councillors, the Year Head, the Chaplin and the Behavioural Support Teacher and the HSCL teacher:

[…] we discuss who is going to take responsibility for each student and discuss what we know about the student’s home environment and if this is where the issue is occurring I will then carry out a home visit (Tanya).

Engaging with parents can be problematic according to coordinators, especially when parents are called into the school. One interviewee stated that when a home is visited by the HSCL teacher, the parent becomes less defensive and more cooperative, as the visitation element is perceived to give the parent more control of the situation:

When we call to the home it is up to the parent whether or not they let us in or leave us at the door, although that hasn’t happened to me before. Previously, when parents were called to school if there was an issue they would automatically be defensive. However, the home visit allows them to control the conversation (Erin).

Other participants suggest that every situation is different and in most cases they find this role challenging and complex, as in many cases what is going on in the home is unknown until the visit takes place:
I was told by a lady whom I worked with many years ago who said “do not go out to houses with an agenda, you may have an agenda but don’t go out to the house and tell them what it is. If you go out and keep your mouth shut and your ears open you will hear everything that you need to hear” (Chris).

From the data presented one can observe two emerging strands, one of which places the role of the HSCL teacher as a resource that can be utilised as and when parents need a specific support. The second strand situates the HSCL teacher in a complicated position, where they are required to be proactive in dealing with situations such as behavioural issues, poor school performance and poor attendance when they occur. However, the method whereby the family is made aware of school related issues has to be executed in a delicate manner where equilibrium is created between what is right for the child and family and what is right for the school.

5.3.2 Building Relationships Outside of the School

The previous section presented the general roles that HSCL coordinators play when visiting the homes of the pupils attending their school. This section focuses less on specific duties and responsibilities, but instead concentrates upon the perceptions that coordinators have of the parents’ feelings towards them during the home visitation element of the HSCL. This section offers an insight into the approaches employed by visiting coordinators to overcome negativity when calling on families, in order to make the home visit a positive experience for both parents and coordinators. Often gaining access to the family home and establishing a trusting relationship is dependent upon the coordinators’ level of communication skills, their ability to show empathy and not making an agenda for the visit known to families. This is considered crucial for maintaining good relations between the home and the school. In many cases, it can be seen that the creation of a bond between the coordinators and the parents often opens the door whereby parents can be observed as being less dislocated from the school environment.
Coordinators are generally of the opinion that parents have very little difficulty with them visiting the family home, and they are in most cases viewed positively by parents. However, they speak of the need for sensitivity at all times. Coordinators understand that by speaking to parents in their own familiar environment gives parents more confidence in expressing themselves. Some coordinators feel that more distal relationships, between parents and school, cause greater difficulties when encouraging parents to participate within the HSCL:

We are not in most cases going out to have a chat about the weather. We go out to talk about serious issues such as behaviour issues, bullying and concerns over children’s well-being. Often we have to spend a lot of time in the home before we can get to the point (Ciara).

Other participants explained that initially there is a certain level of scepticism on the part of parents, where the role of the HSCL teacher is often equated to one of authority and judgement. In many communities there are feuds between neighbours and other families. This coupled with other problems such as drug and alcohol abuse means that coordinators have to work hard to disassociate themselves from this perception:

At first there is a certain level of scepticism. We have to make it very clear that we are not social workers and that we are there for them working on their behalf rather than just going in and throwing information at them. I take it very slowly and stress that I am there for their benefit, I ask them is there anything that I can do to improve the situation for their child at school. While our work is with parents it is with the child in mind also. It’s trying to make education something that is important in the house. Where it can be difficult is that in the area that we are located in has problems with drugs, alcohol and crime is very much to the fore. The other side of that, is that we have a lot of families involved in feuds so you have to be very careful so not to arrive with an overly positive attitude (Noreen).
This point is reiterated by another teacher who explains that every family that they had ever worked with had a certain level of suspicion until they fully understood how the HSCL worked:

Across the board people want to know what my job is, and ask me to tell the truth, is there something wrong that they should know about or am I a social worker? Within five to ten minutes you can usually gain their trust just by telling them that you are there to help them. Even the most positive families will mention that they have been a bit suspicious (Gillian)

In many cases, marginalised parents have had negative experiences when in contact with state agencies and often feel frustrated. Catherine stated that:

Generally there are very few issues. Sometimes parents can be annoyed about things, often about the situations that they are in, dealing with social welfare and other money related issues, but generally you diffuse the situation [...] (Catherine)

It is suggested by some coordinators that parents may be angry with many aspects of their life and their interactions with statutory agencies; however it is not necessarily the coordinators that they are annoyed with. The HSCL teacher provides a platform for families to express their opinions and emotions. Very few explain that they are made feel unwelcome by parents. Stephani remarked that the outcome of a home visit will often depend on one’s personality and the tactics one chooses to adopt:

You would be amazed at the amount of parents that are delighted that we took the time to call out to them. If an issue is sensitive and I don’t feel that it is an appropriate time to mention it, I will leave till another time. We have to tread
carefully to bring the parent to a place where we are all comfortable talking to each other (Stephanie).

Ciara also explains that parents often think it is the job of the HSCL, during the home visit, to level blame and pressure upon parents rather than being there as a support for them:

The further removed from the education system families are the more they think my job is just to give out at them, they often associate the school with authority (Ciara).

Whilst the findings provide relatively positive evidence that suggests the interactions with families during the home visitation is positive, they do suggest that significant time and effort must be invested into building rapport and maintaining relationships. In many cases, coordinators are seen as representatives of the school which often arouses suspicion. As a result of this association, parallels are drawn between the school and social services. Coordinators explain that they do not go out with an agenda and do not use the home visit as a means of judgment but instead go out to build bonds with families in the security of the family home as they are aware that the parents’ experiences of school were often negative.

5.3.3 Observation within the Family Environment

Whilst generally the presence of coordinators on the door step is welcome, some explain that once inside the home a need for sensitivity, empathy and professionalism is crucial. The importance of generating and maintaining this bond is important as coordinators find the home visit a varied and challenging experience. A common theme in this section is that many of the roles that coordinators assist parents with often have very little connection to the school. The assistance that they provide in the home often relates to advocacy and welfare issues; coordinators are
placed in situations where social workers and Gardai would be more suitably equipped to help.

Many participants express that they have to be prepared for all situations as every home visit has the potential to be very different to the next:

In the vast majority of cases, once inside the home you could be met with vast range of issues that you are expected to deal with (Cliona).

The home visits provide a lens in which coordinators can view the lives of marginalised families. Working with families and having such access to their lives, involves a high degree of trust as in many cases the problems which many parents endure are not the duties that coordinators would be equipped to deal with:

Much of what I deal with is alien to me; it’s all theoretical at first until we visit the home. We often see parents that have gone down the wrong road – with drugs and alcohol and the reality of the problem only becomes apparent when you visit the home, I have a parent that told me that she hadn’t been sober from drugs or alcohol in 9 years. It’s difficult to know what to say, but we have to teach them how to be parents again and we need to educate teachers on the realities of poverty (Cliona).

The ways in which coordinators interact with parents during home visits is again described as one that is more than just delivering information relating the school. Instead, visits involve being immersed in the challenges that face disadvantaged communities. Many explain that much time is dedicated to advocacy issues:
A lot of parents don’t just invite me into their homes they invite me into their lives, they share so much with us. Often we never get to discuss school, education or their children, they (parents) often just want someone to listen to them (Mary).

Similar findings are expressed by another teacher who explains that coordinators who visit homes often provide the only contact that parents have:

Often when I visit homes parents tell me that they are lonely and feel isolated. Many of our parents here are on their own and are dealing with mental health problems. Sometimes they are just glad of someone to check in on them. The ways some of these estates are designed people feel very closed in (Frank).

These examples demonstrate the complex nature of home visits and suggest that much of what occurs during a home visit, goes beyond the remit of the HSCL. Further evidence of the non-educational role of HSCL teacher is exemplified by Ciara’s experience when visiting a home, where the welfare of a child was at risk. This teacher explains that they had come across an instance during a visit that they were obliged to report to TUSLA, as they had become aware of a child that had experienced sexual abuse:

The family in question wouldn’t be typical of disadvantaged families. Both parents were working, however it was flagged by teachers that this child was emotional in the class room and seemed regularly upset. It became apparent that during the home visit the girl explained that she had been sexually abused by another child (Ciara).
Even though the teacher acknowledged that the family had not contributed to the initial allegation and fully supported their child, by the teacher becoming aware of the situation meant that it was now taken out of the family’s hands:

The situation put me in a very awkward situation, as on one hand my job is to stand with families and support them, but the way in which they were handling the problem was causing more upset and distress to the child so I had to decide whether or not to undo all of the hard work invested in building a good relationship (Ciara).

The importance of maintaining a good relationship with parents is a significant challenge for another respondent. However, this teacher described having a different perspective when approaching welfare issues in the home;

I would be very careful about getting social services involved. I wouldn’t want to be the one responsible for having their children taken away from them (Regina).

Regina went onto explain that social services would be used as last resort as she would try to speak to as many people as possible first to get an understanding of the full extent of the issue and to see if the issue could be resolved at local level. Other issues where coordinators feel that their role as an advocate for parents is challenged occur when visiting parents who have addiction problems. It is these visits where indicators of neglect are most obvious:

We see all kinds of things during the visit. When I go into a home I may not see drugs but I can smell them or sometimes the parents display behaviour that you would associate with drug use. Such houses are usually dirty, sparsely
furnished and have very little food in the fridge. Even though I know there is drug use happening there is not a lot that I can do (Catherine).

Kieran explained that many of the homes that he visits are to families with English as a second language. Without the home visits these families find it very difficult to communicate with welfare services and statutory bodies:

I am working with an African family at the moment with very little English. They are living below the poverty line because they have had difficulty registering with social welfare. I often use the home visit to check on them and make necessary phone calls or help with the filling out of forms. Without the home visit there is no one else to help (Kieran).

5.3.4 Summary

In summary, coordinators engage in a wide variety of issues during the home visit. Instead of promoting the home as a place of learning and providing parents with the necessary skills to advance their children’s education, HSCL coordinators are often engaged in non-school related issues. Despite many of such tasks being beyond the remit of the HSCL in order to develop and strengthen the relationships between the school and the home, some often take on the role of advocacy. It is agreed by many, that the home visitation element of the HSCL provided a valuable insight into the lives of those whom the serve. Often coordinators are surprised at what they discover but visiting homes enables them to understand the difficulties that families encounter and enables HSCL coordinators to communicate these experiences to others working within the school. The ability to engage with parents in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner is stated as being the key to making home visits successful, even though at the time it places them in morally challenging scenarios.
5.4 Working with Community Partners

As presented in the previous section (5.2.1), the need for a strong relationship with the community is common amongst HSCL coordinators. This section presents the various ways in which HSCL coordinators interact with local community partners and statutory agencies in order to support the families whom they work with. Coordinators regard those who they work alongside in the community as integral in the provision of services that the school is not equipped to do so. As well as having specially trained personnel, many community agencies have the ability to access funding in order to facilitate courses and provide services to the school and parents. The types of partners that schools work with are from both the voluntary and state sectors such as SVP, Barnados and a blend of Government departments.

Much of the assistance given to the parents focuses upon child care, advocacy and counselling services to name but a few. Whilst the common theme suggests that coordinators enjoy a positive and productive relationship with many of the locally based community partners in which they work with, it is suggested that this positive relationship rarely extends to statutory agencies. Most coordinators feel that the absence of the joined up thinking between the school and organisations such as the HSE leads to frustration and unnecessary difficulties in carrying out their work.

As the names of many of these organisations have their location in their title, they have been anonymised. Participants suggest that without the involvement of the community in the school and the school within the community the HSCL would not be effective.

5.4.1 Defining the Community

When trying to define what the community is in relation to HSCL, it is suggested by coordinators that it sets the context for the rest of the work that the HSCL undertakes. Also the relationship that is shared by the school and the community is mutually beneficial:
I work towards building community esteem and community self-confidence as families around here have a mixed up idea of what is due to them and that impacts upon the community when everyone thinks that way. The school regards the community as a resource and something that really needs to be connected with the school. When families do well as a result of the school the whole community benefits (Kieran).

Another teacher stressed the importance of the community, suggesting that only a small amount of a child’s time is spent within the school environment, so therefore the school has to strengthen the community:

The community should be an extension of the school, it is very important here. When I speak at staff meetings we always talk about how little time is spent here, so we need to embrace it and get involved with as many of the voluntary groups in the community as possible (Caroline).

The idea of the community being an extension of the school is further explained by Patrick, who suggests that if investment is expected in the school then the school should invest in the community, thus providing a means of creating changes in environments that families spend their greatest amount of time:

People have preconceived ideas about areas like this, but they’re wrong. We have done a lot to change the ways in which people view poorer communities. I believe that the school and the community cannot be separated as they benefit each other; if kids come out of school with qualifications and parents feel that they are important, that in turn benefits the community (Patrick).

The idea that building partnerships between the school and the community is of benefit to both spheres, is further developed by Stephanie, who explains that the
parents are the community so they need to be at the forefront of dialogue and in achieving this their involvement at discussion level with other schools, community partners and other families is important:

At community level we hope that parents feel part of the community through their participation in the school. We work together with other schools, for example many of the meetings would be attended by three principals, three HSCL coordinators and you would have all of the local agencies and other coordinators within the neighbouring communities, pupils and parents on the committee so that subjects in the broadest sense can be discussed (Stephanie).

Other participants regard the relationship with community partners as one of necessity, as it provides valuable supports and services that are beyond what the school can facilitate:

In general the community fills in the gaps and provides for the family what we cannot. The school and community are always working as an integrated unit (Cliona).

The idea of the school and the community being an integrated unit is also explained by Lorraine, who describes the ways in which community partners are part of the more formal school structure:

The meetings we have here in the school often involve other school HSCL coordinators, and parents but community partners are always welcome. They help in developing plans and initiatives that benefit not only parents and children but also the broader community. So not only do we encourage parents to be part of the school we also encourage support groups and local businesses (Lorraine).
5.4.2 Community Support

This section presents the ways in which the community aspect of the HSCL fills in the gaps in pupil and parent support that the school cannot. The findings suggest that the facilitation of health and well-being supports, counselling and respite are common in most areas where the HSCL is present.

This teacher explains the range of supports that their school benefits from. They include educational supports, they depend upon the voluntary sector and the statutory agencies in order to maximise the range of services that can be provided to families:

I would work very close with SVP and Barnados; I work closely with the Schools Completion Officer and the Garda Siochana Junior Liaison Officer. Usually we deal with an awful lot of agencies depending on what is going on. For example if it was a literacy programme that I wanted to organise I would get in touch with the library for assistance. I try and tap into as many supports and agencies as possible so that if I need them I know they are there (Mary).

Other coordinators also express the importance of being resourceful when it comes to the supports provided by community partners:

We often have the facilities and the venue to provide classes for parents but do not have the funding to pay for a tutor. Due to being located near to the university, they are always happy to provide tutors for both classes for parents and homework clubs for the children (Ciara).

Many of the supports provided by the community are linked to provision of childcare, which enables parents to participate in a course or activities that are being
offered by the school or to allow them to attend an appointment for instance. In addition, many supports according to coordinators, such as crèches allow parents to take a break allowing them to have time for themselves. Some find that course participation is largely dependent upon the ability to obtain child care facilities:

Many of our parents are bringing up children alone and in a lot of cases have more than one child. When you have very little money it can be very stressful and very isolating, to have the opportunity either take some time for yourself or to have an outlet to meet other mothers and people is a big help (Noreen).

Coordinators identify many families in their communities as experiencing issues as a result of mental health problems, addiction problems and many other issues associated with poverty. The HSCL provides a vital role in putting parents in touch with the most appropriate supports:

Drugs addiction in this area is a big problem as well as mental health problems, obviously there is nothing the school can do, but we can connect people with local organisations that provide the appropriate supports such as counselling and drop-in services (Anne).

As discussed in Section 5.1.8, coordinators explain that in some cases the community partners cannot always provide courses or programmes for parents and children, but can provide much needed funding. This teacher explains that without the assistance of a particular local partner, the school would not be in a position to provide as much help to families:

The only community agency that I would work with is the SVP. They are fantastic and have genuine interest in school; they provide funding for all kinds of supports from courses for parents to emergency funding for us to give to families experiencing difficult times. I am very reliant on them and they are so approachable when needed (Ciara).

Christopher also expresses the reliance the school has upon the SVP. Often the funding required is not to help parents with learning and school based activities. In
some cases funding is sourced by coordinators to help families with essential supports that many take for granted:

We had a child in school that quite frankly smelled. Other children were bullying him. This prompted a visit to the home and I was disgusted at what I found. The shower was not working and the bath leaked. The family had reported the issue to the council but were told this would take time. I felt that this couldn’t go on any longer so I contacted the SVP and they provided a new shower and I paid for a plumber to install it (Christopher).

In some instances it is not just the voluntary and state agencies that provide relief for parents. Some coordinators find that much of their funding is donated from local businesses:

In some cases where large industry players are present in the community a contribution by them is often made to the school. The garden and poly-tunnel was provided by a large private organisation in the area (Aoife).

As well as the community providing services to parents, the local community also supports children once outside of the school environment. Sports facilities and after school clubs, according to coordinators, are commonly provided:

After school clubs are a facility that we rely upon heavily here. Organisations such as the Garda Junior Liaison Officer will run workshops which gives the young people something constructive to do outside school (Lorraine).

Another teacher explains how the Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer provides after school clubs for the boys, where they can learn about motor vehicle mechanics and safety. This is regarded as important, as it keeps youths off the road and discourages them from becoming involved in car related crime:

The Garda diversion programme allows them to get involved in car and motor cycle maintenance. This is great because they’re all interested in getting on the
road. This gives them an interest whilst building a relationship with the police (Noreen).

Other coordinators remarked on how community organisations assist when the HSCL and the various other in-school initiatives are unable to retain pupils in secondary schools, as they link young people to Youthreach\textsuperscript{16} projects:

Youthreach here is very successful and provides a lot of courses that are attractive to those children that no longer want to engage with the formal education system. It has a youth café and runs activities to cater for all sorts of interests which keep them off the streets (Anne).

Coordinators frequently report that they are reliant upon the services of the voluntary and informal sector for the support of both parents and children. However, in some cases, to alleviate more serious issues parents need to be connected with state agencies such as the HSE and TUSLA. Coordinators explain that in many cases, parents are not able to understand the language or instructions in which they are given, so it is necessary to act as a go-between. Other instances of coordinators contacting the statutory agencies often concerns welfare issues:

We link in with the HSE and various other governmental bodies. Often families feel intimidated when dealing with them as they feel that they won’t understand or won’t be understood. We also deal with such agencies if we have concerns over a child or family. Their welfare is priority (Kieran).

In terms of the more serious problems that families experience, statutory agencies are deemed by coordinators to have more power in making important interventions. Coordinators often feel that they cannot offer any help, so therefore contact professionals on behalf of troubled parents:

\textsuperscript{16} Youthreach is a Department of Education and Skills official education, training and work experience programme for early school leavers aged 15 – 20. It offers young people the opportunity to identify options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification. As it operates on a full-time, year-round basis, Youthreach has a continuous intake policy.
We rely on social services heavily here, as a large school in an area with as much disadvantage as this there’s a lot of very serious issues relating to the welfare of children, and also the welfare of parents. So we would be in regular contact with the HSE in trying to arrange help for families with addiction problems and mental health issues (Noreen).

For many coordinators, the first port of call when trying to help families is the local agencies, many of which provide free counselling. They can assist with a range of problems from relationship advice to mental health services:

Local groups we have here offer drop in centres for parents to go to. They offer a range of services where they can just go in and have a general chat or they offer more specialised services to help with more serious issues (Regina).

In summary, coordinators interact with a multitude of agencies for various reasons, however the common theme is that without the cooperation between the school and the community, the HSCL would be limited in what supports it can provide. As much of the support that families require goes beyond what schools can offer, services that provide counselling and other essential supports for families are crucial. Without after-school clubs that provide sports and useful activities it is felt that children would instead conduct their social lives out on the streets.

5.4.3 Effectiveness of Joined-Up-Thinking
This section presents how HSCL coordinators are challenged within their dealings with community partners and statutory agencies. Difficulties in being understood as a teacher, and as an advocate for families are common themes emerging from the findings. The most common theme however, suggests that that there is poor level of joined up thinking between the school and statutory agencies, which many coordinators express frustration with.

On the other hand, despite some coordinators stating that their relationship with community partners and agencies was at times difficult, most indicate that their interactions work in an effective and efficient manner:
There is a fantastic network here; we have a brilliant working relationship with all the groups that support us. If A can’t help us they will put us in touch with B and C who can help. The way in which we work is almost seamless really and if there is a child at risk of being out of school or expelled we almost have a solution before it happens (Noreen).

The most common theme that emerges from the findings suggests that the majority of HSCL coordinators feel that the standard of interconnectedness that exists between the school and State agencies is frustrating. As a cross over in the work carried out between the school and statutory agencies exists, participants explain that greater cooperation could lead to a higher standard of service:

The HSE and TUSLA frustrate me, I don’t know if it’s because they are over worked but we would have very serious issues here. We regularly refer cases to the HSE and TUSLA and they might not get round to dealing with them for at least a month – and I’m talking about serious abuse. We sometimes have an attendance issue and when we chase it up, we find out that the child has been taken into care and the HSE or Social Workers have not bothered to inform us (Caroline).

Aoife expressed a similar concern in relation to Social Services not being as helpful as one would expect, as they both have mutual concerns for the wellbeing of children:

Social Services can be the most helpful but also the least helpful. Social workers just don’t communicate with us. We often report an issue but often we never hear from them again – it would be nice to be kept informed (Aoife).

The perceived absence of joined up thinking described by coordinators is common, especially in terms of their dealings with State agencies. However, many feel that the communications with local partners demonstrates a greater level of cooperation and understanding:
I would love to say that the HSE and TUSLA is great, but when we give them information they never get back to us. We are constantly working with SVP and Barnados and they are fantastic to work with as with most of the community organisations here (Judy).

A similar finding provided by another teacher indicates that the school and agencies are two completely separate entities; therefore the perceived absence of cohesion is inevitable:

I know that the child is at the centre of both our interests, but at the end of the day we are doing completely different jobs and are looking for different outcomes. I’m interested in the child’s education and they are interested in a whole lot more. It can be frustrating but no matter how connected we are with Social Services the child is always put first (Cliona).

Kieran believes that the lack of communication between state agencies and HSCL coordinators is due to a transient work culture within State organisations:

Staff never stay in these jobs long enough to get to know us. Within the civil service people are getting promoted or moved to other departments or another country, that’s just how it is. We noticed that during the Celtic Tiger this was especially the case, we could be working with a case worker over the phone and the next thing we know they have moved to Australia (Kieran).

A feeling of not being understood by the organisations is also a theme that is evident in the findings. Some coordinators suggest that staff turnover amongst those in charge of local organisations can make a difference to the relationship that the school shares with them:

We have a new chairman of our local SVP who is great, but the last person was very difficult to get help from financially. He had no idea about what we did and was not interested. It became such an ordeal that we stopped asking for help (Ciara).
5.4.4 Summary
In summary, this section has provided an insight into the roles that local community organisations and statutory agencies connect with the school via the HSCL. As mentioned in the previously in his chapter (Section: 5.1.3), many coordinators regard retention as a key objective of the HSCL. The findings in this section suggest that occasionally the HSCL or the school staff in general cannot accomplish this; some communities have organisations that provide alternative paths to gaining job related skills. The HSCL forms an important means of communication between the individuals and families and the statutory agencies. In some cases, parents have trouble when engaging with State agencies, so the HSCL provides a valuable role in being able to offer advice and connecting them with the most relevant departments.

Despite the purpose of the school’s interaction with community based organisations, seeking support for families and children through working with community partners is commonly regarded as providing what the school or home cannot; however coordinators express a lot of frustration when seeking assistance from the formal sector. The most significant challenge to coordinators becomes evident when communication is necessary with State agencies. There is a perceived absence of joined up thinking, which in many cases jeopardises the well being of children and families. However, coordinators generally have good experiences when engaging local community organisations, with the exception of a few respondents who considered that some partners have a poor understand of what the HSCL programmes does.

5.5 The HSCL and the Reduction of Educational Inequality
This section explores how coordinators regard the effectiveness of HSCL in alleviating educational inequality. This chapter will present statements that suggest the HSCL, as an integrated policy, is considered by coordinators to have greater benefits than school only interventions. Many participants suggest that education should be defined in a broader sense, where all aspects of the child’s life are considered to influence educational development. HSCL coordinators often have difficulties in using a targeted approach when selecting participants for the HSCL. Many challenges relating the stigmatisation of the most disadvantaged children in
the school has led to the programme’s benefits to all children, often resulting in those who need support least also benefiting from the various initiatives. The findings also suggest that the measurement of success used by coordinators is ambiguous. Some use attendance and retention as the benchmark for the HSCL’s success, whereas some coordinators suggest that as the programme is focused upon parents then successes should be measured within the area of parental participation levels.

5.5.1 The Perceptions of the Level of Interconnectedness within the HSCL

The term ‘integrated policy’ in the context of this research refers to the type of policy that incorporates multi-agency responses to the problems associated with educational disadvantage. As discussed in chapter two, the HSCL addresses educational inequality through the development of parents’ ability to be positive influences in their children’s education, with the assistance of community partners and the state agencies. It is clear from the findings that most coordinators understand this type of approach as being significant in making positive changes in the lives of the families and their children.

Most of HSCL coordinators explain that integrated responses to tackling educational inequality are essential, as most of the barriers that restrict the potential of marginalised children occur outside of the school environment:

You cannot cure the problems of the home and the community in school. It is important that the school understands the issues that relate to poverty. Unless you can see it you cannot understand it (Frank).

Another respondent suggests that 85% of a child’s time is spent outside of the school; therefore a broader response to educational support is justified. With only a small percentage of a child’s life being spent at school, a greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the out of school supports. By empowering parents and the community turns learning into a 24 hour process (Michael)
The problems that inhibit children from reaching their potential in school can only be remedied by taking advantage of resources that schools do not provide, such as supports designed to help with providing a healthy and stable home:

Without being able to use the contacts that we have made here, we would be failing a lot of children and their families. The school isn’t in a position to provide health and financial supports for those experiencing hardship. The whole family needs support. All of the people that we work with make such a difference to achievement (Noreen).

Many other coordinators reiterate these sentiments and explain that the school can work to develop the educational capabilities of children and families; however to tackle disadvantage effectively requires a broader range of supports:

The saying that “It takes a village to raise a child” has never been truer. We can do so much here but at the end of the day we’re just coordinators we need a multiagency response to deal with the effects of marginalisation (Susan).

It is explained that the ways in which the HSCL operates and supports children is the envy of all schools including those that are not funded by DEIS:

Every other teacher that I speak with states they would like to have a system like the HSCL or someone to liaise with families. The idea of creating partnerships with parents and the community should be at the centre of every school’s philosophy (Anne).

Whilst acknowledging the benefits of integrated systems of learning such as the HSCL, it is suggested by Catherine that the very need to promote partnerships with parents serves as a poor reflection upon the current focus of the education system:
If schools did what they were supposed to there would be no need for a HSCL teacher. My view is that because school is now based on the needs of industry there is now a need for a person to put children first in the school. Schools should be there to promote learning and not facilitate the ‘point’s race’. All schools should be set up to serve the community and with understanding staff the school could probably operate without the HSCL (Chris).

Coordinators generally feel that integrated responses enable greater results when supporting marginalised families in the engagement with school and learning. The common theme that emerges acknowledges the significance of viewing education as a process that goes beyond the school bell, and within this concept both the home and community needs to be engaged in this process.

5.5.2 Selecting Disadvantaged Families

Most coordinators favoured a system of selection that extended the HSCL’s supports school-wide rather than identifying the children and families most in need of HSCL supports. Very few participants report seeking families to participate based upon the grounds of their socio-economic status. This method however, is not intended to undermine the core principles of the programme, but instead avoid stigmatising the most marginalised families in the school’s community.

A significant amount of coordinators favour offering the supports of the HSCL to all families with children attending their schools. For Kieran the decision not to target those most in need was quite deliberate in order to create an environment where parents can motivate each other:

I don’t believe in target groups, when you get a good mix of parents in a group they will mix together and influence each other so you might have one parent
who is quite articulate and who may be able to encourage a more needy parent […] (Kieran).

Another common theme that emerged suggests that coordinators offer the HSCL school-wide so as not to stigmatise the most in need of educational support and prevent less marginalised approaching the school to find out why they have been excluded:

A lot of the parents that we work with are low on self-confidence and have a lot of insecurities about their abilities. Despite this, the people in this community are still proud and if we singled people out for help it would push them away (Deirdre).

Other coordinators simply explain that due to the magnitude of social disadvantage in the community, there would be very few who would not fall within a target group. They also state that feeder schools often pass on details of whom they have been working with in order to make the transition from national school as simple as possible for children, families and teachers:

Most of the school population here is made up from families who are very socio-economically disadvantaged. There is no need for me to single out parents or students as I have a good idea about their circumstances prior to them starting in the school. The feeder primary schools are usually a good indicator and they pass information onto me (Judy).

Another teacher explained that they cannot understand why targeting is needed due to their school being categorised as a DEIS school:
We are a Cat One DEIS school, which means we have a huge amount of people in the area that are unemployed, living in poverty or have little or no education. This school’s catchment area is almost the size of Sligo. The Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education decide this, not the school, so in my opinion everyone here should be entitled to benefit from the HSCL.

Other schools however, effectively target the most vulnerable families in order to offer support. The common theme that emerged from the findings is that parents initially meet with all parents in first year in order to gather information related to their educational needs and ability to help their children with school work. Often the home visit is an effective means of evaluating the educational needs of children and their families:

In September I would visit all first year parents and would then facilitate an induction evening. During this meeting I would talk informally about what is on offer to parents and see what the reaction is like. Not all parents will need to be involved but myself and school staff has a good idea of the parents we want to target (Aoife).

Targeting the most in need of HSCL support is problematic for many coordinators. Despite using a targeting approach, it is common that the parents who do not need the additional supports are the ones most eager to involve themselves in the programme:

No matter how targeted the HSCL is it’s always the parents that have an education or a good job that attend the courses. We can’t say no to them but I wish other parents with lower levels of education or those who are unemployed would take part (Cliona).
Other coordinators are of the opinion that they get a better understanding of parental needs from home visiting as many parents as they can. How the home is structured and the level of cleanliness is sometimes used as a means for deciding which families should be targeted:

I tend to visit all of the families, at this stage I have been into all of their homes. When there, I can pick up on things and see how the home is operating. If the home is kept in a certain way it may be obvious that the home is functioning badly or vice versa. If I see evidence of poverty then I know that they will need help. I also look at literacy levels and we can test for this when students enter the school. We have listened to coordinators who advise us of children with both behavioural and literacy difficulties. […] we work within clusters. We meet every week and I would get information from them and also we have a meeting with our teachers and HSCL coordinators from the feeder schools (Catherine).

Another teacher uses a similar indicator when looking to target. This method is used as it is felt that you cannot make assumptions regarding the ways in which disadvantaged families live:

Often people assume that the travelling community are the most socio-economically deprived. This isn’t the case here, I visit a few traveller families where one is settled and the others aren’t. Their homes are spotless and the washing machine is always on the go. This is why it is important to go out to the homes and treat every family as individuals (Susan).

In some cases coordinators select parents based upon parents approaching the school for help. In most cases, but not exclusively, the parents that request help often fall into the teacher’s target group anyhow:

[… they often make me aware of a problem over the phone. We would then try negotiating a solution to the issue; we ask again what the school can do. We may also ask the child. The child is at the centre and I deal mostly with
everything that surrounds the child, I may ask the child is there is a bullying issue going on for example. The home work may be an issue so we have homework club every evening so this will be offered to parents (Cliona).

This section presents the ways in which coordinators select parents to participate in the various components of the HSCL. Despite the remit of the policy being based upon a targeted approach, often there is difficulty in adopting this method of induction. To avoid stigmatising families and excluding others the common theme suggests that most schools offer the HSCL to all families. Those that maintain a targeted response are often reliant upon information provided by feeder schools and have to rely on their own intuition during parent evenings to decide who in most cases are in need of educational support. For those who target parents, the home is often the most useful means of gaining an insight into those parents’ lives that are most socially disadvantaged.

5.5.3 Measuring the Success of the HSCL

As documented in the previous chapter, the HSCL encompasses a broad spectrum of components and works closely with a vast array of partners, therefore defining what success is, can be a complex process. The most common theme within the findings suggests that success is very often dependent upon marked improvements in attendance, punctuality and retention. Many coordinators state that is their only means of measuring success, as it is quantifiable. Others focus upon the ways in which they are able to engage parents within the various programmes as a way of monitoring the scheme’s success. Greater attendance at parent/teacher meetings, and on literacy and numeracy courses were the benchmarks used in these instances. It can be understood from the findings that measuring the successful outcomes of the HSCL is, to some extent, ambiguous.

The most common response suggests that success is judged upon marked improvements in attendance, punctuality and retention. Many coordinators state that this, as well as being able to make social and community connections, are the only means of measuring success:
Getting the pupils into the school and getting them stay for a full week is definitely something that we attribute to the HSCL. Through connecting children and their families with supportive organisations has made coming to school less of an issue and a more welcoming environment for families (Phillip).

Phillip is among many who suggest that the increase in attendance and punctuality reflects the success of the programme. However, despite Lorraine concurring and explaining that retention is very important she states that many other elements to the job that cannot be measured are also vital:

Ireland has one of the highest school retention rates in Europe. To be able to measure human kindness or when somebody has been nice to you is very hard to measure. I suppose we have to look at statistics in terms of retention and the amount of children going onto third level. I would question the whole idea of a standard of measurement, how do you measure sitting in someone’s house after they have had a crisis and working through it with them and that child being able to integrate back into school is a success (Lorraine).

It is also explained that as well getting the pupils to attend and be punctual, improvements in the standard of behaviour are also monitored;

We liaise with their subject teachers and look for feedback on a range of issues that we have been working on. Behaviour is big indicator that suggests if we are doing our job right or not. We do a lot of work with the family and the community behavioural supports and it is disappointing when we don’t see improvements (Regina).

Other coordinators also suggest that improvements in behaviour not only demonstrates an improvement in children in school, but also parents. This signifies that the courses provided for parents are having a positive effect:

We often wonder if parents actually benefit from the parenting courses that we provide. If kids are behaving and enjoying school then we can only assume
that the parents are encouraging them and promoting the benefits of doing well. This is not the case when we first start working with families (Michael).

Noreen also suggests it is not just the attendance of pupils that signifies the HSCL as being effective but also the attendance of parents at courses and other school and community based initiatives:

To measure it is very hard to do as you are talking about attitudinal changes and perceptions so that is very hard to measure. We used to have parent and teacher meetings that we ran over two days, one day for the first years and the other day for second and third year parents. Now we have had to add a lot more days, due to the volume of parents coming in and that’s a massive success as far as I am concerned. [...] You are offering so many things to so many different people it is very hard to measure but the more people turn up at things in and out of the school means that we are getting the message across (Noreen).

Attendance on courses facilitated in schools for parents, to enable them to be of greater help to their children in relation to their education, also provides a useful measurement indicator:

We look at the amount of parents that are coming into our courses; we get to know what is popular and what isn’t. As well as looking at what is working, it allows us evaluate what isn’t. Before the HSCL you would not get a parent into the school unless they were coming in to complain (Anne).

Another theme evident from the findings suggests that the measurement that many prefer to use is based upon their own view of how well they perform. Given that the roles that HSCL coordinators perform mostly relates to supporting parents, others measured their success by the amount of positive interactions they had with families:

On average I would be making 8-10 interventions on a good day. It could be just making a phone call to a parent to check that all is well or lending an item of uniform to pupils whose parents cannot afford replacements. Even by
referring a pupil or parent to relevant community agency is what I regard as success (Mary).

This appears to be a difficult question to answer as many coordinators find that to set a benchmark for success quantification is required. The HSCL, however, is considered to be unquantifiable:

I have a lot of people asking me this and it is always tough to answer. My work here isn’t measurable. I work on an ad hoc basis and rarely two days are the same. If I do my job well and make parents feel good about themselves or deal with a problem that they have then I guess that is a success (Frank).

The HSCL primarily focuses upon parents, however only one teacher explained that success of the interventions they made might be reflected in improved standards in academic performance:

We look and analyse the third and sixth year results. I look for improvements and often find that maths and English have improved. It’s difficult sometimes to say whether that is a result of the HSCL or just good teaching, but I like to think that because parents are better equipped and supported, our work has meant something (Caroline).

Another teacher explained that the educational outcomes of school should be measured. In their school, success is measured by the transitions into further and higher education and also those who successfully gained employment:

If I can’t find something for each school leaver to do then I can’t comfortably say that the HSCL has been a success. Through my connections I try to get pupils onto Post-Leaving Certificate programmes, even if they haven’t got the entry requirements, I try to negotiate with the course facilitators. I also approach local employers to see if they can take on school leavers as interns or trainees. Once I have that sorted out I can call the scheme a success (Caroline).
The findings suggest that all HSCL coordinators generally use attendance, punctuality and retention as the primary measurements of success, due to the fact that many of the other tasks in which they engage with are not as easily quantified. Behaviour is an important theme as this measures not just the quality of the HSCL coordinators work in the school, but the broader success of the community supports that provide assistance and guidance. For many, a common theme exists that focuses upon the level of engagement with parents. This is often measured through greater attendance at school, based upon events, courses and through positive interventions that are made on a daily basis. To a lesser extent, improvements in academic results amongst the pupils, is not considered by my most coordinators as a measurement of the success of the HSCL.

5.5.4 Creating a School-wide Understanding of Inequality

This section presents the ways in which the presence of the HSCL has led to creating a greater understanding of the challenges that many families encounter, amongst the broader school staff. Often poor standards in behaviour and below standard school work are an indicator to HSCL coordinators that there may be a problem outside of the school. Despite this, subject teachers often deal with such issues in a punitive manner as a result of not knowing what is occurring outside of the school environment. In some cases are they only concerned with maintaining order in their own classrooms.

Stephanie explains that when an issue is noticed, it is dealt with in a different way as a result of the presence of the HSCL:

There is a change in attitude now, where a child is not bad for not being good at school. When a problem is identified we can work to resolve this and support the child through the difficulty rather than using discipline to change behaviour (Stephanie).

This point is explained by many other coordinators. Some stress the importance of raising awareness as there are serious issues being endured by marginalised communities and these cannot be dealt with in a punitive manner:
I think it has created a greater awareness of the kind of problems that’s out there. We always say that the parent is still the prime educator of the child and every time I come back here from a home visit I have to speak with teachers in relation to letting them know that a student is having problems with one thing or another. I am given a spot at every staff meeting to discuss the concerns and make them aware that despite us going home to nice houses there some children are coming here hungry, from homes with no heating or where abuse is occurring within the household. These problems can explain a lot about the child’s conduct at school and these problems cannot be addressed by enforcing discipline. Through the HSCL this level of communication happens (Caroline).

Not all coordinators describe positive conversations with their colleagues when discussing educational inequality. It is reported by some that subject teachers appear to be only concerned with what happens in the classroom:

My biggest challenge as the HSCL teacher is trying to make classroom teachers aware of what I do and what problems children are going through. They just don’t care; they just want get on with teaching their subject. To them it doesn’t matter if child has watched their mother being subjected to domestic violence, it doesn’t matter if there is a drug and alcohol problem in the house (Cliona)

It is apparent that many coordinators are of the opinion that they are creating a wider understanding of educational inequality amongst their colleagues. Prior the HSCL in schools, many children would be punished for poor academic performance and behaviour. Coordinators suggest that if such problems occur, the HSCL provides a line of communication where the root cause can be investigated. This however, is not the case in all schools with some coordinators expressing frustration with their colleagues who do not understand the role of the HSCL and seem unwilling to take on board the concepts and characteristics of disadvantage.
5.5.5 The Characteristics of Disadvantage

According to coordinators, the combination of initiatives that the HSCL provides is an effective way of challenging intergenerational cycles of educational disadvantage. Many regard the issues that marginalised children encounter in school, are a result of their parents’ own experiences of school. So as well as changing the attitudes of subject teachers, HSCL coordinators have a responsibility of changing the attitudes of parents and encouraging them to expect more from children’s’ education:

Intergenerational cycles are obvious here and it is all about empowering parents. I was at an NBSS\textsuperscript{17} training course and it focused upon this and how to assist in working things out, how to make parents feel better about themselves and this idea has gone a long way to break these cycles. When parents are feeling more in control and confident they can go on to push their children to do better (Regina).

Another teacher explained that the reasons why many pupils have low expectations of their own abilities and fail to see the benefits of staying on to complete the Leaving Certificate is due to the absence of real encouragement at home:

During a home visit a father became very angry stating that he had got through life without a leaving certificate and school doesn’t guarantee you an income (Ciara).

This highlights the influence that parents have upon their children; however this in not the same in all situations. Another teacher suggested that it would be unusual for a parent not to want their children to be successful:

This is a very disadvantaged school and we have a lot of problems in this community. Many of our parents would have left school very early and would often be long term unemployed. It is these factors that make them want so

\textsuperscript{17} The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) was established by the Department of Education & Skills in 2006 in response to the recommendation in School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools (2006). The role of the NBSS is to assist partner schools in addressing current behavioural concerns on three levels. The NBSS works with schools in addressing students’ social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs.
much more for their children and to make the most of the opportunities that they never had (Gillian).

Despite the various observations of coordinators pertaining to the existence and visibility of reproductive cycles of educational inequality, most regard the HSCL as being an important tool in alleviating its effects:

Without the HSCL I don’t know how we as coordinators could link up all of the responses which help families and children. School alone can only do so much, yet as a HSCL teacher I feel that we do so much in blending it all together (Erin).

Similar thoughts are expressed by another teacher who states that cycles of inequality cannot be broken in school; parents need support in all aspects of their lives if inequality is to be challenged:

If the problems lies outside of the school, that is where it should be fixed. Until policies such as the HSCL were on stream we could not guarantee this would happen, but now we a play a role in doing this, we organise for good things to happen that give families a lot of support and assistance. If we can get parents involved these cycles will be broken, I can see it happening within this community (Kieran).

5.5.6 Summary
The HSCL does not use a targeted response in most cases and instead coordinators offer the HSCL initiatives school-wide. This method is chosen to avoid stigmatising the most disadvantaged children, whilst many suggest that as a DEIS school, the amount of students that are not considered disadvantaged is negligible. This also demonstrates the level of autonomy that coordinators possess. Further evidence of this exists in the ways that the success of the scheme is evaluated at school level. With no clear benchmark, mostly attendance and retention figures are used as they are some of the few quantifiable data sources available to HSCL coordinators. Very few participants suggest that success is
benchmarked upon the amount of students that progress onto further or higher education or gaining full time employment.

Many coordinators suggest that the characteristics of educational disadvantage tend to be intergenerational as a result of parents’ poor attachment with the education system. Coordinators regard the negative ways in which parents view the school as reflective of their own school experiences. Through the empowering and development of self-confidence amongst parents, HSCL coordinators endeavour to transmit an attitude to families which promotes greater expectations of their children’s educational opportunity. However, the findings also suggest that in many schools, it is only a minority cohort of parents that require such encouragement, as it is natural for parents to want greater educational experiences for their children than they experienced themselves.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents how coordinators perceive the HSCL programme. The central components of the HSCL - the school, community and the home have been described from the perspective of those charged with their delivery of the scheme. Whilst many common themes have been presented, a degree of ambiguity exists with the delivery of the various initiatives which are considered to be important.

Coordinators explain the main objectives of the HSCL contain two main strands. The first strand focuses upon maximising attendance and retention and the second strand concentrates upon equipping parents with the skills to support their children in reaching their full educational potential. The HSCL provides a line of communication between the home and the school where issues relating to such problems can be followed up. According to coordinators this is important as the work they do is informal and if these roles were escalated to the Education Welfare Officer legal action would be taken against many families with children not attending school regularly.

In achieving these goals, coordinators facilitate in-school courses for parents to become involved with. Many courses are based upon the development of literacy
and numeracy, whilst many others focus upon breaking down the barriers that prevent many parents from being comfortable within the school environment. However, such courses are not always well attended. Courses that have literacy and numeracy built into them implicitly tend to more effective. Some coordinators however, explain that in many instances it is the parents who least need the support that represent the greatest attendance. Many courses offer parents a social outlet, where they can meet with other parents and coordinators as being a parent in socio-economically disadvantaged areas can be isolating.

Being able to provide such initiatives depends upon the level of funding that coordinators receive. Most are aware of their entitlement from the DEIS budget, but in many cases coordinators have little access to money. School principals are generally reported as being cooperative, except by some who report having to rely upon community partners to fund initiatives. According to many, reduced public spending has made little difference to what they can do as many claim that they are their own best resource.

Participants regard the community as being a crucial element of the HSCL. The community fills in the gaps with regards to supports that the school cannot provide. Often coordinators connect parents with various local community partners and State agencies. Often parents need assistance in the area of health, finance and child care and find interacting with State agencies a daunting experience. It is suggested that the school and local community partners share a close relationship and are mutually beneficial to each other. For the HSCL to operate effectively the community needs to be supportive of the school. Through the HSCL promoting educational values to families, a sense of regeneration in marginalised communities is thought to be created. The level of cooperation however, does not extend to State agencies. Many expressed frustration at the absence of joined up thinking when dealing with statutory bodies such as the HSE and TUSLA, where there is a perceived failure of communication between them and HSCL coordinators, who are also working directly with families.

It is in the home that coordinators can best view the challenges that disadvantaged families face. The home visits for many coordinators are at the core of the HSCL
and provides an opportunity to meet with parents in an environment that families feel most at ease. Coordinators suggest that it is during the home visit that their role of promoting educational benefits is most challenged. A common theme suggests that coordinators never know what they will be tasked with, as much of their role within the home visit relate to advocacy and support. Coordinators dedicate much of their time listening to problems and trying to connect families with appropriate supports. It is the opinion of many that this exceeds the remit of the HSCL, but understands that by assisting them develops rapport and bonds of trust, so that parents can be encouraged to participate further in the other initiatives that the HSCL offers.

Despite the complex nature of building and maintaining relationships between the home, school and the community coordinators highly value this approach to combating educational disadvantage. School only approaches are regarded as ineffective as the problems that children encounter at school are, in most cases, a result of circumstances that occur outside of the school. It has been suggested that it is unimaginable to think that families shouldn’t be included in the educational process. Partnership models are the envy of many other schools that do not benefit from DEIS initiatives.

Many HSCL coordinators work hard to identify the parents in the school that are most in need of educational support. Through home visits in the first year, information provided by national schools and information evenings, coordinators are responsible for making an informed decision regarding which families qualify for educational supports under the HSCL. However, others do not choose to adopt a targeted response as they fear it will stigmatise the most marginalised children and parents therefore offer the HSCL school-wide.

Coordinators suggest that ways in which the success of the HSCL is benchmarked varies. As with defining the objectives of the HSCL, two themes emerge. The first suggests that the success of the HSCL is based upon the amount of students that remain at school, whilst others focus upon the participation levels of parents that enrol on literacy and numeracy courses. Whilst these are important indicators, coordinators suggest that these were the only quantifiable factors that can be measured. However, most coordinators explain that success can take the form of the
amount of positive interactions that they have with a vulnerable child or parents. It is suggested that the HSCL is about people, experiences and problems and these cannot translate into figures. Very few coordinators mention using educational performance as a variable for measuring the success of the programme.

The presence of the HSCL for some coordinators has created a different attitude towards student behaviour, attendance and underachievement amongst other school staff. Instead of adopting a punitive stance towards such issues, a broader understanding of the sociological underpinnings of disadvantage has encouraged a more supportive response. However this isn’t the case in all schools, as for some coordinators the greatest challenge faced relates to the HSCL’s ability to create a school-wide understanding of the aims of their role. Some coordinators feel that subject teachers are uninterested in the issues that some children are facing.

The effectiveness of the HSCL in tackling the cycles of intergenerational educational inequality is evident in this chapter. Many coordinators attribute the issues that children have in school to the poor legacies of education that exist in the home. Much of the work that coordinators engage in relates to breaking down negative attitudes; however they state that they meet very few parents that do not want better opportunities for their children than they had.
Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter discusses how the HSCL addresses educational disadvantage in secondary schools in Ireland. This discussion is derived from the thorough literature review and policy developments, in conjunction with the participants’ experiences obtained through the analysis of the qualitative data. The first section discusses how the HSCL is implemented in schools. Recognising that much of the scheme’s central tenets are placed upon interventions outside of the school environment, the HSCL teacher occupies an important role in making the school a more open and inclusive environment for parents to come to. This chapter also discusses the ways that designated parents’ areas within school provide building blocks, where relationships with school staff and other parents are established. The issues that coordinators encounter as being agents of change are also discussed, as is the challenges that HSCL coordinators face in creating a school-wide approach in order to alleviate the effects of educational disadvantage. The levels of autonomy that coordinators have are largely based on having access to funding. By exploring the availability of resource provision due to the availability of funding, the reliance upon external agencies to provide what should be provided by DES is discussed.

Sections two and three of this chapter discuss the family’ and community’ role within the HSCL programme. Coordinators view parents in many instances, as having considerable apathy towards being involved in school based courses. Courses designed to improve literacy and numeracy are the least popular courses. Such findings can be aligned to Lafeale (2011) who suggests that marginalised parents are often ill at ease within the formal school environment. Section two also discusses the ways in which Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological model can be used to identify the areas where disadvantage is most prominent. The home visits to family homes provide the coordinators with a valuable snapshot of the lives and experiences of those whom they engage with and according to DES (2005b) and
should create an opportunity for parents to promote the home as a place of educational development. This is important as according to Midwinter (1980), Friere (1998) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002) who state that it is often the case the lives of disadvantaged communities are misinterpreted by the school and other statutory organisations. The evidence in this study however, suggests that much of the time allocated to this task is spent engaging in roles of advocacy which often fall outside of the HSCL remit but are still regarded as providing a valuable service.

Section three discusses the ways in which the local community benefits the HSCL. Schools rely upon local community organisations to provide services that are unavailable within the school. The Bioecological model places the community within the exo-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3), where it can reconfigure itself as an extension of the school. This discussion suggests that the school and community partnership has reciprocal benefits as Coleman (1966) and Midwinter suggest that the majority of an individual’s learning is completed outside of the school, so in turn an educated community is vital for community regeneration. The Bioecological model faces significant challenges as there is a distinct absence of joined up thinking between HSCL coordinators and statutory agencies.

The final section of the discussion takes into consideration the overall performance of the HSCL in terms of its ability to address educational inequality. Through the decisions of many coordinators not to use a targeted selection process, the HSCL is available to all children attending DEIS schools regardless of their families’ socio-economic status. Poverty in Ireland, according to SILC (2015), remains a significant problem and coordinators feel ill equipped to identify those in most need of support due to changing dynamics of poverty. As a result of the ambiguous nature of the HSCL programme, coordinators operate without clear benchmarks for success. The ways in which coordinators set indicators for measuring the achievement of children and the effectiveness of the HSCL are discussed. It is suggested that whilst being important, a preoccupation exists with the measurement of attendance and retention. Willis (1977) suggests that academic achievement is often regarded as less important amongst marginalised children and Kelleghan et al (1995) suggest that school
achievement should be standardised with results in state exams and transitions from secondary school being what defines the success of specific education policies.

Finally, the HSCL as whole is discussed in relation to the ways in which cycles of inequality are broken. With social ecology at its core, the HSCL focuses on disparities that are occurring not just within the sphere of education. This discussion will look at how this policy compares with traditional school policies that still exist in society. It is suggested that the school needs to be integrated with the home and community, as school only interventions serve only as a means of perpetuating the inequalities that many families endure.

6.2 How the HSCL is Implemented

This section discusses how coordinators implement the HSCL. Whilst the central thrust of the HSCL policy is focused upon salient adults whose children are most at risk of educational failure, it does not concentrate upon the interaction between school and children. However, the findings suggest that the school environment, as a result of the presence of the HSCL, is a more open and inclusive place for marginalised children and their families to occupy. HSCL coordinators play an important role in developing the attitudes of school staff. The role allows HSCL coordinators to raise awareness of the concepts of social and educational inequality amongst other teachers and to help them understand the challenges that many families encounter. The findings however, suggest that this duty is regarded by many HSCL coordinators to be their greatest challenge. This section also presents the levels of autonomy HSCL coordinators have and how limited access to funding impacts upon the various initiatives offered by the HSCL scheme. As some HSCL coordinators do not have direct access to the 10% of the DEIS budget, which should be allocated to them for the facilitation of the various HSCL initiatives, they often rely upon community agencies to provide programmes which are designed to help and develop the skills of families within the schools’ community.
6.2.1 Creating an Open and Inclusive Environment

The most common response from the HSCL coordinators who participated in this research is that they provide a warm and friendly representation of the school to families. As well as being a link between the home and the school, coordinators suggest that the most significant supports that they provide to parents are home visits as well as the courses that are provided in the school. Both will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

According to DES (2005b), the HSCL promotes the fostering of self-help and independence which enable parents to participate more effectively in their children’s education. One of the primary means of achieving this is through the provision of programmes and courses for parents in the school. Despite this, the literature purports that disadvantaged families are often at odds with the formal education system as they feel inferior within a system that traditionally promotes middle class values (Gatto: 1991) (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). Most HSCL coordinators suggest that significant encouragement is required when attempting to attract parents into the school and most believe that parents fail to appreciate what the HSCL programme is intended to do. This is evident though the kinds of courses that are attended by families.

Despite the reported absence of parental interest in many of the programmes and courses provided by the HSCL, and the perceived avoidance of the school environment, most coordinators regard HSCL initiatives as being vital in making a difference. However, many express frustration at the level of reticence that families demonstrate. As a result, some schools have ceased providing educational programmes for families due to poor levels of attendance coupled with the cost of paying tutors to facilitate such courses. Coordinators feel that certain types of courses such as arts and crafts and cookery are more popular as they focus less upon core educational skills and the emphasis on literacy and numeracy is less explicit. It is suggested that some of the programmes are inappropriately named, thus becoming less attractive. ‘Parenting’ courses are considered to be off-putting as they suggest that parents are unable to do their job and the school appears to be judgemental. It is
suggested that if such courses are renamed the stigma attached to attending such programmes will be reduced.

Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that a major factor mediating parental engagement is socio-economic status. This is indexed through the occupation of family members or the level of educational attainment achieved (usually the mothers). Other non-school factors that are critical to children’s educational achievement include the family dynamic, ethnicity and parents’ ability to involve themselves in their children’s education (Harris and Goodall, 2008: 278). Such factors can be embedded within Bourdieu’s concept of habitus which suggests that the lived experiences of individuals and families affect their sense of belonging to certain social structures such as education. The perceived lack of enthusiasm that the coordinators in this research report, in relation to parents and the parenting programmes offered to them, share some similarities with Hanafin and Lynch (2002) who explain that many parents living in disadvantaged communities do indeed realise the value of attaining results at school and are also advocates of academic, vocational and personal development. It is also felt that social profiling has led to unconstructive assumptions regarding their parenting skills. O’Neill (1992: 95) also described similar findings in her research with almost every parent in her study believing that education was important, despite feeling that the education system had difficulty with interpreting working class life. Crozier (2011: 226) suggests that this perceived lack of commitment, to the school, by parents is often due to the partnership dynamic not meeting the expectations or needs of parents, but instead reflects the need for parents to assimilate to the expectations of the school (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

To help understand why HSCL coordinators report a distinct lack of parental enthusiasm one must consider the concept of habitus. According to Reay (2004), parental histories provide a means of understanding the various dispositions held by disadvantaged families. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that schooling being distinctly suitable and comfortable environments for families with greater social and cultural capitals provide a method for predicting the modes of practice and behaviour of parents. Bourdieu does however; neglect to focus upon the educational support roles
that mothers in particular provide in the home that supports their children’s learning. In the research conducted by the emotional work associated with educational development is suggested to be often overlooked (O’Brien and Furlong, 2015).

The research findings in this study suggest that the HSCL is effective in challenging the difficulties that some parents have in their exchanges with school staff, particularly for marginalised parents (Chapter 3, Section 3.4). Coordinators suggest that often parents are not confident in their ability to competently communicate with teachers or HSCL coordinators as a result their own experiences at school (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4). Harris and Goodall (2008: 280) report that parents are often wary of overstepping unwritten rules in their relationship with teachers, with parents evenings being cited as the greatest cause of parental frustration and confusion. Integrated education policy that actively seeks to involve parents can be regarded as a means of breaking down the social and psychological barriers that prevent important dialogue taking place between the school and marginalised families. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) explain that schools that are welcoming to parents, and clearly value parental involvement often develop more effective engagement between teachers and families than schools that do not promote such partnerships. Many of the HSCL coordinators interviewed in this study expressed that what they were trying to achieve was quite unique in comparison to more advantaged schools which are not equipped with interventions such as the HSCL.

6.2.2 Opening the School to Families

Many coordinators believed that what makes the HSCL so instrumental in alleviating the apprehensions that many families have in regard to being more actively involved with the school, is the manner in which the programme is administered on the ground. Interview participants in this research suggest that bonds of trust with the parents are built up overtime, thus close working relationships are created. It is these relationships that they have with families that are considered to be the cornerstone of the HSCL. Parental involvement and parental participation are key priorities amongst coordinators in making the HSCL a success and alleviating educational disadvantage. This point was reiterated by other coordinators who stated that they
would be concerned that parents may not be willing to co-operate and work with the school if the role of the HSCL programme was transferred to the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO). The EWO’s role is to regulate and enforce the Education Act (2000) and it is suggested by coordinators that their presence compromises the partnership model within the school (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.1). Coordinators explained that many parents had been in contact with the EWO as a result of the poor attendance of children.

Coordinators also asserted that the deormalisation of the school structures is also instrumental in the success of the HSCL. The deormalised school environment has taken the form of designated areas of the school for the sole use of parents and children. By providing a space where they can meet with other parents, teachers and HSCL coordinators in a casual environment, creates closer relationships as they become accustomed to the school atmosphere, thus having more comfortable and confident interactions. Previously such discourse would have been regarded as intimidating and representative of the broader and more formal education system.

The findings suggest that the programmes offered as part of the HSCL within the school environment are designed to fulfil two key purposes. One of which is to enable families to maximise the educational support that they can give to their children. It also aims to create a more welcoming atmosphere so that parents do not feel pressurised or marginalised when inside the school. Some HSCL coordinators explained that many of the parents whom they engage with have had negative experiences whilst in school, when they were children, and continue to have a certain level of trepidation when approaching school staff. Such findings have much in common with Hanafin and Lynch (2002) who suggest many families seek to maintain a distal relationship with the school due to their own educational legacies. Rather than distal relationships being associated with deficit levels of cultural capital, many parents are confident in the educational decisions they make, and according to Cahill and Hall (2014) may parents are aware of the importance of school and are able to adequately support their children (Chapter 3, Section 3.8).
The findings in this study suggest that parental involvement on school councils is weak, as most seats are occupied by school staff, the Pastoral Care Team and members of local organisations. However, DES (2005b) suggests that parental involvement in school and with local committees that are established within the school attracts parents that ordinarily would not engage with the education system. DES (2005b) also suggests that by enticing marginalised parents into the school environment raises confidence and allows parents to feel an active part of both the school and the community due to the promotion of parental participation on parents and school councils.

The findings in this study which suggest that parental involvement is crucial gives relevance to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), who explain the importance of integrated education practices in terms of being able to improve parent/teacher relationships, teacher morale and the general school climate. Other benefits include improved school attendance, attitudes, behaviour and the mental health of children. However, most importantly to this study, greater parental involvement increases confidence, satisfaction and interest in their education and personal development. Hornby (2000), Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and Reay (2018) suggest that almost all parents care about their children’s education regardless of their social class, however some are better equipped than others when providing educational support (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). This suggests that by involving parents in the school they can tap into other school based resources.

Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Epstein and Saunders (2006) emphasise the importance that the influence of families, communities and effective policy have in maximising school participation. The HSCL connects these spheres of influence and provides mutual support networks for all for all parties that have a stake in the educational development of children. The proximal processes that occur between parents and the school over time have important implications for the educational development of children and their families, highlighting the important role that parents have (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Such relational dynamics that involve parents in the school remove
the formality from the traditional school structure and help de-stigmatise the school environment for lower-income families.

The importance of addressing the apprehensions that many marginalised families have regarding the school structure can be understood by examining Bourdieu (1977), Gatto (2005) and the more radical Illich (1970). They suggest that the education system in its standard form can be regarded as a method of reproducing inequalities and reinforcing social class positions (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). Whereas policies that do more than provide compensatory benefits to students have the ability of challenging educational inequality at its core (Roberts, 1980).

Schemes that encourage greater participation of parents, such as the HSCL, are often linked to the contributions that families can make to the school (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; O’Brien and Furlong, 2015) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). The findings in this research suggests that the most important contributions that parents make involve the motivation and educational support of their children, which in turn creates an environment whereby the home and the classroom is more conducive to learning. The HSCL uses its collaborative nature to affirm and develop teachers’ knowledge of how families communicate, encourage and promote educational values in the home through coordinators having greater access to families during home visits and activities within the school. Wolfendale (1992) adds to this by suggesting that partnerships between the home and school, whilst providing teachers with an education based upon the lived experiences of families, also provides parents with new understandings of how their children learn (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Through the provision of school based educational supports for parents and home visits conducted by coordinators, parents can become progressively informed and knowledgeable about education. Conversely, teachers and HSCL coordinators can understand more about what is involved in parenting from a theoretical standpoint as well as from observed practical experience (Wolfendale, 1992: 32).
6.2.3 HSCL Coordinators as Agents of Change within the School

Many of the coordinators acknowledged their role as being one that provides instrumental change, demonstrating a good knowledge of the principal aims of the HSCL (Conaty, 2002:78). Some coordinators explained that their interactions with families demonstrate an attempt to break the cycles of inequality and the negative images of school. These perceptions inhibit many marginalised families from being actively involved with their children’s education. Others regarded their ability to make parents aware of their own potential in advancing their children’s educational outcomes as being key to making the HSCL a success.

HSCL coordinators suggested that the most significant challenge encountered as part of their position is promoting the importance of the role of the HSCL teacher to other teaching staff within the school. In terms of educational development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) place the school firmly within the micro system in the ecological model. The micro system forms the closest set of social factors which influence educational development (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). The main objective in this study is not a focus upon classroom teachers but instead on the HSCL teacher, however the relationship that exists between the two, as perceived by the HSCL teacher warrants attention. Often HSCL coordinators feel that due to the pressures placed upon classroom teachers, they do not have time to identify and support children who are encountering problems associated with poverty and marginalisation. For many HSCL coordinators this is detrimental to the overall objective of the HSCL programme of alleviating educational disadvantage. HSCL coordinators explained that without a school-wide understanding of the problems associated with disadvantage the work that they were engaged with outside of the school environment is undermined.

Many of the HSCL coordinators stated that much of their school based role is concerned with addressing behavioural and emotional issues that occur within the classroom. It is apparent that classroom teachers, in many cases, are ill equipped to resolve many of the problems associated with disadvantage in the classroom. This can be aligned with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who suggest that teachers identify
better with students who already have well developed academic and linguistic capabilities (Chapter 3, Section 3.5). The HSCL coordinators spoke of many cases where teachers wished to teach their given subjects without having to consider the mitigating circumstances that place obstacles in the way of many marginalised children and their families. The challenge that coordinators face in conveying the issues that pertain to educational and social inequality add to the broad and ambiguous nature of the scheme. HSCL coordinators are trained to be able to understand and identify and put in place interventions to assist marginalised families; however these skills are not present with other school teaching staff. This issue was raised by the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Educational Disadvantage Forum who stated that more coherent structures should be established, at both policy and operational level, to provide additional support for teachers and on-going training for those employed within disadvantaged schools (EDC, 2005: 7). The report states that there should be a greater emphasis across the education system generally on setting targets and applying appropriate measurement indicators and greater monitoring of progress against such targets (DES, 2005).

A new range of skills are required which allow coordinators to temporarily move away from teaching specific subjects to roles which carry a responsibility for general educational welfare and advocacy work, assisting parents with personal and social issues. A deeper knowledge of partnerships between the home, school and community is required when considering the role of teaching in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged children (Epstein and Sanders, 2006) (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). For teachers to have a clear understanding of the challenges that marginalised families encounter and to transition from teaching children to teaching parents, on how to become more effective in their children’s learning, poses some difficulties.

This research suggests that the ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) provides a useful lens to understand the challenges associated with creating and maintaining learning environments. In this particular study, awareness that learning exceeds activities that occur within the
classroom is essential and that habitus’ that seem disjointed from those teaching are to be understood rather than challenged (Freire, 1998) (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). Borg and Mayo (2001) explain that coordinators need to promote parents as being a ‘subject’ and not ‘adjunct’ within the school system. Within this concept parents need to be regarded by school staff and themselves as beings capable of engaging in creative endeavours and critical thinking (Borg and Mayo, 2001: 261) (Chapter 3, Section 3.8).

6.2.4 Implementation Challenges

The findings suggest that HSCL coordinators have a high degree of responsibility when identifying the educational and welfare needs of those families involved with the school. Although all schools involved within the DEIS policy framework meet a stringent qualifying criteria for additional educational supports, HSCL coordinators exercise discretion and judgement in implementing the various HSCL Initiatives. This is due to each community being regarded as potentially different with variations in the level of need for educational supports. Whilst the provision of courses and programmes for families to become involved with can be aligned to the needs of the community, the findings suggest that the range of supports within different schools vary greatly and exist as a result of the access coordinators have to funding.

The levels of ambiguity within the role of the HSCL teacher can be further evidenced in the following ways. Firstly, there is a need for coordinators to adapt to unique and often individual situations. While these situations depended upon the specific educational and advocacy supports needed by the families whom they engage with, these also vary amongst schools. Secondly, coordinators explained that the HSCL is allocated 10% of the overall DEIS budget within each school; however gaining access to this budget often proves difficult (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.6). The coordinators in the schools that are independent from ETBIs generally stated that they do not hold the funds as this was the responsibility of the School Principal. Accessing funds to facilitate courses and other family related activities is managed by HSCL coordinators justifying the expenses to the Principal. In most cases such claims are approved, with some coordinators praising the senior school staff for their
understanding or stating that they were ‘lucky’ to have a person that understood the aims and objectives of the HSCL. The DEIS schools that are managed by ETBI’s tend to have greater difficulty in accessing funds due to working within a more bureaucratic system. Such schools tend to have a more formal chain of hierarchy and incorporate large catchment areas, thus making accessing funds more officious and formal. A less frequent response suggests that some HSCL coordinators are aware of the 10% of the DEIS budget due to them, however, are still reliant on community partners and volunteers to provide training courses for both families and pupils as a result of not being able to access funding.

DES (2014; 2017) state that the HSCL grant is allocated to provide targeted supports, courses and activities for parents ranging from leisure activities, personal development and parenting skills, further education as well as support with their children’s learning. The grant may also be used to establish and maintain a parent’s room within the school, provide travel expenses for the HSCL teacher, support the adaption of the curriculum and teaching methodologies to meet targeted children’s needs and to purchase appropriate resources for HSCL activities (DES, 2014: 15) (Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2). In most cases the school principals rarely object to applications for funding and welcomed most activities that the HSCL teacher suggested. However, for those who reported a heavily bureaucratised system it is often easier to utilise the resources of community partners. Those who do not receive funding from their School Principals are unable to offer any indication as to where the HSCL funding is redirected. Other coordinators are subsequently unable to offer any course or programmes to families as a result of funding restrictions.

An important element of the HSCL is the ability of the coordinator to identify issues that need addressing. Issues are identified in many cases as most HSCL coordinators have a good knowledge of the general challenges experienced within the local community. Often to address such issues involves obtaining authorisation and funding if necessary from the school principal. When school principals are fully cooperative with coordinators’ requests the bottom up nature of the HSCL can be observed. In instances when the principals have greater involvement, their
contribution may be considered to undermine the very notion of a bottom up approach.

Lipsky (1980) suggests that street level bureaucrats, such as teachers, are compelled to make decisions about individuals which have the potential to affect their life chances and opportunities. This suggests that the level of ambiguity within the role of the HSCL teacher is not limited to their ability to source funding. As with Jewell and Glasser (2006), HSCL coordinators can be regarded in similar manner to those frontline workers employed in welfare offices (Chapter 3, Section 3.10.1). Their study suggested that frontline workers within human service organisations occupy a crucial position as the primary point of access to public resources for individuals who are often experiencing financial hardship. Similar can be said for HSCL coordinators who regularly engage with parents who are unfamiliar with the school environment or the best ways to help with their children’s education. The actions of HSCL coordinators become more critical when attempting to move from meeting needs to changing behaviours, motivations and attitudes.

The level of autonomy that coordinators have in making decisions that concern the effective operation of the HSCL are stated as being critical and in most cases this level of autonomy existed amongst the coordinators in this study. However, in some cases it is suggested that the role that the principal plays often creates a policy conflict when accessing funding for important initiatives. If one is to correlate the HSCL role to Meyers, Glaser and MacDonald (1998) (Chapter 3, Section 3.10), it may be asserted that the scheme should match the needs of families without the influence of hierarchical structures such as principals and school management. This moves the idea of the HSCL teacher beyond Lipsky’s (2010) likening of HSCL coordinators to street level bureaucrats within a hierarchical structure, to a position that requires accountability and a close working relationship with the policy recipients.
The ‘bottom up’ nature of the HSCL can be criticised in terms of creating structures within structures. It is clear that those at the coal face are better placed to identify the causal factors that place obstacles in the way of the policy aims. Despite this, principals need to be consulted and grant authorisation before coordinators act. This relationship places school heads and management akin to the policy makers, where the loose nature of the policy guidelines places a burden of responsibility upon coordinators to interpret and implement policy.

What is clear from the findings is that each interview respondent uses slightly different methods of implementing the HSCL within the school environment. This further illustrates the ambiguous nature of the HSCL programme. In many cases a sense of frustration is evident as HSCL coordinators explain how difficult it is to promote the values of both the HSCL and education in general. This level of resistance is present in both their dealings with parents and colleagues within the school. Ambiguity within the HSCL can best be likened to Meyer, Glaser and MacDonald’s study (1998) as each community has very different social characteristics and varying levels of disadvantage so the programme needs to be able adapt to the conditions set by those who the policy serves. Hill and Hupe (2009) suggests that in instances where clear guidance is absent, the importance of having a good understanding of each variable is crucial to successful implementation (Chapter 3, Section 3.11).

6.2.5 Summary

The HSCL is implemented through various initiatives that collectively create partnerships between coordinators, parents and the broader community. Through the use of a designated space in the schools for parents and school staff to meet coupled with school based courses for parents to become involved with, many of the anxieties that marginalised families experience regarding the school are meant to be alleviated. The uptake of such programmes is low and is reflective of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who suggest that families from lower socio-economic groups have difficulty maximising their educational opportunity (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).
Effective implementation of the HSCL programme requires HSCL coordinators to be agents of change, with a responsibility to developing the attitudes of both parents and other members of school staff. One of most significant challenges that HSCL coordinators encounter is making classroom teachers aware of the issues that affect marginalised families. In an attempt to create a school-wide approach to tackling educational inequality, HSCL coordinators demonstrate a clear understanding of the problems that such families experience due to specific ongoing training (DES, 2005b, 2014, 2017). However, it is suggested that classroom teachers only want to teach their specific subjects and do not want to spend time addressing emotional and behavioural problems that occur as result of issues, that in many cases, outside of the school. Such findings implies a correlation with Freire’s (1998) analysis which emphasises the need for a greater understanding of working class life and culture and the potential that parents have in aiding children with their educational goals. As the EDC (2005) and Epstein and Sanders (2006) recommend that it a greater knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of partnership models within education is required amongst all teachers (Chapter 2 and 3, Section 2.7; Section 3.8).

The ‘bottom up’ nature of the delivery of the HSCL should allow coordinators to match the needs of the community when implementing the scheme. This concept has been proven to be problematic in this study due to the ‘top down’ direction of the school hierarchical structure. With the access to funding and the need to authorise HSCL decisions being reported as problematic for some coordinators, the ability of the HSCL to make autonomous decisions regarding the needs of the community whom they engage with are to some extent limited. This situation can be related to Lipsky (2010) who suggests that accountability rests with the principal and not with the families (Chapter 3, Section 3.10). This section suggests that the brief that HSCL coordinators work from is very broad and as with the individual, each school is constructed from different characteristics, where the need for schools to adapt to the community is necessary.
6.3 Home Visits

This section examines how coordinators view the role of parents and the home within the HSCL. Coordinators often experience frustration with the level of apathy that many families demonstrate in relation to their children’s education and their exchanges with the teaching staff. According to HSCL coordinators very little interest is expressed by parents in the numerous courses provided within the school. These courses designed to equip parents with the prerequisite skills to help their children achieve their educational potential. Schemes such as the HSCL, attempt to level the educational playing field between marginalised and more advantaged families but in many instances, coordinators consider this element of the HSCL as being ineffective due to poor levels of participation.

The time allocated to home visitation is vastly consumed by non-educational matters which detract from the core aim of the programme. The chrono-system within the ecological model suggests that for initiatives to be effective, exposure must be targeted and prolonged (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; O’Toole, 2016). The central objective of the home visit is to create environments for learning which are external to the school, which can be aligned to the core concepts of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Despite many advocacy tasks being beyond the remit of the HSCL role, they portray a valuable insight into the lives of marginalised families, which often seem distinct from the lives of those working within the education sector, yet they are not specifically envisaged as forming part of the HSCL components.

The findings suggest that the home visits and courses that are provided within the HSCL are of greatest importance to the scheme’s success. A brief overview of the principles behind these components of the HSCL is outlined, followed by the ways in which HSCL coordinators utilise the courses provided in the school and the home visits as ways of building rapport with families. This section also examines the methods used to promoting the value of education to parents within the home. Having access to the homes of families and observing their lived experiences is considered to be the most useful determinant in making decisions about who should...
be targeted for HSCL participation. This section then describes some of the challenges that are faced when attempting to encourage active participation in the various elements of HSCL. In terms of the home visitation, this section explores how the role of the HSCL has changed to one of a family advocate rather than an educator. How HSCL coordinators use the home for promoting the core values of the programme is also discussed and within this area of enquiry the cultural and social class related differences that occur between the teachers and the pupils that they engage with is considered.

With many HSCL coordinators having stated that at least a third of their working time is consumed by visiting the families of the children attending the school, it is suggested that this element of the programme is most effective in changing the attitudes of both school staff and marginalised families. The home visitation demonstrates the policy’s impetus of promoting the educational benefits that can be harnessed externally of the school environment. As with much of the findings from the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, many anomalies exist between theory, policy and practice. This section describes in detail what HSCL coordinators do during home visits and presents, from the coordinators’ perspective, the level of perceived commitment and positivity shown towards the policy by both HSCL coordinators and families.

6.3.1 Building Parent/Teacher Partnerships

Coordinators regarded the fostering of relationships with parents as being central to the HSCL’s function. The policy literature reiterates this by asserting that the home visitation element of the programme is crucial to the HSCL’s overall success. This is a result of the home being an ideal place when ‘developing empathy with families in their efforts to engage with the education system’ (DES, 2005b: 22). According to the HSCL policy outlines, home visits, by coordinators, provide an opportunity to deliver important information regarding school related matters and construct bonds of trust with families (Conaty, 2002) (Chapter 2, Section 6.3.1). Many coordinators concurred with these guidelines as they regarded their role, during home visits, as
one of advocacy where the delivery of school related information creates a line of communication between the family and the school.

Many coordinators however, were unconvinced that the promotion of the home as a place of learning is a core remit of home visits, as in most instances coordinators are dispatched by the school principal and welfare teams to homes with far more serious agendas. Issues encountered in the classroom such as behavioural issues, emotional outbursts and absenteeism are often the primary reasons as to why home visits are undertaken. These tasks create additional pressure and complex interactions, as coordinators are cognisant of the importance of the sensitivity needed to broker relationships between the school and family.

The findings in this study suggest that HSCL coordinators actively encourage parents to become involved in school and community based initiatives. However, it is evident that promoting education and the school environment as a welcoming place for marginalised parents remains difficult. It is during the initial home visits that the building of rapport and coordinators can promote themselves as the friendly face of the school (Walker et al., 2000; Conaty, 2002). Whilst the findings purport that HSCL coordinators, are in most instances, received warmly when visiting homes it was noted by some HSCL coordinators that care is needed so as not to appear judgmental in their approach with families.

The DES (2014: 12) states that the purposes of the home visits are to build bonds of trust with parents and the school, encourage parents to become more involved with their children’s education, to dispense information as required by the school and to seek out leaders amongst the parents to convey the importance of the programme to other parents within the school and community. DES (2005b) explains that a home visit should encompass a detailed explanation to parents of how the education system works at all levels from preschool to third level, with an aim of raising awareness amongst parents of the learning processes and to bolster confidence within parents. The most recent literature regarding this programme DES (2014)
suggest that HSCL coordinators will spend at least 33% of their time working on home visitation.

Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) acknowledge that in many cases schooling cannot bring about a significant increase in social capital, mobility or educational success, especially in terms of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Chapter 3, Section 3.5). The key to achieving educational potential rests in the broadening of educational thinking beyond the idea of the school being the locus for cognitive development, which is why parental participation in children’s learning is considered to be so important (Jeynes, 2005; Floui, 2006; Cullen et al. 2006) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.1). The modern dictum that parents are the prime educators is something that requires serious thought (Conaty, 2002). She regards education as not being centred in the home or the school but should be regarded as an ellipse. Within this model there are two foci, the home and the school and the ellipse remains centred in the community. This concept shares similarity with the micro and exo-system in the ecological model, which illustrates how forces located within school, neighbourhoods and local resources all influence the educational development of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). All of which become particularly useful within educational development over time exemplifying the importance of the chrono system (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), (Hayes et al. 2017) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4).

Wolfendale (1985: 14) suggests that to create an effective partnership with parents, families must be central in decision making and policy implementation. Parents must also be perceived as having complimentary skills and expertise to assist their children and should be encouraged to contribute as well as receive services. In addition, families should be able to share the responsibility for learning and be mutually accountable for their children’s learning. However, the findings in this thesis suggest that parents’ involvement is limited to the attendance of school based courses and that participation within school decision making is weak (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2). Todd (2007: 68) adds to this suggestion by explaining that whatever partnerships are forged need to be ‘real’ and not tokenistic. They also should be
distanced from many assumptions that if children’s performance is below par, parents are to blame. HSCL coordinators discussed the barriers that deter families from being more active within the relationship between home and school. These barriers were perceived by the coordinators to be based upon parents’ own insecurities and legacies with the school system. Crozier (1999) suggests that such relationships should reflect parents’ wishes to be able to intervene on their children’s behalf when trying to access information regarding their children’s progress or trying to obtain information on how the might further support their children’s education. To achieve this, the HSCL encourages parents to become involved in courses provided in the school. The findings suggest that encouraging parents to become involved in such courses is difficult and in most cases a high level of reticence is experienced demonstrated by parents. This may be attributed to the idea that individuals feel comfortable and secure within social fields and structures which are more in-line with their habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; O’Brien and O’Fathaigh, 2005; Wacquant, 2006) (Chapter 3.5.3). HSCL coordinators stated that Parent/Teacher evenings are in many cases poorly attended and pressure from the school is required to encourage parents to attend.

6.3.2 Enrolling Parents onto School Based Courses

As well as coordinators being able to build relationships with the parents through the home visitation element of the programme, courses are facilitated in-school for parents. These courses provide an opportunity for parents to equip themselves with skills to develop their children’s and their own educational development, but also build relationships with teaching staff within the school. The term used by many HSCL coordinators to describe the courses that are designed to ease parents into the school environment was ‘non-threatening’. Such courses contain less academic content and instead concentrate on the development of social interaction. Popular courses include cookery, arts and crafts and computer skills, all of which implicitly contain elements of literacy and numeracy within the course content. Courses which are more explicit in the goals improving literacy and numeracy are in most cases poorly attended and require a lot of persuasion by coordinators.
The purpose of the classes and courses which are facilitated in the school are initially designed to ease families into the school environment, and should be organised by the facilitators in a non-threatening manner. The central aim is to make parents feel comfortable and welcome within the school environment (DES, 2005b: 32). An over-academic focus within such classes may replicate the pressure and fear of failure that many parents may have experienced during their own education (Conaty, 2002) (Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1). Contrary to this line of thought, many of the HSCL coordinators suggested that the programmes on offer to parents are not ambitious enough. For many coordinators the promotion of classes which focus on literacy and numeracy are of most importance, as they have the potential to empower families and generate an interest in the school environment, thus leading to more academic involvement at later stages of their children’s education. Such sentiments are in keeping with the policy documentation which acknowledges courses and classes designed to help parents in supporting their children’s learning are a key priority; however, the policy places a significant emphasis on making the school a welcoming place where parents can enjoy social interactions with other parents in a friendly and open atmosphere (DES, 2014: 10).

These courses according to Conaty (2002: 92) should have the purpose of identifying issues within the family’s own education that prohibit them from enhancing the educational experiences of their own children (Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1). HSCL coordinators understand that most of the parents regard the ‘non-threatening’ courses as an outlet for social interaction, rather than a stimulus for learning. Most schools operate such programmes and many have a range of courses that progress to more applied themes, which focus on literacy and numeracy. Wolfendale (1985) expresses the importance of parental involvement in such courses provided through initiatives such as the HSCL. She suggests that as well as providing a platform for families to build upon reading skills, greater parental involvement provides an insight into contemporary education and teaching methods thus creating a greater understanding of the challenges that teachers face within the classroom and conversely allows teachers to familiarise themselves with the educational and broader challenges that marginalised families encounter (Wolfendale. 1985) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4).
Other courses include parenting courses intended to equip and develop skills so that parents can better manage emotional and behavioural problems amongst their children. Some of the coordinators expressed that this is an area that required them to be very careful and sensitive around their approach when delivering courses and advice. Such interactions require a non-judgemental attitude. Coordinators hoped that through the parenting courses being provided, opportunities are given to parents to develop their understanding of the importance of school and to help raise their expectations of their own children, which are considered to be normative within more advantaged families (Ball, 2003: 93). The need for this caution correlates with Hanafin and Lynch (2002) who emphasise that parents, despite being considered socio-economically marginalised, still very much care about their children’s education and very much realise the value of education (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). The findings in this research suggest that the HSCL, as part of the DEIS initiative, represents a departure from a more traditional view of assisting vulnerable families, which had a tendency to blame marginalised families for the difficulties that they face. According to Taylor (1997), Borg and Mayo (2001) and Gillies (2005) other programmes previously designed to alleviate disadvantage fail to address the issues associated with poverty, focusing only on compensatory supports within the classroom, whilst neglecting the core issues that are present within the home that perpetuate educational inequality.

6.3.3 Encouragement

The findings suggest that HSCL coordinators are of the opinion that the parents are not actively involved in school based initiatives as in many schools, programmes that promote literacy and numeracy are poorly attended and in some schools classes have been withdrawn due to non-participation. Many HSCL coordinators reported a high level of reticence from parents when trying to convince them of their importance. Courses included numeracy and various literacy programmes designed to enable parents to be able to work alongside their children at a similar pace. However, these courses tend to be unpopular and according to coordinators this is a result of parents perceiving them as being threatening and pressurising. It is such courses that
provide the basis for personal development both in terms of becoming self-confident in one’s ability to make positive interventions in the lives of their children and to also improve one’s chances of social mobility, which in theory assists in relieving the disadvantaged situation that many families find themselves in (DES, 2005b).

This perceived lack of enthusiasm described by HSCL coordinators can be correlated with Levine and Sutherland’s (2013) study which suggest that parents distance themselves from school as result of a complex set of social factors, and not as result of disinterest in their children’s futures (Chapter 6, Section 3.3.3). Their findings indicate that social capital is a concept that has great relevance in determining parental participation and those with greater levels of social capital are most favoured by schools (Levine and Sutherland, 2013). The findings also reflect Hornby and Lafaele’s (2011) suggestion that working class families regard home-school relations as partnership that should be kept distal, whereas middle class families seek a closer relationship with school staff (2011). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), (Bourdieu, 1986) and Lareau (1987) suggest that parents with lower levels of social and cultural capital tend to be ill at ease when placed within formal environments and the dialogue with the school tends to be formal such as parent/teacher evenings. HSCL coordinators in this research reported that the only notable case where much persuasion is not required is in families which have at least one parent working within a profession. It could be argued that these adults and their children demonstrate higher levels of cultural capital, evidenced through a deeper understanding of the values of school and through parents being able to help their children with school work. Other respondents stated that the families that need the HSCL programme interventions least often used the various supports most. This concurs with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 161) who describe the ability of more socio-economically dominant families to recognise the prerequisite rules and conduct of formal learning environments and be able to identify tools that will enhance their children’s chances to be successful (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

Despite the reported absence of parental interest in the programmes and the perceived avoidance of the school environment in general, most coordinators
regarded HSCL initiatives as being vital in making a difference, however expressed frustration at the level of persuasion that is required to get families involved. Having these feelings can be attributed to some teachers having difficulty in understanding the choices that parents make, which can be closely aligned with Freire (1998), who suggests that coordinators and parents often find it difficult to identify with each other’s social practices and values. For Willis (1977), the apparent disconnect that families have with the education system can be attributed not so much to a conflict of cultural values but more of a sense of inferiority coupled with an attitude of presumed failure caused by low levels of confidence and self-esteem. Some coordinators believed that the HSCL facilitates assistance for those families suffering from such confidence issues but were also of the opinion that building confidence amongst parents is a gradual process and only some coordinators reported high proportions of parental involvement.

The perceived absence of enthusiasm of parents, as described by participants, may not be necessarily related to the educational values of parents. Whilst many coordinators in this research suggest that much persuasion is needed to involve families in school activities, parental choice must be considered. The habitus, social and cultural capital that many teachers occupy is distinct from those of families whom the engage with (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As found in McCoy and Byrne (2011) and Reay, (2007; 2017), families make rational choices based upon their perceptions of the core benefits of involvement and achievement and such reasons may seem alien to both school staff and the education system in a broader sense. Lasky (2000) observed that teachers have the potential to exercise power over parents as a result of their profession and in some cases are in a position to judge parental choice, thus making the school a less welcoming environment.

6.3.4 Promoting the Home as a Place of Learning

HSCL coordinators reiterated the philosophy promoted by Conaty (2002), asserting that their role is to break down the formal barriers that stand between disadvantaged parents and school, however they felt that the additional challenges that are frequently encountered went beyond the expectations of their role. According to
DES (2005b: 23), HSCL coordinators often deal with complex and unique situations that concern the families within their schools. These situations include instabilities which cause disturbances within the family such as relationship breakdowns, family members serving prison sentences, children that are living in temporary care due to interventions decided upon by TUSLA and often parents suffering mental illness or experiencing domestic violence (Snyder and Patterson, 1987; Horby and Lafaele, 2005) (Chapter 3, Section 6.3.4). The DES (2005b: 23) goes on to explain that the role of coordinators is not to listen with the aim of fixing the problem, criticise or pass judgement, but rather to gain an insight into the realities that many disadvantaged families encounter.

The concept of the home as a place for educational learning and a centre for positive social development is reiterated by the then Ministers for Education, Mary Hanafin (DES, 2005) and Richard Bruton (DES, 2017), who suggest that many of the obstacles that need to be overcome in order to reach ones educational potential lay beyond the school. It is widely recognised that many of the barriers to educational access, progression and attainment lie outside of the education system and the school does not have the capabilities to address all causes of disadvantage (Clark, 1996; Kelleghan 2001; Tormey 2010) (Chapter 2 Section 2.4). The HSCL can be regarded as an attempt to bridge the ways in which educational inequality is viewed within the school and reproduced outside of the school environment. It is suggested that for parental engagement to be effective it should be rooted within the home and have a complimentary role to the school where the home provides what the school cannot (Johnson and Ransom, 1980; Goodall and Montgomery, 2006) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.2). According to Wolfendale (1992) learning can be formal and intentional, as in the type of education delivered in schools. Wolfendale goes on to explain that informal and incidental learning is subliminal and occurs in an environment outside of the school. Most informal learning takes place within the family context and utilises the skills and knowledge that parents possess. In terms of regarding parents as educators, Topping and Wolfendale (1985: 4) suggest that parents should encourage educational development through natural interaction that occurs in the home and allow the school environment to deliver more formal lessons. (Chapter 3, Section 3.9). This concept can be aligned with Conaty (2002: 71) who states that a
key component of the HSCL programme is to draw upon the complementary skills of both parents and coordinators. However many coordinators, as a result of operational ambiguity, where coordinators are confronted with non-educational issues that fall outside of the policy guidelines, fail to promote this logic to whom they engage with. There is little evidence within the findings to suggest that the home is promoted as a place of learning, not in a deliberative manner nor due to a lack of understanding by the HSCL coordinators of the importance of the home visitation aspect of the scheme but rather due to the milieu of other issues which detracts from the educational purpose of their visit.

Despite coordinators’ efforts in trying to promote the home environment as a centre for learning, the HSCL Scheme acknowledges the importance of such practices by adopting an integrated policy response allowing coordinators to utilise the environment outside of the school setting to foster and develop positive attitudes towards education. However, the findings suggest that in many cases coordinators are unable to promote the school positively due to the nature of their visit. Often home visits occur due to a need to report concerns over pupil conduct or performance. Coordinators in this research find that it is the children of the most disadvantaged families that are the most likely to have problems in school. Russell (1932), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Levine and Sutherland (2013) suggest that schooling alone is not what produces cultural and social capital, but instead provides an environment for those who possess higher levels of cultural and social capital to use to their advantage (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) further suggest that the school, in its traditional form, fails to recognise those families without the prerequisite skills to identify the benefits that school can provide, which emphasises the importance of home interventions when addressing educational disadvantage. For many of the HSCL coordinators in this research, it is the home visits that offers the greatest insight into social and economic disadvantage with some of the respondents finding the ways in which some families organise and prioritise components of their lives difficult to comprehend. Willis (1977), Gatto (2005) and Jenkins and Micklewright (2007)
assert that education systems favour the dominant classes (Chapter 3, Section 3.6) and as Freire (1998) and Lynch (1999) suggest that social class conflict occurs as a result of a failure to recognise each other’s cultural and social values (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). The role of the HSCL in providing an understanding of the benefits of education and promoting the capabilities of parents is critical to the overall aims of the programme, however in many instances this is not possible during the home visit.

It is evident that home visits provide a lens whereby normative behaviour and habitual practices can be observed. The home visit element of the HSCL can be aligned with Bourdieu’s (1983) concept of field. It is when in the home environment that families are most at ease. For Bourdieu (1983) and Wacquant (2006) the field, in this case the home, provides an opportunity for families to insulate themselves from external influences in order to uphold its own values, thus making the promotion of school values difficult in homes where there is an absence of strong educational values (Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3).

6.3.5 Providing Advocacy

Some coordinators stated that the successful functioning of the HSCL scheme does not necessarily come in the form of the HSCL enabling parents to provide more assistance in the home in relation to children’s education. It is believed that by providing a means whereby families can express their feelings can go a long way in breaking down perceived barriers between the home and the school. This idea is reiterated by Cochran-Smith (2004) who champions the idea that the informal relationship between teachers and families, where teachers traditionally occupy a dominant position within society, can demonstrate a level of connectedness with the community that ordinarily cannot be experienced between teachers and pupils within the classroom setting. As a result of this, the importance of home visits is not limited to the promotion of educational values. The findings suggest that the most beneficial role that coordinators have during home visits is being an advocate for the parents and by forming the essential link between the family and the formal school environment, irrespective of such contacts promoting educational values or not.
Wolfendale (1985) also focuses on the non-academic benefits of the HSCL scheme that have an effect upon the teacher/parent relationship such as helping to develop self-esteem and coping mechanisms for dealing with challenges that occur outside of the school (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). It is suggested that the role the HSCL coordinators have, in keeping families informed of school related news, creates a sense of partnership where parents feel involved. Coordinators in this study often used the delivery of information as a means of gaining access to the families. Often this act alone is reported as making parents feel valued and connected with the school, suggesting that involvement in literacy and numeracy programmes are not always necessary. This practice is deemed to be a positive move, as parents are encouraged to be part of the programme and not a subject of it.

In general, HSCL coordinators find that what they were party to once inside the homes of families pose the greatest challenges within their role. The nature of the relationship between the coordinators and the family is one of support and advocacy, where the resolution of problems is often sought to be achieved through multi-agency responses. The level to which coordinators describe their role as being a sympathetic ear is of serious concern to many when conducting home visits. The role of the HSCL coordinator is in some instances is not confined to promoting the values of education, but instead shifts towards a role that has responsibility for the general wellbeing of children and families. This indeed provides a window for teachers and coordinators to discover the challenges that face many marginalised families; however many find that such responsibilities placed upon them exceeds the remit of their role.

Most HSCL coordinators interviewed concurred by stating that a valuable provision made by them is to connect families with other agencies such as statutory bodies, health services and local community partners. For many the home visit goes beyond this, often involving coordinators aligning themselves to social workers, addiction councillors and Gardai. This would suggest that the interactional nature of the ecological model is evident within the role of the HSCL coordinator as they assist in forming links between the micro, meso and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner and
Many describe experiences where their role as a teacher/coordinator and ‘the friendly face of the school’ is compromised and as a result it is often difficult to maintain morale. This is cited as being a result of the conditions that families and children were living in or as coordinators became aware of obvious welfare issues the teacher subsequently is obliged to report. One respondent in particular stated that doing so would compromise the trust that families place within the HSCL and the school, so therefore, would often ignore such issues. Other coordinators reported spending hours on the phone to immigration services and the Department of Social Protection to arrange basic needs for families with poor or no levels of English. Such tasks impinge upon the teacher’s ability to serve the rest of the family cohort. Many other instances similar to these are reported which extenuated a feeling of hopelessness and fatigue upon coordinators.

Whilst coordinators regarded such tasks as beyond their brief, most HSCL coordinators obliged families in offering assistance in non-academic areas. As both DES (2005, 2005b) and Conaty (2002) suggest, the aim of the home visitation is to create an awareness of parents’ abilities in terms of being able to provide support for their children’s schooling; however, such sentiments fail to consider the barriers that prevent families from being more actively involved within the programme. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) suggest that the common barriers to educational involvement that many marginalised families include economic and health related issues such as stress, anxiety and depression (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.2). The findings in this research suggest that the problems that many parents encounter are a result of these factors, thus leading to them having to prioritise daily tasks for the general well-being of their families. Teachers being party to such exchanges allows professionals to gain a greater insight into the factors that create such obstacles and help develop more effective practices with regard to parental involvement within the home-school partnership (Hornby and Lafaele (2011: 50).

6.3.6 Summary

The ability of coordinators to involve parents in school based programmes and bond with families in their own homes is the cornerstone of the HSCL programme. The
findings suggest that coordinators regard the building of effective partnerships with marginalised parents frustrating, due to low levels of participation. Coordinators view parents as being unwilling to engage in courses that are based upon literacy and numeracy skills. It is suggested by many of those interviewed, that parents view these courses as somewhat intimidating, especially to those parents who have had negative experiences within the school system personally. In some schools, where parental involvement is particularly poor, such courses have been withdrawn. On the other hand most coordinators report that parents are willing to come into the school environment for courses that are based upon social and creative themes. Some coordinators state that the parents that least needed the additional supports are the parents that were most likely to attend, reinforcing the idea that the greater benefits are achieved by those with higher levels of cultural and social capital.

Whilst less academically intensive courses such as cookery and the numerous craft classes may be considered less beneficial to the development of core educational skills, every interaction that the school makes with a family member is regarded by coordinators as being positive. These courses, described as less threatening, all incorporate levels of literacy and numeracy implicitly so as to not deter active participation. Such interactions allow marginalised parents to feel more comfortable in their interactions with school staff which middle class parents are usually at relative ease with (Hornby and Lafeale 2011). The findings suggest that coordinators seek to raise the awareness in families of their own potential and capabilities in providing educational support for their children.

Home visits provide an opportunity for coordinators to observe the ways in which families live and organise their lives and their homes. In many cases, coordinators are frustrated, instead of having the opportunity to promote the home as a place of educational development; much of their time is spent assisting parents with non-school matters. Such findings are contrary to what the brief of the home visit dictates (DES, 2005b:22), which suggests that the home visit should encourage active parenting. Such tasks undertaken during the home visit however, allow
teachers and coordinators to gain an understanding of factors that place barriers between marginalised families and education.

Whilst acknowledging that the partnerships which are fostered with parents, in the home, are not always educationally based, many HSCL coordinators state that the role that they play as an advocate is important. By allowing coordinators to observe life through the lens of the parents, coordinators gain a vital insight into the problems associated with disadvantage. The provision of practical help and the connections with local and statutory agencies, according to coordinators, provide the assistance that parents want and through this help trust and bonds of partnership are built. The absence of defined roles of advocacy in Conaty (2002) and DES (2005a, 2005b) has meant that coordinators have an autonomous and discretionary role during home visits, which allows them to build bonds of trust with families in the hope that such gestures will be reciprocated through compliance and participation with HSCL programme.

6.4 The Role of the Community

HSCL coordinators view the roles that community partners play within the scheme’s aims as central to its objectives. For many coordinators the school serves as a focal point within the community and is the most valuable tool in the regeneration of marginalised areas. Schools are limited to the supports that can be offered to parents; therefore community partners are essential in offering assistance in areas which are not school related. They also provide essential financial support to the HSCL scheme and without them many programmes designed to bring parents into the school would not be available.

This section examines how the school is considered to be an essential component of the community. The concept that the community has a greater influence on the educational development of young people is discussed in conjunction with the efforts of the HSCL makes in relation to linking with organisations. The ways in which the school can enable the regeneration of marginalised communities is presented with
particular attention being paid to Coleman (1966) and Midwinter (1981) who suggest that the community has greater influence upon the educational development of children that schools alone (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3).

Also within this section the level of dependency that the school has upon community partners is discussed. The findings suggest that other than providing essential supports for families and children that fall outside of the remit of the school, community partners play an essential role in funding in school initiatives when finances from the DEIS budget is not available. The level of reliance upon external resources to support children and their families in terms of education will be related to Bronfenbrenner (1979) who as with Coleman (1966) and Midwinter (1981) suggest that the community and neighbourhood are important components of educational development (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3).

Finally, this section discusses the importance of good levels of communication between the school, families and community and statutory agencies. It is suggested that the HSCL coordinators play a key role in making connections between families and appropriate supports. The bond between the HSCL coordinators and such organisations will be critically assessed in terms of the closeness of their relationships and the importance of the integrated nature of the HSCL.

6.4.1 The School in the Community

For some, the school is considered to be at the centre of the community and according to coordinators; this positioning of the school in a social context is reiterated by other school staff, families, pupils and the broader community. The findings suggest that schools have the capacity to change the social dynamic of marginalised communities, giving people hope that cycles of poverty and inequality can be broken. This idea is developed by one respondent who explains that when a child in their school completes the Leaving Cert it gives the whole community encouragement, thus persuading other children in the neighbourhood to complete school also (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1). This view of the school being part of a
learning community is shared by Epstein and Salinas (2004) who also suggest that the nature of collaborative working between coordinators, parents and the community bodies creates the most significant impact upon the learning experiences of children and families. Falling within the Bioecological model of development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggest that within a collaborative framework, children and families are directly influenced by the communities in which they occupy (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Hayes et al. (2017: 17) suggests that even though a child may not be in direct contact with local organisations, the exo-system within Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model partially provides rights and responsibilities for children through the generation of cultural norms and practices that are transmitted via friends, extended family, local services and resources within the locality.

Other respondents emphasised the importance of community partners being able to fill in the gaps that the school and home cannot provide. These gaps referred to by coordinators, apply to the educational issues that cannot be addressed within the classroom environment (DES, 2005a). Such issues often require interventions outside of the school environment, with the assistance of the home and/or with the involvement of local agency and partnership support (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Local community partners regularly provide activities for children, and have able to focus support in the areas of education, health and social interaction. In many cases, when coordinators cannot actively generate participation in school based educational programmes (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2), community efforts to provide classes often receive greater levels of participation. For Coleman (1966) the idea of the community being of benefit to the family is paramount. Coleman’s account of educational inequality and its links to the community in which the school is geographically located is of interest to this research. Despite Coleman documenting many differences between the schools in his study regarding the performance and educational attainment of their respective students, his most important finding was the existence of the adolescent society. In this society, adolescent culture varies between schools and is influenced in many cases by parents and teachers. However, more importance is attached to the culture espoused outside of the school environment. Coleman indicates that a community rich with sporting facilities, after
school clubs and other activities foster a sense of competition and achievement amongst children.

The use of sports clubs to bond the community together is prominent in the findings of this research (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1), which is similar to the idea of bonding capital found in the study conducted by Leonard (2005), which asserts that young people’s involvement in church activities provided a sense of social solidarity and connectedness. Confidence and a more positive self-image amongst students and young people in the neighbourhood was created as a result of the availability of school based sports facilities which are open to the public. In addition, many marginalised pupils felt that their social class was not as obvious outside of the school environment. Whilst Coleman (1966) recognised that good schools can make a difference in one’s educational opportunities, it is what occurs outside of the formal school environment that is most influential in a child’s educational development (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3).

HSCL coordinators suggested that despite the challenges in making the home a place of learning, community partners such as Garda Diversion Programmes, regional youth services, and homework clubs give disadvantaged children an opportunity to engage in extra-curricular activates. Similarly, Todd (2007: 86) explains that greater involvement with local community organisations benefit the community, as often levels of crime, substance abuse and issues that relate to sexual health are reduced. Such findings can be aligned to the concepts of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 237) and (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) who suggest that for educational development to be effective, collaborations must exist between multiple organisations, providing a broader definition of learning, development and wellbeing (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4).

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) suggest that students’ learning is enhanced when there is an overlap between multiple spheres of influence, such as the relationships between the school and community partners (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). The findings in this
research also draw upon the suggestion that communities are ‘untapped reservoirs of human potential’ (Paz, 1990: 19) and policies that have equality as a focal point are firmly rooted in the community, allowing the community to recognise the benefits of their contribution (Epstein and Selinas, 2004). Evans (2004) suggests that disadvantaged communities often have less collective social capital than wealthier neighbourhoods and residents in such areas often portray less community and social cohesion. This concept demonstrates the important role that the school possesses within the community. Schools can develop social and cultural capital and also strengthen community ties between those within the school and those living in the vicinity of the school through bonding capital (Leonard, 2005) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3). Evidence of this can be seen in Chapter 5, (Section 5.4.2) where some schools allow their facilities to be used by the members of the general public, thus providing opportunities for communities with few resources.

With the school firmly rooted within the micro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), some coordinators suggested that centralising the school as the hub of the community allows for families to benefit from community supports. The HSCL aims to address this by making available to parents greater access to community partners that help directly with children or with families to improve the ways in which they can be of greater assistance with their own children’s education. The connections that the HSCL make with local and statutory organisations are a key element within the overall programme, as the policy acknowledges the limitation that the school has in alleviating disadvantage (DES, 2005a). It was suggested by coordinators that the school being situated in the heart of the community promotes the benefits of school completion not only to siblings and relatives but also to other young people living in their neighbourhood. However, Leonard (2005) and Devereux (2011), state that the media’s unconstructive reporting and profiling of marginalised communities stigmatises those already living on the margins and detrimentally impacts upon people’s everyday lives compounding other factors such as the general lack of opportunities for those living in such neighbourhoods (Chapter 3, Section 3.8).
Midwinter (1980) suggests that the regeneration of disadvantaged areas cannot succeed without centring the school within the community (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.2). The school is a crucial element when improving communities as schools are effective agents of social change. However, such change is difficult to achieve unless the social backgrounds and the lived experiences of those living in the community outside of the school are taken into consideration by policy makers (Midwinter, 1980: 203). For Midwinter, the local community has the potential to empower families and individuals. Through local agencies being able to identify with the needs of its own community representative democracy is replaced with a model more closely aligned with popular democracy, thus making school apposite to the culture and experiences of the families in question. This however, places schools in a position where greater relationships with local partners are required as the level of dependency upon them increases. By working with both the home and the community, HSCL coordinators are able to gain an appreciation for the broader social issues that affect families (Chapter 5, Section, 5.3.1) Although HSCL coordinators have limited ability to make changes at policy level, by working closely with the community, the bottom up nature of the HSCL allows community partners to be consulted and provides them with an input into the types of courses needed both inside and outside of the school environment, for both children and parents (Chapter 3,Section 5.3.1). Through the development of educational capabilities of both children and adults, the work of the HSCL can be regarded as a tool to develop bridging capital where social capital that has a use value can be converted to exchange value, where achievement can be transferred into opportunities to alleviate some of the issues related to disadvantage (Leonard 2005) (Chapter 3, Section 30.7.3).

6.4.2 The Reliance upon Community Partners

Many HSCL coordinators stated that without community partners from the voluntary sector the functions of the HSCL, as well as other DEIS initiatives would be significantly curtailed. As discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4.2), many of the HSCL coordinators who participated in this research explained the difficulties that they encounter accessing funds for the provision of courses and programmes. This challenge can only be overcome through the involvement of community partners.
Secondly, such community partners provide services for parents that are not available through the school, even in the schools that provide the greatest range of programmes for families. Services included counselling, health promotion and other advocacy related supports. The relationship that exists between these services resembles the ways that the micro-system is influenced by the exo-system in ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). DES (2005b: 91) suggests that at local level the HSCL should develop relationships with youth groups, drug awareness groups and sports groups. The findings suggest that working with local agencies goes beyond the provision of extra-curricular activities with many HSCL coordinators referring parents to drug and alcohol counselling, relationship guidance, mental health services as well as the various partners that provide support for parents with literacy and numeracy problems.

Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu (1977) suggest that the formal school environment favours the pupils that already have prerequisite skills to do well. Such children also develop greater appreciation for educational outcomes and have the resources within the home to address what they consider difficult in school (Chapter 3, Section 3.3). Such findings are evident in this study, as HSCL coordinators commented that the greatest participation within HSCL programmes are from families that required the additional supports least suggesting that educational values are embedded within families’ habitus and cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977: 88). For children and families from marginalised families the community agencies are essential resources, as in many cases parents are unable to offer educational assistance. The link between social class and inequality extends beyond education and to enable disadvantaged families to benefit from education, the other cumulative effects of poverty need to be addressed (Nolan and Whelan, 1999) (Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

6.4.3 Interconnectedness

The importance of building and maintaining good relationships with the broader community extends beyond the local voluntary sector. Many HSCL coordinators reported that much of their time is allocated to home visits and within this role
significant time is occupied by contacting various statutory agencies on behalf of families. The majority of HSCL coordinators in the study expressed frustration with their experiences. Most spoke favourably about the bonds that were built between themselves and local organisations, however many criticised the ways in which the statutory agencies operated. According to those interviewed, there is a lack of joined up thinking in terms of the level of cooperation between HSCL teacher, parent and organisation. This challenge in many cases undermines the role that the HSCL teacher plays as often they are of the opinion that their judgements upon family needs, are overruled by an overly bureaucratic system who are unfamiliar with the context of the problem. One teacher described an instance where social services had closed a case on a family and the teacher, who was familiar with the family, still had concerns over the welfare of the pupil. It is also felt that public service workers in general do not understand the lived experiences of marginalised communities or have an ability to relate to the overall objectives of the HSCL.

Much of the contact with statutory agencies, on behalf of parents, is a result parents’ inability to effectively communicate with the various bodies. Coordinators explained that parents also found themselves frustrated due to certain agencies having high turnovers of staff or a complicated method of connecting with the necessary agency to deal with their issue. The level of frustration and difficulties that families encounter can, in some cases, be attributed to poor joined up thinking between families and State agencies, but also may be linked to the ability that marginalised families have in decoding the bureaucratic system. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Freire (1998) suggest that cultural differences inhibit linguistic and semantic ability and that the absence of said skills reduces self-confidence and self-esteem rendering the service user to near powerless positions in their exchanges with State agencies (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

According to Conaty (2002) from the initiation of the HSCL, the DES placed a lot of emphasis on networking between schools and community agencies. It is understood that by the school networking with the broader community results in a heightened awareness of the work being carried out by other agencies and prevents the
duplication and replication of other services. Evidence of this can be found in this research, where in many schools the HSCL teacher has discontinued classes for parents that were available elsewhere, thus allowing financial resources to be invested into other areas. DES (2005b: 87) explains that this partnership between community and school should promote the collaboration of all agencies within a community. According to DES (2014: 9), HSCL coordinators are required to build relationships with key players in the local community, so that they can add value to what is done in the school, in particular work carried out to improve attendance, participation and retention. The findings however, suggest that building such relationships is a case of tapping into all available resources in the community rather than creating partnerships, therefore benefitting the school more than the organisations. The services that the schools rely upon are generally available to all members of the community and remain independent of the school. Coordinators stated that the relationships between the school and local community groups are relatively harmonious; however, fear exists that if the resources are not used funding may be removed by authorities.

Boldt (2007: 25) and Todd (2007:94) suggest that the level of communication between agencies and the school must be a key priority when considering integrated services. Todd emphasises the need for joint training in order to understand each other’s professional role and common agreements between agencies and schools need to be forged that take collective action to alleviate problems associated with disadvantage (Todd, 2007:95) (Chapter 3, Section 3.2).

6.4.4 Summary

This section of the discussion presents evidence which suggests that the communities that young people and families inhabit are just as beneficial to educational development as the school environment. The findings also demonstrate that the school plays an equally important role in the community, where according Midwinter (1980) and Todd (2007) such a centred role within the community allows for the social regeneration of disadvantaged communities. Through creating positive a positive image of the school through developing parental, pupil and
neighbourhoods attitudes towards school completion, some teachers regarded achievement amongst children from disadvantaged communities as no longer aspirational but instead an expectation.

Often schools are limited in the resources that they can deliver despite having a budget to provide extra learning supports. The importance of the school being able to collaborate with youth groups, Garda Diversion Programmes and counselling services is crucial in providing the support to families that the school cannot. Gaining access to these organisations rarely poses a problem for HSCL coordinators as they have built partnerships with them over long periods of time. This relationship is however, essential to the aim of the HSCL as it prevents overlaps in the supports provided thus allowing the HSCL to operate in an efficient manner where the limited funding available to coordinators can be reinvested into other educational provisions.

Good relations with local community partners are common amongst coordinators, especially with those located in the school’s vicinity. However the relationships between HSCL coordinators and statutory agencies are often fraught with tension and frustration. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Freire (1998) suggest, families often find difficulty in expressing themselves when contacting statutory agencies such as the Department of Social Protection, as the language used in forms and to describe terms is perceived as being of a complex nature. Coordinators also encounter challenges of a different nature when engaging with agencies on behalf of families. They often feel that agencies demonstrate a lack of joined up thinking and often fail to understand the challenges that marginalised communities face or what the HSCL is trying to achieve.

6.5 Coordinators Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the HSCL

The HSCL may be regarded as an effective policy tool for alleviating the effects of educational disadvantage. There are however, areas of its implementation that fail to connect with the scheme’s core aims. DES (2005b) states the importance of targeted
approaches when delivering additional supports for marginalised families; however the practicalities of such a method of selection makes this response virtually impossible in most DEIS schools, according to the coordinators interviewed in this research. The HSCL fails to provide clear benchmarking with regards to the schemes evaluation, thus leading to HSCL coordinators implementing their own ad hoc measurement indicators. Coordinators regard the HSCL to be working well if they can encourage pupils to attend more regularly and remain in school for as long as possible. However, limiting the benchmarking of the HSCL’s effectiveness to attendance and retention has the potential to create lower expectations of children from marginalised socio-economic families. The scheme is crucial in creating a more inclusive concept of education where the social problems that are external to the school environment are realised to be the most significant challenge to educational opportunity (Conaty, 2002; DES, 2017). Forming close partnerships between home, school and community provides environments for children to learn and develop, away from the traditional school systems that are said to reproduce inequality (Illich, 1970), (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), (Gatto, 2005).

This section explores how HSCL coordinators evaluate the effectiveness of the HSCL. The findings suggest that HSCL coordinators are challenged when targeting the families most at risk of education under-achievement and subsequent failure. In an attempt to avoid the stigmatisation of less well off families, HSCL coordinators offer the services of the scheme to all families, regardless of the level of disadvantage that they were experiencing. As a result of coordinators demonstrating sensitivity in such instances, the HSCL’s targeted response to tackling education disadvantage is undermined by school staff being unwilling to identify the children and families most in need of educational support.

The HSCL allows each school to implement the scheme in such a way that it best suits the needs of the school community. This level of autonomy extends to the ways that HSCL coordinators measure the success of the HSCL. The findings suggest that coordinators understand the importance of attendance and retention and tend to use these variables as the benchmarks for the effectiveness of the scheme.
DES (2005a, 2005b, 2014) offers little guidance in this area, however the focus upon retention in the findings in this research and within the policy aims tend to overlook other measurement indicators such as transition to further and higher education.

In some many instances the HSCL does not meet all of the aims set out by DES (2005a; 2017) and Conaty (2002). It is suggested that HSCL coordinators regard the scheme to be relatively successful in achieving its objectives, however feel that parts of the programme require attention. This part of the discussion examines the ways that the HSCL, as part of the DEIS plan, challenges the traditional concepts of education that were suggested to perpetuate social and educational inequality and its effectiveness to breaking through the cycle of poverty.

### 6.5.1 Effective Targeting

The findings suggest that many HSCL coordinators are unable to use appropriate targeting when selecting the participants for the various components of the HSCL. In most cases, coordinators were of the opinion that there is a risk of stigmatising those children and parents from disadvantaged families, feeling that by identifying those in need of assistance may deter them further from becoming involved. For those who attempt targeting, open evenings and parent/teacher evenings are used to speak to parents in order to gain an insight into how the HSCL can be of benefit. Other coordinators reported that if they manage successfully target the families most in need of additional educational support, other families often complain that they are not being afforded the same attention. The most common reason for not applying a targeted approach results from the belief by coordinators that HSCL is only available in DEIS schools, therefore being earmarked as a DEIS school assumes that the majority of the families in the community are considered to be disadvantaged, therefore HSCL supports are available to all families (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2).

The absence of a targeted approach by HSCL coordinators gives relevance to Coleman (1966) and Ball (2003) who suggests that ‘non-targeted’ policy based implementations are ineffective when addressing educational disadvantage (Chapter

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3, Section 3.5). They both argue that such interventions disproportionately benefit those who need educational support least. In this research, some coordinators remark that when more advantaged families are excluded from the additional resources, which are designated to DEIS schools, they have the means to provide additional resources for their children through a more educationally focused home environment and the ability to finance private tuition. Webb (2002) describes this situation as ‘gambling’, where marginalised families do not have the same options open to them and are therefore reliant upon policy interventions such as the various components of DEIS (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

Research conducted by the Educational Research Centre for the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005) discovered strong evidence that a multiplier effect occurs in schools amongst large cohorts of children from marginalised backgrounds (DES, 2005:28) (Chapter 2, Section 2.7). DES (2005b) describes the official procedure that is recommended when identifying the families and children most in need of additional support. Whilst identification of needs can be achieved on a macro scale, the identification of those who are most in need of additional support within the school can be a more difficult task. DES, (2005b:86) explains that at the beginning of each school year the HSCL coordinators and school principals meet with the School Completion Programme personnel to draw up a target list of pupils based upon an agreed criteria. The criteria often involves the consideration of many factors including absenteeism levels, instability in the home, poverty, behavioural issues, a pattern of early school leaving amongst siblings, earning difficulties or a lack of family support. Using this expansive list the HSCL teacher organises visits to the family home to introduce themselves and explain the range of supports that the programme provides, which places a great level of responsibility upon HSCL coordinators efforts in being able to identify disadvantage.

6.5.2 Visibility of Poverty

Some HSCL coordinators offered the scheme school-wide as they felt that the identification of disadvantage had become increasingly difficult in post Celtic Tiger Ireland. This was apparent during the interviews as many coordinators were unable
to describe the typical social profile of the families that they engage with. Whilst some coordinators regarded disadvantage to be embodied in lone parent families, the long term unemployed and those struggling financially, they believed that poverty manifests itself in many new ways. Often families who are highly educated have experienced financial hardship as a result of the changing economic conditions during the recession.

No longer is it sufficient to use traditional poverty indicators as described by Townsend (1994), who advocates the use of a measurement which determines relative poverty. Poverty and disadvantage, according to Tormey (2010), refers to the factors which inhibit students from deriving the most advantage from their experiences at school (Chapter 2, Section 2.4). Since 2007, the prevailing economic climate has led to a largely different cohort of society that is reliant upon social welfare and other state interventions (Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs, 2009). Those that fall into this new definition of ‘poor’ are often those who are educated, previously considered to be middle class and often own their homes albeit experiencing difficulties in maintaining mortgage repayments. This is evident in the findings of this research, especially within the schools that serve rural communities. This in turn makes the identification of inequality difficult as one cannot rely upon typifying social class profiles or class stereotypes.

Within most schools the majority of the families share similar social profiles. The findings suggest that in some cases families do not meet the traditional concept of disadvantage for reasons such as having a good level education or secure employment. This is considered to be positive as interactions between all parents, regardless of social profile, provide an opportunity to motivate each other and facilitate a platform to share experiences and interpretations of day to day life. This level of interaction can be related to the thoughts of Coleman (1966) Bourdieu (1977), Robbins (2002), who suggest that the development of social capital can be attained through interacting with those with different outlooks, tastes and attitudes towards education (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).
6.5.3 Measuring the Success of the HSCL

The findings suggest that measuring the success of the HSCL is programme is somewhat ambiguous. With the absence of clear benchmarks for what success is, according to the HSCL coordinators, success is based upon their own evaluations of the programme. The close links between poverty and early school leaving are observed in the findings, as most coordinators defined the success of the programme upon the amount of pupils that remain at school to complete the Leaving Certificate. Others evaluated the success of the programme by the reduction of behavioural issues within the classroom and attributed such advances to the work carried out by HSCL coordinators in the home and through the connections made with local and statutory agencies. The methods of benchmarking used in the HSCL can be aligned to Lipsky (2010), Hogwood and Gunn (1984) and Matland (1995) who describe the challenges that those charged with the delivery of ambiguous policies such as the HSCL encounter (Chapter 3, Section 3.9). They suggest that goals are largely dependent upon the relationships between all actors, in the case of the HSCL coordinators, parents, pupils and other stakeholders.

Whilst much of the policy related literature omits details on how success should be measured, DES (2005b) provides an evaluation of the HSCL circa 2005. Within this evaluation conducted by Peter Archer, some of the most important principles of the programme are outlined and how performance is measured within key areas is discussed (Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1). Archer suggests that the scheme’s aim to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies have been relatively successful as surveys given to parents suggest that a high level of activity involving parents had taken place and parents provided very positive feedback. Archer also states that parents had increased in self-confidence and knew more about what was happening in the school. As a result of this, they learned how to help their children with their homework and had a better understanding of what was being taught in school. Much of Archer’s evaluation shares similarities with this research, especially in the area of enhanced partnerships, which are deemed as successes by the DES (2005b: 122). However, Archer does not acknowledge the child centred philosophy of the HSCL, as detailed by Conaty (2002). Ryan (1994) also noted that this increased level of communication between parents and
coordinators had encouraged coordinators to evaluate their thoughts on parent’s contribution to the school and the education system in general. As with the findings in this research, Archer’s report in DES (2005b) also describes survey data that indicated that a majority of HSCL coordinators believe that the scheme made a positive impact upon parents, schools and the community.

Kelleghan et al. (1995) and Smyth, McCoy and Kingston (2015:38) suggest that the general categorisation of success set at second level school is based upon retention levels and performance in public examinations (Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Weir et al. (2014) in a commissioned evaluation of DEIS found that that academic performance of students attending DEIS schools had improved in general over the years and in English they had outperformed their peers in non-DEIS schools. With the exception of mathematics a visible improvement in performance was observable in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, however the most significant rise occurred in those schools that benefitted from the additional supports that DEIS provides including the HSCL. Research in this area, such as the Growing up in Ireland Study, has demonstrated how possible gathering and quantifying data with regards to measurements of success is (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1). However, the respondents in this research stated that the collections of indicators that highlight success are limited to records pertaining to attendance and retention.

If the focus upon retention and attendance is to be established as the benchmark for success, Weir’s (2014) findings indicated that the presence of DEIS interventions had led to improvements in both variables over the years (Chapter 2, Section 2.8). Weir suggests that absenteeism reduced by a small amount; however it remained to be significant issue when compared to the data collected from non-DEIS schools. The findings in this study also suggest that some improvements have been made with regards to attendance but the problem is still significant amongst marginalised families. Therefore it remains to be the primary focus of HSCL, providing a quantifiable indicator to use to mark the scheme’s progress. HSCL coordinators also remarked that similar methods are used when evaluating retention rates. DEIS schools still remain significantly challenged when contrasted to non-DEIS schools;
however as with attendance rates, a small increase is evident. The noticeable increase in those children from marginalised communities remaining at school is not only attributed to the efforts of HSCL coordinators and the other DEIS initiatives. Some coordinators stated that that the lack of employment opportunities within localities and the cost of travel contribute greatly to the numbers of students remaining in school. Smith et al. (2015) also suggest this increase in school retention may not be solely attributed to the various DEIS initiatives as the economic climate and poor prospects for unskilled labour have played a substantial role in encouraging pupils to remain within school. HSCL coordinators in this research were not in a position to discuss retention and attendance rates on a national level but on a local basis were satisfied that their efforts had made an impact (Chapter 2, Section 2.8.1).

Despite the findings in this research suggesting that the measurement of success within the HSCL neglects to address academic achievement, they concur with some of the central precepts of the scheme. Conaty (2002) suggests that the scheme consists of a collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers. In addition the scheme should be unified and integrated at both first and second levels, the thrust of the HSCL should be preventative rather than curative and the central focus of the scheme should be on the development of positive attitudes of parents that impinge upon their children’s educational development. In addition, for the scheme to achieve its goals the identification of educational needs and being able to draw together appropriate responses to meet such needs, the development of coordinators and school staff attitudes to the problems associated with disadvantage and finally the establishing of bonds of trust with families should be evident.

The above sentiments are reiterated in DES (2014) which outlines the central aims and precepts of the HSCL as set out by Concepta Conaty. The findings gathered from the semi-structured interviews reiterate much of what Conaty (2002) outlines; however other potential means of measurement are also evident within the findings. Whilst these are important and appropriate benchmarks they fail to engage with educational achievement. Many respondents spoke of instances when they have
worked over a number of months to reintegrate pupils back into the school that had missed substantial amounts of time. Often these children were suffering with psychological problems or were deemed as uncontrollable by their parents, it is these important variables that are absent from much of the literature pertaining success in the HSCL.

Many of the coordinators interviewed in this research suggested that attendance and retention were the most quantifiable indicators whereby success of the scheme can be measured. The findings also suggest that many HSCL coordinators develop their own mechanisms to measure success. These measures include the monitoring of the turnout at parent-teacher evenings and the level of participation within the courses provided for parents to become engaged with. Many the coordinators were of the opinion that success of their achievements can be observed through the creation of school-wide understandings of their role. (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.3).

6.5.4 Low Expectations

Many of HSCL coordinators felt that it is a significant challenge to get the pupils to regularly attend school and then to maintain attendance until the Leaving certificate was complete. It is evident that a great effort is being made by HSCL coordinators to involve parents within the various courses that have been provided by both the school and local community partners. However, few respondents reported that transition onto higher or further education was considered to be a mark of the schemes success.

This level of expectation can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, all HSCL coordinators reiterated the hard work which is needed to make the programme work. Coordinators reported having to put in extra hours outside of their paid scheduled working day, hence measuring the success of their efforts was based upon evaluating each task that they performed, regardless of the impact it may have had upon pupils or families. Secondly, as a result of cut backs in education spending, some respondents mentioned that career guidance is often limited, thus leading to pupils
having to rely upon parents and family connections for advice, which in many cases is limited. Often in marginalised families further or higher education is not an option due to the associated costs being beyond what most families can afford. Also in such households it may be a requirement for school leaving children to make a financial contribution to the home, as day to day survival and making ends meet takes precedence over further education (Lynch, 1999: 100-101). Finally it may be that schools in general, in particular teachers and guidance councillors have lower expectations of pupils from disadvantaged families.

To develop this point in a more depth it is necessary to examine the findings of Smyth et al., (2011) who document the feelings of final year second level students. Smyth et al. found that many working class children feel that less is expected of them by teachers and guidance teachers (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Willis (1977) found that children from working class and marginalised backgrounds possessed very little self-belief in their capabilities and expected to fail, whereas Smyth et al. (2011) presents evidence that suggests progression to higher education is considered to be an automatic pathway for those children from more advantaged families. Smyth finds that many working class students feel that they are more capable than what the career guidance councillor considered them to be. In terms of further education and employment opportunities, Smith et al. (2011:154) suggested that many children from lower socio-economic families are discouraged from dedicating time to completing CAO forms and that applying for PLC courses was over emphasised. These findings share many similarities with this study of the working experiences of HSCL coordinators, as very few respondents expressed academic and career progression benchmarks of success. All of which, concur with Bourdieu (1977a) and Reay (2004; 2018) who intimate that individuals are predisposed towards certain types of behaviour. Career aspirations and ambition are embodied within such characteristics.

McCoy et al., (2014) in their longitudinal study of pupils transitioning onto further and higher education and into the labour market both as apprentices and workers, found that expectations upon students also had relationships pertaining to social
class. Although the relationship between social class and teachers expectations was less noticeable it existed on four main levels. Past students who had pursued higher education courses expressed that they believed that their teachers had high expectations of them and it was mostly children from middle class backgrounds that went onto to study at universities. Also of those interviewed that progress onto further education and PLC courses also felt that there was encouragement for them to continue with their education, where as those that entered the labour market felt that less had been expected of them at school (McCoy et al., 2014: 46).

The findings in this research suggest that HSCL coordinators demonstrate some understanding of the close links between disadvantage and educational failure. This is evidenced through teachers encouraging pupils to remain at school for as long as possible; however they do not actively encourage greater participation in further and higher education (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.3). This may however, be attributed to teachers’ own social identity rather than not understanding the sociological concepts of inequality. O’Brien and Furlong, (2015), Devine et al. (2013) and Keane and Heinz. (2013) suggest that many teachers are often at odds with the lived experiences and choices that many parents make as result of conflicting levels of cultural capital and habitus (Chapter 3, Section 3.8).

Attendance/retention, punctuality and behavioural issues can be easily quantified which may explain as to why such variables are commonly used as markers for evaluation, whereas progression beyond school cannot. With the absence of a definitive measurement tool to monitor educational and career transitions from secondary school, the HSCL is rooted in the traditional concept of education and human capital. This concept presumes that education enhances one’s chances of gaining better and more secure employment, thus avoiding the risk of poverty but does not consider the structural barriers that stand in the way of many learners (Tilak, 2001; Njong, 2010) (Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1).
6.5.5 The HSCL Achieving its Main Aims

The findings suggest that many of the HSCL coordinators feel that the programme is generally effective in its aims of alleviating educational inequality, however most have some concerns with certain components of the programme. Coordinators feel that the HSCL functions well, despite reporting poor attendance on courses for parents and the HSCL’s inability to promote the home as a place of learning. How well these components performed do not define the overall programme. It is generally felt that every connection made, being an advocate for a parent and through families knowing that the scheme was available if they needed it, are part of fulfilling core aims.

As mentioned previously the level of persuasion required to actively involve parents in schools coupled with the HSCL’s inability to create environments for learning in the home impacts upon the overall aims of the HSCL. Many of the coordinators reported a marked increase in attendance and retention and despite home visits being largely consumed with non-educational duties, every interaction with parents builds upon the bonds of trust that the scheme promotes. For many coordinators, increased bureaucracy and reduced funding threaten the HSCL’s effectiveness. Coordinators that were interviewed in this study stated that no matter how child centred the programme is difficulty arises when trying to engage parents in educational courses. This suggests the HSCL programme is challenged in terms of providing parents with the tools to become more engaged in their children’s education and providing a greater opportunity for mobility.

The policy literature, as outlined in the previous chapters, states that the HSCL, as well as other parts of the integrated policy framework of DEIS, recognises the importance of early intervention and collaboration when challenging the problems associated with inequality. According to DES (2014), the DEIS frame of reference is based upon a definition of educational disadvantage which can be found in the Education Act (1998). It refers to educational disadvantage as the impediment to education that arise from socio-economic disadvantage that prevents students and families deriving appropriate benefits from education in schools. The objective of
the education system is to provide a broadly based, inclusive high quality education system that enables children to develop to their full potential thus creating a fulfilled life, as well as making a social and economic contribution to the wider society (DES, 2005). However, the need for policy tools such as the HSCL amongst other DEIS initiatives suggest that school alone is not the social leveller that Parsons (1970) suggests. Parsons (1970) suggests the education system delivered in schools should enable children to transition from patterns within the family environment to the standards required in the modern economic society. Parsons suggests that the school acts as a social leveller, where through the learning process and hard work, children can become socially mobile (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). The HSCL scheme’s ability to engage a broader range of educational supports can be more closely aligned to Coleman (1966) and Illich (1970) who suggest that the most important lessons for life are instilled in children outside of the school environment. HSCL policy documentation recognises that under-achievement in school can have profound consequences for children especially as they transfer into adult life. In addition underachievement has profound effects on well-being, health, self-esteem and participation in a family and community life (DES, 2005:16).

For Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), interventions that occur outside of the home are the most valuable in developing both social capital and social mobility. In terms of educational development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the school is only a small part of a larger developmental network. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), Hayes et al. (2017), learning takes place in the midst of society and all of the people and places children come across have a profound influence upon them (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Education policy that neglects to include the family and the community fall in line with Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory, which implicates the school system as one that reinforces middle class values, whereby inequalities occur as a result of children from marginalised social backgrounds being ill equipped to recognise the perquisite values that the school promotes. Jenkins (1992: 104) suggests that pedagogic action such as formal schooling produces culture in all its arbitrariness and also promotes its own power relations, which underwrites its operation. This can be simplified to schooling being described as a system that reflects the interests of dominant groups or classes, which in turn
reproduces an uneven distribution of cultural capital. This concept can be equated to school being viewed as a microcosm of the wider social structure. The structural recognition of the importance and value of education is described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), as ‘symbolic mastery’ (Chapter 3, Section 3.5). During second level education the possession of such mastery is often implicit and inculcated within actions that occur within the family environment. It is through authoritative bodies in the school that the illusion of symbolic violence is exercised whereby the school legitimises the idea that it is neutral where it actually only facilitates the limited social mobility of members of the dominant class (Jenkins, 1992: 109).

The findings in this study revolve around a narrative that suggests that the HSCL operates in areas with high concentrations of poverty, and the relationship between disadvantage and educational outcomes is evidenced through low participation rates amongst families and a struggle to improve pupil attendance. HSCL coordinators in this study regarded their efforts at retaining pupils as being critical for marginalised young people to break through the socio-economic barriers that challenge the community. DES (2005a) suggests that to give marginalised children the best opportunities transferable skills are required to preparing pupils for work. This concept fits in with the idea that formal education systems operate with a hidden curriculum. According to Illich (1970), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Gatto (2005) and Gough (2006) to name but a few, the standard curriculum in most schools reflects the needs of industry thus rendering education as a means of perpetuating disparities that occur in the adult world (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). The educational philosophies that are observable in such curricula are accused of leaving students behind due to the competitive nature of public examinations; however policy tools such as the HSCL aim to give marginalised children and their families a better chance of competing with their middle class peers.

The perceived effectiveness of the HSCL can be regarded as a powerful measure in challenging the status quo of the delivery of education. Even though the findings in this research fail to provide evidence that a universal system of measurement exists, coordinators regard the HSCL as crucial in tackling the problems of disadvantage.
The HSCL provides a level of commitment from the DES (2015a, 2107) that recognises the existence of educational inequality is present in schools and plans are in place to address it. Cohen (1990) and Ball (2003) suggest that families from marginalised communities have a tendency to accept hierarchical divisions that have been cemented in place by the middle class and neoliberal policy influences (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). The HSCL has been presented by coordinators as a means of redistributing power back to families who would traditionally have been regarded as subordinate to school staff. The HSCL attempts to empower parents through the development of their own skills and their abilities to support and motivate their children whilst interacting on a more equal footing with school staff. Through the acknowledgment of the barriers that previously deterred marginalised parents from being comfortable in the school environment, a change in the functioning of schools is now present. Coordinators suggested that through the role of advocacy the reporting of issues that concern families are at least brought to the attention of the school staff. Similarly to Lipsky (2010), the bottom up approach that the HSCL is based upon, parents have a greater opportunity in influencing the school policies that affect their children (Chapter 3, Section 3.9).

When attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of the HSCL it is important to consider the more recent ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006). The person, process, context and time components of this theory are particularly pertinent to the findings in this research. From the person perspective it can be found that in many cases conscious decisions are made by parents to actively involve themselves in the HSCL scheme or not in many cases. For those that do, this demonstrates an understanding of the more long term objectives of the scheme. Contextually the HSCL appears to work well by drawing together responses from various bodies in order to provide supports for parents. From a time perspective, HSCL engages with families and children throughout school, therefore can be applied to Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s micro time and meso-time periods, as many interventions are implemented both within normal school hours over a specified period of time and outside of the school environment, which encourages long term changes in educational capabilities.
6.5.6 Summary

Policy direction within DEIS states that the HSCL should adopt a targeted approach to selecting participants (DES, 2005a, 2017). The findings in this research suggest that targeting is ineffective when tackling educational disadvantage in schools. As such, coordinators find it difficult to identify the most marginalised families due to the invisibility of modern poverty. In addition, there is fear of stigmatising those children and families that are most in need of the supports that the HSCL offers. As a consequence those least in need of additional educational supports disproportionately benefit. This however, does not align DEIS initiatives with the concepts found in Coleman (1966) and Ball (2005), who suggest that policy interventions to address educational inequality are futile (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). By providing the same supports to all families, regardless of their social class, the focus remains to give children and families greater opportunities post-Leaving Cert.

Despite almost all coordinators stating the importance of the attendance and retention, there is little evidence in this research to suggest that any other variable of educational outcome is considered. This research acknowledges the importance of retention; however it suggests that coordinators have difficulty in quantifying any other variables such as the rates of transition to further and higher education. Also a problem occurs when using the measures of retention rates, as many coordinators regard the lack of opportunities in localities a contributing factor when encouraging children to stay. The effectiveness of HSCL coordinators in creating and maintaining parent partnerships is an important indicator of the HSCL’s success. Whilst acknowledging the family focused and child centred focus of the scheme (Conaty, 2002), the child centred principle may be compromised as a result of HSCL coordinators being unable to only attribute pupils’ educational achievement to the presence of the HSCL.

Closely aligned to the measurement of success are the expectations placed upon children and families involved with the HSCL. As discussed above, the absence of clear benchmarks of success suggests that different expectations are placed upon children in DEIS schools than in more advantaged schools. Willis (1977) and Smyth
et al. (2011) found that children from lower socio-economic groups feel that less was expected from them. The findings suggest that lower expectations are not deliberately placed upon children from marginalised families, however it is felt by many coordinators that placing the same expectations upon children as those attending non-DEIS schools was unconstructive due to challenges faced by many families.

The aims of the HSCL are not being met in many areas. Creating learning environments within homes are reported as being a significant challenge with many coordinators. Time allocated to this role is consumed with advocacy issues and the courses intended to develop literacy and numeracy skills amongst parents are still poorly attended which suggests that the aims of the HSCL being able to empower parents remains a challenge.

The HSCL is effective in challenging the ways in which traditional school structures and learning processes favour only those from more privileged social backgrounds. Through the promotion of home and community involvement in children’s learning helps create a broader concept of inclusive education by providing a lens for coordinators to gain a greater understanding of families’ lived experiences. Both Illich (1970) and Bourdieu (1977, 1986) suggest that it is the interventions that occur outside of the formal school environment that are most effective and Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Hayes et al. (2017) suggest that social contexts outside of the school are just as important for development to occur (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.4). Through the ways in which the HSCL creates open and inclusive environment gives parents greater power and more confidence in their interactions with school staff, which challenges the traditional way in which power is exercised by institutions (Lukes, 1974; Hayward, 2000) (Chapter 3, Section 3.6).

This research finds that despite poor levels of parental involvement in many of the in-school courses, HSCL coordinators feel that the scheme in general is of great benefit. Most coordinators expressed that the scheme facilitates dialogue between
parents and the school and that every interaction make a difference. Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu (1977) still have relevance as this research suggests that school only approaches to tackle educational disadvantage are significantly less effective than policies that focus upon changing perceptions of the school, providing parents with the skills to help their children with school work and provide a platform for teachers to understand the lived experiences of marginalised parents.

6.6 Chapter Summary

The formal schooling system according to many including Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Gatto (1991) is an environment where often marginalised children and their families feel alienated from. In many cases it is the pupils that have the greatest levels of social capital that tend to achieve higher. The HSCL attempts to create an open and inclusive learning environment through the facilitation of educational and leisure based courses for parents. Also most schools equipped with the HSCL have a dedicated space within the school that is allocated for use by families (DES, 2005b). Encouraging families to participate in school based programmes, for many coordinators, remains problematic with coordinators reporting that a great amount of apathy still exists amongst disadvantaged families giving relevance to the concepts of Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who suggest that in many cases interventions that occur within schools do little to alleviate the problems associated with marginalisation (Chapter 3, Section 3.5).

The difficulty that schools experience in enticing families onto courses and the issues relating to inequality that surface during children’s formal lessons, are commonly attributed to issues that are occur outside of the school environment (Conaty, 2002; Des 2005a). Often coordinators within the classroom are ill equipped to deal with challenging emotional and behavioural problems and according to the respondents, coordinators feel frustrated as they cannot teach their specific subjects. Subject teachers have difficulty understanding the role of the HSCL teacher as well as the sociological underpinnings of educational inequality, which suggests that often teacher identities are at odds with those who they teach (Heinz, 2013; Keane and Heinz, 2013; Devine et al., 2013) (Chapter 3, Section 3.8). The HSCL is an effective
tool in countering educational inequality as it utilises a broad range of responses that
draws together multi-agency responses which target the root causes of disadvantage.
This is closely aligned with Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Epstein and Saunders (2006)
who suggest that there are many overlapping spheres that influence the educational
development of individuals.

When applying the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and
Morris, 2006; Hayes et al., 2017) to the HSCL, the home visits provide an
opportunity for pupils and parents to develop and learn in rich educational
environments outside of the formal school setting. DES (2005a, 2005b, 2017)
suggests that the family home should be adapted to a place of learning. To achieve
this, coordinators visit homes to promote the values of the school and develop
understandings of the benefits that families can bring to the educational development
of their children. Coordinators are however challenged in doing so, as much of their
time during home visits is dedicated to the provision of advocacy supports for
parents experiencing a wide range of problems. Many of these tasks, according to
the findings, go beyond the remit of the HSCL teacher’s role. Despite the complex
nature of home visits, they allow coordinators to view the lives and experiences of
whom they work with. The importance of being non-judgemental is key to this
element of the programme in order to avoid reinforcing cultural deficit in the
relationships that coordinators and parents share (O’Neill, 1992; Hanafin and Lynch:
2002; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) (Chapter 3, Section 3.8).

Within the Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the ways in which the exo-
system influences the educational development in marginalised locations is based
upon the individual’s and the school’s relationship with community (Chapter 3,
Section 3.7.4). The findings in this research suggest that this relationship is strong as
it provides valuable resources that schools cannot. For Midwinter (1980) the school
provides the most valuable mechanism for local regeneration due to school raising
the social capital of those engaged with the school. In addition, local community
partners being party to school activity creates a reciprocal relationship where there is
a seamless relationship between different learning communities (Chapter 3, Section
3.4.3). The ecological model is however somewhat challenged when creating and maintaining bonds with statutory agencies. Cooperation remains poor in most cases, with this research suggesting that the levels of joined up thinking between HSCL coordinators and agencies is tenuous.

Conaty (2002) and DES (2005a, 2005b, 2014, 2017) emphasise the importance of the HSCL being a targeted response to educational disparity (Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1). The findings however, suggest that those involved within the programmes various initiatives are not commonly targeted. Instead coordinators opt to offer the scheme to all in children and families. Such findings can be related to Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who suggest that school based interventions often disproportionately favour those who need them least. The motives for practicing this method of selection can however be regarded as necessary to avoid stigma amongst individuals and the difficulty of identifying poverty (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2). This is coupled with the suggestion that high concentrations of disadvantaged parents attend DEIS schools, which warrants a universal approach to selection.

The ambiguity of the implementation of the HSCL can be viewed by the ways in which educational achievement and the HSCL’s performance is benchmarked. This research concurs with previous evaluations of the HSCL (Archer, 2002) and (Weir 2014), who state that retention and attendance are the important measurements. Whilst acknowledging the importance of retention such measurement indicators are considered by coordinators to be the simplest to quantify. However, such performance indicators fail to take into account educational achievement of both children and parents who attend courses. In comparison the schools that have low proportions of marginalised families, such benchmarks would indicate lower expectations of children in DEIS schools as according to Kelleghan et al. (1995) the normal methods of measuring success are based upon exam results and transitions to employment and further education.
The HSCL can be described as an effective policy in terms of providing parents with the skills to advance their own children’s educational achievement. The biological model provides a useful means of observing learning processes that occur outside of the school. It provides an effective way of understanding parental engagement, choices, how social capital is developed and how it impacts children’s education. However, being unable to effectively target those who most need the support of the HSCL teacher and not being able to measure the educational outcomes of children, the success of the HSCL remains a question.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes this thesis by revisiting each of the chapters and summarising the key findings that provide answers to the central research questions. The aims of objectives of this thesis are reiterated and the strengths and limitations of this study are discussed. Whilst this research suggests that the HSCL is a positive development in terms of alleviating the effects of educational disadvantage, recommendations are made in order to improve and develop this area of integrated educational policy.

7.2 Aims and objectives

With poverty being cited as ever increasing (SILC, 2016), (EAPNI, 2017), the need for children to remain at school and achieve their full educational potential has never been greater. The formal school system is however limited in its resources to make a significant impact upon addressing educational inequality where it often originates. This gives relevance to integrated responses such as the HSCL which collaborates with families, community organisations and statutory agencies. The aims and objectives of this research were to explore the ways in which the HSCL programme challenges the issues relating to educational disadvantage. Through conducting semi-structured interviews with HSCL coordinators, this thesis sought to gather information regarding the various provisions for both children and families, whilst providing an often forgotten voice of the teacher.

In order to examine the effectiveness of the HSCL, in building partnerships with parents and the community four research questions required exploration:

- How the HSCL is implemented in Irish second level schools, as perceived by coordinators;
• What do HSCL coordinators regard the role of the home and the family to be within the HSCL partnership?

• How do HSCL coordinators understand the role that the community occupies within the school partnership model?

• What ways do HSCL coordinators perceive the programme as being effective?

7.3 Thesis Summary

The contextual nature of this research has focused upon the link between poverty and education. The concepts of education have been greatly broadened since the Investment in Education Report (1966), from an institution based upon the teaching and instilling of Catholic values to one of equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to fulfil the needs of a rapidly expanding Ireland as result of greater involvement in Europe. Despite the advent of an education system that was regarded as more inclusive, problems of the disadvantage were far from gone. Early school leaving in Ireland, amongst pupils from lower socio-economic groups remains an issue in Ireland and has inspired a significant body of research (Byrne and Smyth, 2010), (DES, 2013), Smyth et al., 2015). Early school leaving results from a number of causal factors which include: age variation within the classroom, poor levels of self-esteem, low motivation and limited support and resources within the home. This has been a focus for the DES for many years (NYCI, 2001). However, this coupled with high teacher to pupil ratios, compensatory measures to address the educational challenges that marginalised families encounter, has resulted in schools being limited in their responses (ASTI, 2017).

The relationship that exists between early school leaving and poverty in later life is widely recognised (EAPNI, 2016). Consistent poverty in Ireland, has almost doubled since 2008 (EAPNI, 2017). Education is regarded as making a crucial contribution to enhancing well being and quality of life. For Healy (2016) education is essential for creating a socially just Ireland and those who leave school early are more likely to be risk.
The Growing up in Ireland study has been of significant interest to this research as it has identified patterns in children’s educational development. As well as identifying more positive educational experiences for children from less marginalised social backgrounds, the survey highlighted the links between parental educational experiences and those of their children. In most cases, it is the mothers who demonstrate the most apparent correlation. From a policy perspective, both the Green Paper for Education (1992) and the White Paper on Education (1995) fail to consider the important role that families have in influencing their children’s educational outcomes, but instead focus upon tailoring the curriculum to equip children with skills for the labour market. It was not until the White Paper (1999) that the connection between family dynamics and educational achievement was recognised by the DES.

The HSCL programme has been designed to bridge the gaps between structural and individual causes of educational disparity. Through its ability to connect the school with families, local community partners and statutory agencies a sense of recognition and shared responsibility has been created which represents a departure from the school based compensatory responses to inequality which were previously used. The HSCL has five aims at its core which include targeting the pupils most at risk of failure, promoting collaboration, seeking to empower parents, improving retention and disseminating good practice. The need for integrated policies such as the HSCL is great, as much of the problems that lead to educational failure amongst young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are rooted outside of the school environment, so this where the policy initiatives need to be focused (DEIS, 2002a).

Chapter three presented the sociological concepts of education and the theoretical underpinnings of the various responses to alleviating the effects of educational inequality. Education has been described as a means of providing greater opportunities in adult life for many. However, Coleman (1966), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Gatto (1992) amongst others suggest that the formal education system favours those who already have an appreciation and aptitude for its core
principles. Others such as Dahl (1957) and Lukes (1974) suggest that schooling in most instances serves to forge power relationships between those who have the potential to make the largest economic contribution to society and those who are most likely to not achieve their full potential. They suggest that children from lower socio-economic groups are often uncomfortable in this environment. In contrast, their middle class peers tend to excel, and any school based interventions often disproportionately advantage those who need them least (Coleman, 1966). It is contended by Freire (1998), Bronfenbrenner (1979) that school policies should extend beyond the school environment and take on an ecological approach by including families and the broader community. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model has assisted in creating part of the theoretical lens in this research. The HSCL incorporates micro, exo and macro systems where a collaborative approach between the school, families and community partners is favoured.

This research focuses upon exploring how the HSCL is implemented. Substantial research has been carried out that emphasises the important role that parents hold in creating a learning environment within the home and being in a position to advance the educational development of children. Such approaches have proven to be fruitful in advancing more positive attitudes towards formal learning, empowering parents, boosting the self-esteem of marginalised families and creating more open and inclusive schools (Hornby, 2000). Such partnership models have received some criticism. It is suggested that the relationships built between coordinators and parents are usually structured upon the interest of the school and enforces compliance amongst whom the school engages with (Crozier, 2000).

Chapter three also explored the ways in which communities benefit the educational development of those within it. Learning communities are regarded as untapped reservoirs of human potential (Paz, 1990), where just as a child needs a healthy mind and body, a healthy community is also essential. A community that is occupied by individuals attached to the school develops social capital and achievement is considered by many as the most effective form of regeneration.
School policies designed to tackle disadvantage have often failed to consider the realities and experiences of disadvantaged parents. O’Neill (1992) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002) have demonstrated the need for teachers to be able to identify with the needs of the children and families who are attending the school. Integrated policies allow parents to view education through a different lens where the real causes of poor attendance and low achievement can be realised (Roberts, 1980). In turn with greater channels of communication between parents and the school, dialogue can take place which instils the importance of education and making parents aware of their capabilities thus raising the expectations of educational achievement amongst disadvantaged families.

Chapter four focused upon the methodological approaches used and the ways in which the findings intersect with the earlier chapters that focus upon policy and theory. This chapter explained the reasons why the use of a constructionist theoretical paradigm is most suitable for this research. Constructionism recognises multiple objective realities whilst still providing a relativist position and was decided to be the most appropriate means of presenting the multiple views held by HSCL coordinators in relation to their roles. Through carrying out twenty-four semi structured interviews with HSCL coordinators in cross section of DEIS schools across the country, the findings were thematically analysed.

Chapter Five provided a detailed account of the experiences of HSCL coordinators who work with marginalised families. This structure of this chapter corresponds with the central research questions in this thesis. The findings presented reflect on how coordinators understand their role as forming effective links between the school and the homes of families with whom they work. Such links serve to build bonds of trust and create a more welcoming and inclusive impression of the school environment. Coordinators also regard the scheme as being crucial in providing families with support, advice and the adequate skills to be a more positive influence in their own children’s educational development. This is attempted though the provision of courses that focus upon literacy and numeracy and some that provide an opportunity for parents to build relationships with other families in the school.
Courses that are explicit about their educational underpinnings are often unpopular with parents. Less threatening courses such as arts and crafts tend to have higher attendance. Other coordinators understand the role of the HSCL to be about changing not only the attitudes of parents towards education, but also creating a school wide understanding of the social problems associated with disadvantage. Without the role of HSCL coordinators would not understand or be able to identify emotional or behaviour concerns, which may be symptomatic of broader problems occurring outside of the school environment.

Section two of the findings chapter was concerned with how coordinators regard the home visitation component of the HSCL. Instead of coordinators being afforded the opportunity to promote the home as a place of learning, the home visit often involves providing assistance to families, which falls beyond the remit of the scheme. Advocacy is reported as being the predominant support provided by coordinators, where they are faced with a range of issues in assisting families. These include helping parents in situations of domestic violence, substance abuse and problems relating to mental health. In some cases, the integrity of coordinators is challenged when visiting homes. By reporting what they witness in the home, to the appropriate authorities, often jeopardises the relationship they have with parents, which in many cases takes time to establish.

The third section of chapter five presented the ways in which HSCL coordinators perceive the role in which the community plays within the educational development of marginalised children and their families. It was expressed by HSCL coordinators that the community provides educational and welfare supports to children and parents that the school cannot. With limited budgets, many schools are unable to fund courses that require expert tuition. However, local community organisations are often in a position to help financially or even have people with expertise in specific areas employed to deliver such programmes. Other coordinators suggested that the relationship between the school and the local community is one of a reciprocal nature, whereby an educated community has the potential to be vital in the social development of marginalised areas. While fruitful relationships were fostered
between the school and local and voluntary organisations, it was felt that this type of partnership does not exist with statutory bodies and agencies. It was expressed by many coordinators that there is a distinct absence of joined up thinking, where it was felt that there is understand lack of understanding surrounding the role of the HSCL and the lived experiences of disadvantaged families.

The final section within chapter five focused on the effectiveness of the HSCL. It was thought by interview participants that to effectively tackle educational inequality, the broader concepts of inequality need to be addressed simultaneously. Coordinators claimed that this cannot be achieved through school only policies which generally work towards the provision of compensatory initiatives. Despite coordinators recognising the integrated approach that is required when encouraging children and families to reach their educational potential, many coordinators benchmark the success of the program differently. For most, retention and attendance represented effective success indicators, as they are the most quantifiable. While for others success was seen as evident in the positive interactions that was generated between the school and the families involved in the programme. Being able to identify those that are at most of risk of educational failure is problematic for most coordinators. When selecting participants for the various HSCL initiatives targeted approaches are seldom used. This is due to the fear of creating social stigma and being unable to identify the signs of poverty in modern society. Therefore it is necessary to offer HSCL supports school-wide.

Chapter six discussed the ways in which the experiences evident in the findings in this research intersect with current and past policy commitments as well as the existing literature that relates to education and parental involvement. Traditional concepts of what the ‘school’ symbolised are regarded by Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu (1977) as ineffective in alleviating the effects of disadvantage. Many educationalists, such as Gatto (1991) and Ball (2003), suggest that the formal school system perpetuates the inequalities of the broader society. Others including Bowles and Gintis (1970) and Friere (1998) suggest that schools serve as effective mechanism for producing individuals to suit the needs of industry.
The implementation of the HSCL is dependent upon a number of factors which include: the level of understanding regarding the experiences of marginalised families and their ability to create a more open and inclusive environment that parents feel comfortable to occupy. This is an important element to the programme as traditional concepts of school often alienate parents from lower socio-economic environments due to their own negative experiences within the education process (Conaty, 2002). Through the HSCL’s focus upon parents, whilst being child centred (DES, 2005a), the facilitation of courses and designated spaces for parents are effective in creating open, friendly and inclusive environments. The reticence that parents demonstrate towards becoming involved in courses, which enable them to be of greater educational support to their children, suggests that a correlation exists between marginalisation and lower levels of self-confidence and self-esteem when interacting with the school.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) Bioecological model can be aligned with the concepts and practices of the HSCL scheme, and the home visitation component provides a link between the exo and micro systems. The need to visit the homes of disadvantaged children and families highlights that many of the factors which hamper educational development occur outside of the school environment. This highlights the need for education policy to address the problems associated with educational inequality at their point of origin DES (2002a). In creating a school-wide understanding of the effects of poverty, the home visit allows HSCL coordinators to view the realities of life in marginalised communities and communicate them to their colleagues. Without extending the role of schools into the home environment, often unconstructive assumptions are made regarding the commitment parents have in relation to their children’s education (O’Neill, 1992), (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). This research demonstrates that there is more to integrated policy responses than promoting the role of education. In most cases HSCL is ineffective in promoting the home as a place of learning and engage in advocacy services which fall beyond the role of the HSCL as specified by Conaty (2002) and DES (2005a, 2005b, 2017).
This research suggests that the role that the local community plays is vital to the operations of the HSCL. Coordinators are reliant upon local organisations for funding and the facilitation of courses for families. The funding allowance that is allocated to the HSCL scheme under the broader DEIS programme is often unavailable to coordinators. In turn, this places a greater requirement on coordinators to be thrifty and resourceful, which further illustrates the various ways ambiguity exists within the schemes delivery. The use of school facilities such as sports fields, classrooms and halls provide a means of binding the local community together. The ability of the school to create a healthy community is just as important as promoting healthy minds and bodies. The school being able to provide such resources in communities with little for young people to do are crucial, according to Coleman (1966) and (Paz, 1990). However, very few schools that are equipped with the HSCL have the facilities to bring this concept into fruition.

The final section of chapter six discussed the overall effectiveness of the HSCL in being able to effectively alleviate educational inequality. It suggests that the creation of an open and inclusive environment is effective in breaking down some of the barriers that have previously excluded marginalised families. As an alternative to employing a targeted approach to the selection of participants, which is specified by Conaty (2002), DEIS (2005a, 2005b), coordinators have adopted a school wide approach therefore disproportionately benefitting those who need additional support least. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that interventions in the school environment rarely advance the opportunity of those with lower levels of social capital.

The expectations that many coordinators have of children within marginalised schools appears to be low. Instead of using recognised measurements of success such as formal exam results (Kelleghan et al., 1995), improvements in grades or post-secondary school transitions, the use of attendance and retention remains to be the benchmark. Despite the role of advocacy not being listed as a core purpose of the home visit for many coordinators it is both the most important and challenging element of the programme. The Bioecological nature of the HSCL has proven to be
paramount in reducing the effects of educational inequality. The importance of parental involvement has been emphasised by Sheldon (2003), Epstein (2004), Harris and Goodall (2008) and the Growing Up in Ireland Study (2009) to name but a few. Though the overlapping spheres of influence that the HSCL provides, the scheme is regarded as an effective measure in reducing inequality in Irish second level schools.

7.4 A Last Word on Reflexivity

This research has provided new and deeper insights into the educational experiences of those children and families and from lower socio-economic communities. The prevalence of disadvantage in Ireland came as somewhat of a surprise, as this research has found that the traditional indicators of poverty are no longer effective.

The endeavours of many HSCL coordinators who contributed to this research are heart-warming. The ways in which they often go above and beyond their specified duties is a testimony to their commitment to helping the most vulnerable families in society. Many coordinators however, told of distressing stories that many would find unimaginable in terms of the conditions that children were growing up in. Such instances provided a different way of considering the choices that many families face. As with much of literature pertaining to the importance of parental involvement (Harris and Goodall, 2008), (Hornby and Lafealle, 2011), coordinators have suggested that very few parents express not having an interest in their children’s development.

When commencing this research it was expected that the findings would reflect the challenges which coordinators encounter when working with families and community groups. The greatest challenge that some coordinators face is convincing their colleagues of the importance of scheme. This was not anticipated as being such a common response. Through my own university education, studying humanities and social sciences, I have gained a broad understanding of sociological underpinnings and consequences of poverty. This has enabled me to connect better with those
whom I teach, through being able to identify and empathise with those students who experience hardship throughout their education.

7.5 Merits and Limitations

Considering the methods used in this thesis, this section reflects upon the merits and limitations of this study. One must exercise some level of caution in terms of the findings as the sample is relatively small and may not be reflective of the general opinion of the majority of coordinators working within DEIS schools. Also the areas represented in this research contained various levels of educational disadvantage so the questions posed to interview participants were more applicable to some. The benefit of using a small sample has proven to have advantages as it enabled the researcher to gather detailed and rich data surrounding the experiences of HSCL coordinators.

The data presented represents the voices of coordinators where they had an opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions and perceptions regarding parental attitudes to having greater involvement in their children’s education. It must be acknowledged that the actual opinions of parents may differ to the assumptions made by interview participants in this study. This research however seeks to express the experiences of coordinators only, as many studies such as O’Neill (1992), Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and GUI (2009) have presented the opinions and thoughts of both children and families.

This thesis contends that a quantitative study would not be appropriate as the thematic analysis found that often the richest information was provided through coordinators having the opportunity to digress and expand upon the interview questions. A larger sample may however have provided an opportunity to implement an additional quantitative method of data collection.
7.6 Contributions and Recommendations

This research finds that the need to include parental and community partnership is paramount, and the use of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological model is particularly applicable to the process of conceptualising and evaluating public policy. Policy of this nature indicates a commitment to these concepts, however the delivery of the many components of the HSCL often vary from the policy outlines (DES, 2002b). Often this is a result of the ambiguous nature of policy implementation, where teachers and HSCL coordinators are able to manipulate the various initiatives to best suit the needs that they serve. In other instances the magnitude of the problems that families endure are overwhelming to address.

7.6.1 Contributions and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In terms of the contributions that this study makes to policy, this research provides a valuable insight into the elements of the HSCL that are regarded as effective. Other research undertaken such as Archer (2003), GUI (2009) and Smyth et al. (2015) focuses upon the educational outcomes of children, whereas this research identifies key areas within the policy that are ineffective and inefficient.

The ability of the HSCL to create an inclusive school environment is difficult for HSCL coordinators. As such, the importance of providing courses and programmes to enhance parents’ ability to help their children is often overstated. DES (2005a, 2005b) suggests that the HSCL allows for a varied approach to the delivery of literacy and numeracy programmes. Courses that explicitly state their content and goals, such as the various maths and literacy classes, are poorly attended. According to coordinators these courses create apprehension amongst parents, often the expectation for parents to attend formalises the school structure, thus placing an emphasis on compliance with the rules dictated by coordinators (Crozier, 2009). A universal guideline may be of benefit, which seeks to involve parents with more functional duties within the school administration. Some coordinators report that parents co-producing school prospectuses and information booklets, assisted in developing valuable skills and a more involved role. Two respondents used such a
method of developing educational skills and in both cases achieved high rates of participation.

HSCL coordinators face a significant challenge when conveying the key concepts of the principles of the HSCL to other coordinators and the ways in which social inequality affects pupils. DEIS (2005a) makes reference to the detrimental effects of cumulative disadvantage and the causes of poor educational achievement which often lie outside of the school environment. This research suggests that the sociological underpinnings of disadvantage needs to be understood by subject teachers, not only by those who work in DEIS and parental contact roles. Shared training amongst all school staff may relieve the pressure upon HSCL coordinators schedule to provide more time to be spent working directly with families.

This research has found that the unstructured and ambiguous nature of the HSCL, allows coordinators autonomy when implementing the scheme. This has led to an absence of clear benchmarks in which to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy. As with Willis (1977), Lynch (1999) and Smyth et al. (2011), lower expectations are common amongst disadvantaged families and in some instances a result of the need for children to contribute to the household income or being unable to afford the costs of further education. Some coordinators explained that the reasons for lower expectations of children amongst families pertain to low levels of self-esteem. While acknowledging the measurement indicators presented in this research are important, as well as focusing upon attendance and retention, a greater focus on rewarding improved educational achievement is required. Such indicators are commonly found in schools which are not regarded as having high concentrations of marginalised pupils (Kelleghan et al., 1995). The findings suggested that only a minority of coordinators monitor school outcomes by ensuring that each child has options open to them upon leaving school.

Being able to promote the home as a place of educational development and to talk with parents in an environment where they are at ease are some of the crucial
elements of the home visitation component of the HSCL. The coordinators’ ability to do this is limited as a result of the non-educational roles that they fulfil, which in most cases exceed HSCL policy outlines (DES, 2005b). Most coordinators assist families in a range of advocacy issues ranging from counselling on mental health and addiction problems to referring families or children to social services when becoming aware of issues. This for many coordinators places them in an awkward situation, whereby referring families to statutory agencies or care teams can have the effect of undermining the relationships that they have worked hard to build. However, the welfare of children remains a priority. A greater appreciation for such roles needs to be present in practice guidelines as the existing directives (DES, 2005b, 2014) fail to present the full scope of duties that are undertaken.

### 7.6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This research has presented the views of HSCL coordinators with regards to the effectiveness of the HSCL. The justification for doing so is that other research including Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and GUI (2009) focuses upon children’s experiences and research conducted by Archer (2003) and Smyth et al., (2011, 2015) concentrates on educational practices and school retention. Adding the voices of HSCL coordinators to this body provides a new perspective which can contribute to this discourse.

To develop this research further, it is suggested that a parallel study be undertaken that explores how parents regard the operational aspects of the HSCL specifically. Parents’ attitudes to education in this study have been interpreted by HSCL coordinators; however they have been cautious regarding unconstructive generalisations, and express the need to be sensitive when describing their interactions. The voices of parents would add balance to this discussion by providing their views of the effectiveness of the HSCL.

With benchmarking being an issue within the HSCL and expectations of children being lower than those of children attending non-DEIS schools, this research
suggests that the use of a longitudinal study would provide a greater insight into the transitions marginalised children make into further and higher education and work force. This is recommended as without such a study coordinators find it difficult to quantify the performance of the HSCL other than through attendance and punctuality.

7.7 Final Remarks

It is widely recognised that formal schooling is limited in its ability to alleviate educational disadvantage. Disadvantage in general, occurs in all aspects of life and therefore needs to be tackled at its core. Through home visitations and a close relationship with community partners, a broader response can be utilised. The HSCL is an effective means of doing this due its integrated structure. The scheme does however fall short of being able to create a school-wide understanding of social inequality, being popular amongst families, expecting more from marginalised children and appreciating the non-educational assistance that teachers and HSCL coordinators provide. Despite this the HSCL is considered by this research to be of great consequence in alleviating the educational pressures that many families experience.
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Appendix 1

The Questions Posed to Research Participants.

1) What is involved in the role of a HSCL teacher /officer?
2) In your opinion, what is the main objective of the HSCL programme?
3) What is the profile of the families and children that you engage with?
4) How are HSCL participants selected in your school?
   - Are parents eager to become involved or is persuasion necessary?
5) In your opinion, do you regard the educational difficulties faced by some families as a result of a cycle of intergenerational inequalities?
   - Do you think the HSCL is an effective means of breaking such cycles of deprivation?
6) How does the HSCL support pupils in the classroom?
7) What types of courses are available for parents to participate in?
   - Do parents actively seek to become involved?
8) From your experience which types of classes gain the greatest levels of parental participation?
9) How would you categorise the home visitation aspect of the HSCL programme?
   - What do visits involve and are they viewed by parents as positive?
10) What is meant by the term ‘Community’ in the HSCL programme?
    - Who do you work with in the community?
11) Do you face any particular challenges when working with the various community partners?
12) What funding is allocated to the HSCL and how is distributed amongst the various initiatives?
13) How have the recent cuts in public spending impinged upon the HSCL programme?
14) Do you think that integrated education policies such as the HSCL programme are more effective than school only policies?
15) How is the success of the HSCL measured?
16) What changes or new initiatives has the presence of the HSCL led to in your school?
17) How would you define the term in ‘equality’ in relation to education?
18) In your opinion, has the HSCL or any of the other DIES initiatives led to reducing disadvantage in Ireland’s schools?
Appendix 2

Letter to Sent to all HSCL who were Listed with the Department of Education and Skills.

Name:
Address 1:
Address 2:
Address 3:
Address 4:

Date:

Dear:

As a PhD student studying at the National University of Ireland, Galway, I am writing to you in connection with my research thesis which seeks to evaluate the principles and effectiveness of the Home, School and Community Liaison programme in terms of its contribution to promoting equality within the Irish education system. My study draws upon developments in the Irish education system, which has impacted upon inequalities that occur in both the individual family sphere and within the policy environment. From my findings, I hope identify how integrated policy responses, such as the Home, School, Community Liaison programme, contribute to attaining greater participation and achievement within second level schooling.

As a Principal/Home, School, Community Liaison programme officer/teacher, your experiences and perceptions are very important in assisting me to evaluate the programme and its function in tackling inequality. For this reason, I would be grateful if you would agree to take the time to participate in an interview in which we will discuss your understanding and viewpoints of this initiative.
The interviews will be conducted by myself, Eamonn Furey, and should take approximately 45 minutes. I will be in touch to see if you are willing to participate and if so arrange a suitable time. A list of general areas for discussion is attached. No respondent will be identified in this study, anonymity is assured.

I understand that you work within a very busy schedule but would very much appreciate it if you could take the time to participate in the interview, as your opinions are very important.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Kind Regards

_______________________________________

Eamonn Furey
PhD Candidate in the School of Political Science and Sociology.
National University of Ireland, Galway.
Mob: 086 33 69 404
Phone: 091 495405
Email: e.furey2@nuigalway.ie
### Appendix 3

Thematic Categories used in NVivo

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