Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning during the primary school years

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Part 2 (A)
Case Studies & 2 (B)
Oral Language Workshops

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Executive Summary

Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning during the primary school years: a research study

Executive Summary

In November 2017, Marino Institute of Education (MIE) successfully tendered for a grant award commissioned by the National Parents Council and funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Parents Council (NPC) to study the processes of parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning in the primary school years. Part 1 consisted of a review of relevant national and international literature which was published in March 2019 (available at http://www.npc.ie/publications/books).

Part 2(A) called for the development of case studies of parental engagement in five primary schools in Ireland. The perspectives of key stakeholders were to be sought, including parents, teachers, children and other relevant participants. Part 2(B) of the research called for further engagement with the five case-study schools around involving parents with the new primary language curriculum (2015), and particular attention was to be given to homework which supports children's oral language and teanga ó bhéal (NCCA, 2017, p.16).

Key questions for the research team to explore were provided in the NPC tender document and those questions centred around what good parent-school partnerships look like, the role of homework in school and families' lives; how learn-ing experiences of children with special educational needs, children from disadvantaged communities, children with English as an additional language and children from minority ethnic groups may be supported better and how NCCA resources for parents and schools are currently being used. The language workshops provided for parents and schools looked chiefly at how homework could be improved for children and families. Each key question is briefly examined here -

Question 1: How do parents actively contribute to good parent-school partnerships with a particular focus on children's learning/education?

In keeping with the literature (Harris and Robinson, 2016; Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013; Kavanagh, 2013; Robinson and Harris, 2014), our data suggests that there may be a wide interpretation of the concept of parental involvement. Many of the activities identified do not take place in school, but rather, also in line with the literature (Benner and Sadler, 2016; Brooker, 2015), participants across the five case studies identified the importance of the home learning environment (HLE). The majority of parents clearly distinguished between formal and informal learning environments (school versus home) although in schools with heavy parental involvement this distinction became much more fluid but varied in the importance they attributed to their own role in these two distinct environments. Some parents saw curricular areas as important across the two learning environments while others saw play as most central to the HLE. Educational activities

that these parents contribute to outside of formal structures include teaching children to use money or read the clock (mathematical skills), practising good manners and appropriate ways of interacting with others (social skills), getting out into natural environments playing sport or games outdoors (physical / motor skills and health / wellbeing) and playing together (multiple benefits, particularly oral language skills). Participants across the case studies emphasised the importance of talking and ongoing conversation for children's development, as well as the importance of parents' interest in and positive attitudes towards school andlearning.

Despite these commonalities across the five case study schools, significant differences were also evident in how parents understand their role in children's education and thus in the home learning environments that children experience. These differences revolve significantly around socio-economic disadvantage, which seems to lower parents' confidence in engagement with their children's school and their perception of their own role in children's education. Thus, parents experiencing disadvantage do not necessarily engage less in their children's education but they attribute less value to their own role therein. This is congruent with a finding by Lareau (2000) who noted that parents marginalised by poverty tend to see what goes on in school as being outside their level of expertise: "They are ideologically inclined to view school and home as separate spheres" (p.xii).

Other key issues that arose in relation to parents' contribution to their children's education include boundaries around parents' engagement in formal education (school based activities), privacy and respect for others; involvement in Parents' Associations, where again the issue of boundaries and power imbalances arose; and the particular involvement needed by parents of children with special educational needs.

Question 2 - How do the schools support parents' involvement in their child's educational journey?

From the research, it emerges that schools' support of parental involvement in their children's education revolves primarily around relationships and establishing a welcoming ethos. To this end, physical access, communication and approachability were identified as core elements. School leadership was seen as crucial in terms of creating and nurturing relationships and environments where parents feel welcome and are thereby motivated to want to contribute to the life of the school. Understanding the particularities of parents' contexts also

emerged as a pre-requisite to supporting parental involvement in that schools.

Also important are physical structures such as parents' rooms and parents' access to the school (at drop-off or pick-up times for example). The idea of a community emerged. This finding knits in with Epstein's (2009) move away from the term 'parental involvement' to school, family and community partnership' recognising the embeddedness of children's learning. It is important to note that while core aspects such as the importance of ethos, atmosphere and relationship were consistent, understandings as to their meaning and the mechanisms that support them differed. For example, while all parents in all schools recognised the centrality of importance of the Principal, how the relationship 'looked' or was constructed and manifested itself differed across schools.

Question 3: How is homework designed to promote a partnership between school, child and parents?

The research suggests, in line with the literature, that parents and school personnel are particularly divided on the issue of homework and its role in children's education. Homework appears to be associated with considerable stress regardless of children's dispositions and academic abilities. The question of homework is evidently a very important one, not only due to the influence it has on families' lives but due to its highly contested and emotive nature.

Perhaps the most significant finding in relation to homework is the diversity of views on its efficacy in children's learning and the diversity of experiences that revolve around homework in children's homes. Parents and teachers hold particular values around homework that relate to their views not only on how children learn and what type of learning homework should help to develop but also how much of children's lives should be taken up by formal educational/academic activities, speaking to concerns of the 'colonisation of the home' by formal education. Consequently, contentious and in some cases entirely contradictory views on homework dominate the five case studies.

A thematic analysis of homework points to a series of important factors in opinions and experiences of homework. The dominant themes relate to the nature of homework, including type, amount and time limits; the purpose of homework, including the particular intentions for skills development and type of learning, in-home communication around children's learning and ability to monitor progress, as well as notions

of bonding and encouraging specific values and routines; the role of the individual, including teacher views, training and expectations, parental values and children's personalities; the experience of homework and its related difficulties; specific approaches to and strategies for setting homework and supporting its completion in the home; and finally, the implications of the neglected status of children's views and opinions, including their role in consultation, teachers' and parents' recognition of children's experiences of homework and providing children with choice. A particularly important finding is that one of the key functions of homework is identified to be to involve parents in their children's learning. Thus, the fact that homework feels mostly stressful to parents does not warrant positive involvement in learning and may therefore not function as the best tool for parental involvement in children's education, at least not unless it is set in ways that parents can engage with it in more enjoyable and less stressful ways.

Another key finding that emerged is that choice is crucially important to children's experiences of homework. Children need to feel in control and to feel motivated, which is facilitated by them having a choice in relation to the when, where and what of homework. It is therefore a most striking observation across the schools that there appears to be very little concern with children's opinions. Thus, despite parents and teachers discussing homework as experienced as stressful by many children, no parents or teachers spoke of consulting children on their views on homework. The only evidence of children having influence is in School 2 where children can write to the Principal each June asking to have a month free of homework and these children were also asked to complete a survey on homework. Thus children may be able to choose when they do their homework, or which book to read, but 'choice' does not extend to giving children a genuine voice in or influence on their homework. Due to a more subtle finding that partnership must be employed to appropriately differentiate homework or target it at children's preferred learning styles, this lack of recognition of children as important to such partnerships is somewhat worrying and contradicts another key finding, namely that homework plays an important role in teaching children to take responsibility for their own learning. A key finding in relation to homework is thus perhaps that the values, beliefs and purpose associated with it are incongruent with its practical reality, which undermines its value. Edwards and Warrin (1999) write of the colonisation by formal education of the home, a point also made by Gray (2015) in her analysis of the effect of the decline in children's free play time. The research findings presented here give testimony to such views on homework and its role in 'colonising' family life.

Question 4: How do schools support, learn from and build on the home learning environment?

The current research identified a range of innovative and effective approaches used by schools to effectively engage with parents that the literature identifies as at risk of marginalisation – where children have special educational needs, where families are disadvantaged, or where the language and / or culture of the home does not match those of the school. The common thread underlying all of the individual approaches was a strong proactive focus by schools on relationship building, development of trust over time, and respect for individual families' 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). Among the successful approaches in support the HLE used in the case study schools were:

- Home visits

- Mediating information for parents with literacy difficulties or those for whom the language of the school was not the language of the home.

- Sharing school resources with the home e.g. books, educational games etc.

- School community activities focused on sharing home culture/traditions with other families and staff.

- Flexible approaches to homework and supporting parental decisions around homework.

- Engaging families in the process of creating Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs

- Use of technology to bring the home learning environment into the classroom.

- Provision of workshops, courses, support materials on topics and techniques being used in school which could be supported in or supportive of the home learning environment.

Question 5: What strategies do schools find most effective in enhancing partnerships with parents, especially parents of children who may need extra support in primary school - children with Special Educational Needs, children from disadvantaged communities?

Again, as with Q2, the centrality of 'relational' was witnessed in participants' responses. It is not necessarily the strategies in themselves that are potentially successful, but rather the ethos or the 'feel' of the school that underlies them. With respect to strategies, a key message to emerge from the study is that 'parents' are not a homogenous group, so a wide range of strategies must be sensitively employed in the hope of reaching different parents in different ways. With regard to schools with DEIS designation, the role of the home school community liaison officer was clearly important and the parents' room offered an opportunity to create a space for parents and for their involvement. School leadership was crucial in supporting children who experience disadvantage in variety of forms and, those with additional needs. In terms of the latter, the importance of supports and feeling supported especially resonated. It is essential to note, that while some parents were enthused and very much wished to be engaged with and within the school, for other parents this was not their preference. This heterogeneity must be respected lest 'parental engagement' be foisted on parents who may view this as an additional stressor rather than a positive initiative.

Question 6: What resources developed by NCCA are being used to support parents and how are they useful? If they are not used, what is the reason for this?

School personnel and parents were shown a number of resources for parents from the NCCA and NPC. People were asked whether they are aware of them and use them. The schools vary in their engagement with and use of such materials. Except for a few parents who have seen them and some who have found them useful, the majority of parents are not aware of these resources or do not remember whether they have come across them, suggesting that they have not engaged extensively with them. The most used resources are Aistear, STen scores/standardized testing and information on the curriculum. The other resources were not used or known. Participants suggested a number of reasons why such resources are not used extensively. Some Principals and teach-

ers simply were not aware of the resources and therefore for good reason did not use them. The inspector interviewed for the research made an interesting observation in this regard, namely that the NCCA needs to do much more to link with parents and raise awareness of their work and resources by linking in better with schools and parents. In fact, the inspector believed that the NCCA has an important role to play in educating or raising awareness amongst parents with regards to the nature and benefits of playful learning. The inspector observed that many teachers are embracing more playful learning approaches but that parents do not always understand such approaches.

Findings from the case studies phase (Part 2 A) of the research are therefore encapsulated as follows: the importance of schools having pro-active approaches towards relationship building with families; the significant role of the Principal as relationship builder and generator of positive school ethos; the need for sensitive, individualised approaches towards acknowledging families' differing needs and capacities and the role of schools in helping parents to value the educational potential of play, to have confidence and language to express their educational role, and to understand the importance of limiting technology use; schools needing more guidance in how to use homework more effectively in supporting parental involvement in children's education and learning.

Part 2(B) of the research study: Language workshops and follow-up consultations with children, parents and teachers

In part 2(B) of the research study, a series of language workshops were held at four of the five schools that engaged in the case studies. An additional school, where the language workshop was piloted, was added. The purpose of the language workshops was to support parental involvement in meeting the learning goals of the primary language curriculum (2015). Arising from the content shared and discussed at the workshop, parents were invited to trial a two-week alternative-to-homework project which comprised dialogic story-reading and various oral language games and activities. At the end of the two-week trial period, children, parents and teachers re-convened through a series of interviews and focus groups to discuss their experience of the trial. Findings and recommendations arising from those interviews and focus groups are considered next.

Summary of findings in relation to the language workshop

Children

The data revealed that children repeatedly and in large numbers, reported enjoying the increased time that parents spent with them. Children loved the interactive nature of the alternative homework. It "drew them in". The oral language games seemed to prompt great fun and engagement. Parents and children loved playing games, practising their reports on the weather for school and doing interviews. This was repeated throughout the data and across schools. The books chosen for the workshop were enjoyed very much by the children and were considered to be funny. Children liked having choices around homework. They loved having a choice of books to read and a choice of language games to play. It "made them feel like they had something to offer, they were able to offer an opinion," and "The choice of stories, even the games, it was all about choice so she had bought more into it because of the choice".

Parents

Many parents described the games they played, the books they read and the new words explored in journal entries. It was clear that there was huge 'buy-in' and project fidelity during the two-week trial homework period. Many parents, although they greatly enjoyed the new approach to homework, did not see it as sustainable because of the increased time, engagement and energy demanded of them. It was clear from reading journal entries that families spent much more time playing games and exploring the language activities than was intended by the research team. They did this because their children were enjoying the experience but it may have exhausted parents. Parents thought the alternative homework could be introduced at intervals throughout the year, "maybe during the winter months."

Teachers

The language workshop acted as a prompt for teachers to re-focus on oral language and to re-consider their approach to homework. Teachers across all schools noticed that "there was more input from home"; parents were more involved than usual in their children's homework for the duration of the project. There was little or no evidence in the data that teachers were interested in a radical overhaul of homework. There was,

however, evidence of some good homework practice in place such as project homework, P.E. homework, use of interviews with family and neighbours, setting weekly homework to give children choice in deciding when to do homework and giving one subject per night instead of a number of subjects. Some teachers, when asked what supports they would like to facilitate more interactive homework practices, suggested that a suite of oral language games and activities suitable for homework activities be provided for teachers as a resource, perhaps in the form of a booklet. Teachers across all schools thought that regular homework could be periodically shelved, say, once a term, in favour of 'alternative' homework.

Recommendations that arose from the language workshop phase (part 2 B) include the following -

- Additional opportunities could be provided for parents and teachers to discuss how to support children's language development in the home. This could begin with a conversation about homework

- Although there is evidence of good homework practice in schools, there is a need for national guidance on homework in relation to time, content and method that suits children best, according to research in the field

- Schools need to review homework policies and to ensure a whole-school approach is applied in relation to homework

- Entertaining and interactive oral language games and activities should be incorporated into children's homework

- In planning homework, schools might take into consideration the demands on children's time to do planned activities outside of school and the importance of outdoor free play opportunities for young children

- Schools might consider removing homework from junior infant classes with the exception of story-time/reading to/with children

- Colleges of Education might consider a module on parental involvement in their children's education and to include a focus on homework in the module. This is already happening in some Colleges of Education.

- Schools need to consider the multiple demands on parents' time in reflecting on how best to provide support to parents. This may include providing a suite of opportunities for parents to engage with the school, for example via digital media, face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and use of written notes. In terms of time, schools might consider facilitating occasional early morning or evening meetings as well as school- time meetings. This may be in addition to the traditional parent-teachermeetings.

- Consider extending the role of HSCL beyond five years to allow for relationship building. While acknowledging the extensive budgetary implications, consider access to a similar scheme for non-DEIS schools.

Over-arching recommendations in relation to the Case Study research in schools and the language workshops

The executive summary concludes with nine overarching recommendations, which emerge from both phases of the research project. The recommendations in relation to homework are listed separately above. The other eight recommendations follow here -

Recommendation 1:
Schools should focus on relationship-building in developing their strategies for parental involvement, engagement and partnership. They might consider the subtle messages of welcome (or lack thereof) that are inherent in policies, logistical arrangements and modes of communication. Boundary setting needs to focus on the creation of safe, welcoming spaces for all stakeholders where productive engagement can be fostered, and not on exclusion of any parties.

Recommendation 2:
Strategies to encourage parental involvement, engagement and partnership need to recognise the different capacities, needs and availability of different families. Schools might identify and offer a variety of approaches, options for engagement and levels of engagement so that parents can get involved in a manner that is feasible and sustainable both for them and the school. School staffs need to proactively counter deficit models of parents who, for whatever reason, are not in a position to get involved, whether those models come from other school personnel or from other parents.

Recommendation 3:
When children experience special educational needs, parents may experience additional stressors and so may require additional supports and stronger communication from schools. Schools need to endeavour to facilitate a child-centred approach to meeting needs where SEN is in question, in partnership with parents and other relevant professionals.

Recommendation 4:
When engaging with parents living in poverty or at risk of marginalisation, schools need to be aware that such parents may underestimate their capacities for supporting their child's learning. Strategies to promote parental involvement should target parents' self-efficacy beliefs with regard to their role in educating their child, and identify the skills parents do have.

Recommendation 5:
Schools can be commended for their culturally inclusive approaches to working with parents with regards to their children's education. Such approaches must be maintained and important lessons can be learned by schools currently less experienced in cultural inclusion. A variety of means of communication are currently being used in reaching out to parents for whom English is an additional language, or who have minority ethnicities, and this important work must continue and be adopted by all schools. A variety of languages and cultures should be visible within school settings and practices.

Recommendation 6:
School Principals, generally lauded by participants in this research study, must recognise the crucial role they play in setting the tone for parental involvement in their schools, for better or for worse, and whether this role is acknowledged or not. School leadership teams need to audit all school policies, logistical arrangements and methods of communication for practices that may inadvertently exclude parents. Equally they should encourage practices that create messages of welcome, and a sense that parents have a place inside the school walls.

Recommendation 7:
Schools need to think about structural and logistical features that invite or discourage parental involvement. Parents' Associations may offer one valuable form of parental involvement, but they should not be the only option a parent has for communication with the school.

Recommendation 8:

Many schools use times of transition (children starting/changing school or moving class, for example), as good opportunities to establish positive relationships with families. This needs to be widespread practice across all schools. Working in partnership with preschools may be a useful approach.

Background

In November 2017, Marino Institute of Education (MIE) successfully tendered for a grant award commissioned by the National Parents Council (NPC) and funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to study the processes of parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning in the primary school years. Part 1 consisted of a review of relevant national and international literature which was published in March 2019 (available at http://www.npc.ie/publications/books). Here we provide a final report on Part 2 of the research. Part 2(A) called for the development of case studies of parental engagement in five primary schools in Ireland. The perspectives of key stakeholders were to be sought, including parents, teachers, children and other relevant participants.

Part 2(B) of the research called for further engagement with the five case-study schools around involving parents with the new primary language curriculum (2015), and particular attention was to be given to homework which supports children's oral language and teanga ó bhéal (NCCA, 2017, p.16).

For the case studies, the following key questions were posed to guide the research:

1. How do parents actively contribute to good parent-school partnerships with a particular focus on children's learning/education?
2. How do the schools support parents' involvement in their child's educational journey?
3. How is homework designed to promote a partnership between school, child and parents?
4. How do schools support, learn from and build on the home learning environment?

5. What strategies do schools find most effective in enhancing partnerships with parents, especially parents of children who may need extra support in primary school - children with Special Educational Needs, children from disadvantaged communities, children with English as an Additional Language, children from ethnic minorities?
6. What resources developed by NCCA are being used to support parents and how are they useful? If they are not used, what is the reason for this?

For Part 2(B), the language seminars, an overarching question, followed by seven key questions, was posed to guide the research, as follows:

Overarching question: How can the key messages from the literature review inform schools' work with parents and, in particular, in helping their children's oral language (teanga ó bhéal) development?

1. How are the schools currently using homework as a way of supporting children's oral language (teanga ó bhéal) development as presented in the new primary language curriculum?
2. Through working collaboratively (teachers and teachers, teachers and parents), what types of oral language (teanga ó bhéal) homework activities do the schools and parents design for use as part of the research?
3. How do these 'new' homework activities linked to oral language (teanga ó bhéal) differ from the types of homework activities previously used by the schools? How do these differ across the four classes from Junior Infants to second class?
4. What are children's thoughts on these 'new' homework

activities? What are parents' thoughts? What are teachers' thoughts?

5. What are the impacts, if any, of the 'new' homework activities on children's experience of homework? On parents' experience of homework? On teachers' experience?

6. What types of supports, if any, would schools welcome in order to support them in planning more engaging, interactive and real-life homework activities with thechildren?

7. What types of supports, if any, would parents welcome in order to support them in helping their children to develop their oral language (teanga ó bhéal) through fun and interactive experiences athome?

The tender document directed that the final report was to include a description of the strategies and information that schools use in their partnerships with parents to support parents in their role as educators. It was to describe how the richness of families' experience was captured, acknowledged and integrated in schools' work to enhance learning for everyone in the school community and it was also to indicate whether NCCA resources for parents were being used by schools.

These questions form the basis for the structure of this report on Part 2 of the research. We now outline how this work was executed with regard to methodology, sampling and data analysis. We then outline key findings, and analyse their significance using the Person- Process- Context-Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) framework. Thus we draw conclusions and develop recommendations for positive approaches to the development of parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning during the primary school years. This report builds on and develops the Initial Report submitted in June 2018 and the Interim Report submitted in November 2018.

Methodology

Case Studies.

Part 2(A) of the current research called for case studies of parental involvement, engagement and partnership to be completed in five Irish schools from the perspectives of children, parents, teachers, and other relevant individuals. In order to achieve this, we used qualitative methodologies within a Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner and Morris,2006) model, whereby each of these factors and the complex ways in which they interact are considered – relationships ('process'), the 'person' him or herself, the 'context' in which these interactions take place, and the 'time' at which they take place both personally and socio-culturally. The PPCT model has directed the design of the current research throughout, from provision of a structure for critical analysis of the literature on parental involvement, engagement and partnership (Part 1), to construction of the research instruments, to presentation of findings. It is also applied to understandings and recommendations developed.

Methods.

According to Mukherji and Albon (2011), a case study is not a method, but rather an approach within which a variety of data collection methods can be used. The data generated within the current research was drawn from focus groups and interviews (telephone or face- to- face) as well as observation of settings and analysis of relevant artefacts such as documents and web-sites. Data were also drawn from analysis of children's art work, and of secondary data from the Growing up in Ireland (GUI) study. These are well-established methods, often used within a case study approach

(Mukherji and Albon, 2011) as well as within other qualitative methodologies (Patton, 2005). In particular, participatory drawing has been identified as a highly efficient and ethically sound research strategy that is suited for work with children and young people across a variety of cultural contexts (Kiely, 2017; Literat, 2013).

Development of topic guides. In advance of conducting the interviews and focus groups, semi-structured 'topic guides' (Barbour, 2008) were developed. In order to ensure that the data gathered were sufficient to provide answers to the research questions, significant attention was given to the development of appropriate questions. We began by identifying key themes that emerged from the literature review conducted as Part 1 of the current research, as well as those from the NCCA / NPC Call for Tender. Appendix 1 shows the themes in question. Under each theme, the Principal investigators then individually identified appropriate questions for each group (children, teachers, parents, Home-School-Community- Liaison [HSCL] coordinators and Principals). The questions were then combined and audited to ensure that clear, plain language was used and leading language that could potentially bias the responses was avoided. The themes were then merged for each group, creating specific topic guides for children, teachers, parents, HSCL coordinators, inspectors andPrincipals.

These were subjected to critical review by the research team and agreement was reached on the final set of questions. They were then informally piloted with individuals outside of the core sample and adjustments made accordingly. According to Barbour (2008), this preparation is vital to get the most out of qualitative methods, and it particularly bears

fruit on analysis of data, facilitating an interrogation and contextualisation of data rather than simply plucking out random themes from statements byparticipants.

All interviews began with general 'ice-breaker' questions about participants (e. g. "tell me about the school") to ease them into the interview process, as recommended by Mukherji and Albon (2011), before proceeding to the substantive issues. While these topic guides were used to support participants in their explorations of parental involvement in both the interviews and focus groups, this research was also guided by participants in identifying important topics for discussion. This approach is advocated by Silverman (2013) who indicates that topic guides should be 'semi-structured', allowing participants to reflect upon issues relevant to them. Thus, the topic guides provided prompts and direction to the data collector, who then responded to the participants' insights and ideas to explore the topic of parental involvement, engagement and partnership. This flexibility allowed for a more fluid approach, facilitating comfortable discussion on all of the predicted themes and the emergence of further themes not initially predicted by the literature. All topic guides are included in Appendix 2.

Sampling.

As with many qualitative approaches, identification of participants in this research was not randomised, but rather was chosen to meet a number of pre-specified criteria. Non-randomised, purposive selection of participants is common in research outside of the positivist tradition (Barbour, 2008). Five schools were identified to take part in the case study section of the research, facilitated by MIE's comprehensive network in Irish education, and well-established relationships with a wide range of schools through research and practice links. One of the schools was identified by the National Parents Council (NPC) through their previous work on 'Partnership Schools'. While these schools were chosen as sites of positive practices with regard to parental involvement in the professional opinion of the researchers, it should be noted that the research investigates experiences that are perceived as 'positive' and 'negative' by participants. They are not merely case studies of 'good practice', but rather a 'warts and all' exploration of experiences of parental involvement, engagement and partnership from the perspectives of parents, teachers, Principals, HSCL coordinators and children associated with the case study schools. This was then supplemented by insights from the inspectorate and the GUI dataset.

The selected schools were chosen with the need to represent a range of settings in mind, allowing for analysis of the influence of context on the different needs, strengths and challenges and appropriate responses with regard to parental involvement, engagement and partnership. As appropriate with a case study methodology (Mukherji and Albon, 2015), it is not intended that our findings should be viewed as statistically representative of experiences in Irish education as a whole, nor that the findings are generalisable. Rather, they provide in- depth understanding of experiences in particular contexts that allow insight into specific dynamics in the relationships between home and school which may be transferable once adapted for other contexts. In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, the schools are not referred to by name.

School 1.

School 1 is located in a suburb of a large city, in an area that has traditionally experienced extensive poverty, marginalisation and social challenges. It has DEIS Band 1 status, and so has access to the HSCL scheme. It is a mixed junior school, serving boys and girls from Junior Infants to second class, under the patronage of the Catholic Diocese. The schools serves a diverse population of children and families in terms of ethnicity, in particular members of the Travelling community. Parents are offered a number of opportunities to be involved in the life of the school, particularly with regards to literacy and numeracy, and many parents work directly with children in classrooms on various initiatives and programmes. There is a parents' room and parents can avail of educational classes on site.

School 2.

School 2 is located in a large provincial town, and is under the patronage of Educate Together. It has DEIS Band 2 status, and so has access to the Home-School- Community-Liaison (HSCL) scheme. It is a mixed, vertical school, with a preschool also onsite. The school has a parents' room onsite, an active Parents' Association, and various initiatives to promote parents' engagement with the school. These include the use of technology to facilitate communication between home and school, educational classes for parents and a tea / coffee morning in school for parents every Friday. The school serves a very diverse population of children and families, in terms of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background and language.

School 3.

School 3 is a small, rural, mixed, vertical school. The principal holds a fulltime administrative position. There are three

special education teachers. There are no composite class-es. Families served by the school are almost all indigenous Irish, and the school population is relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background (middle- class) and language. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Diocese. It has an active Parents' Association.

School 4.
School 4 is located in a large provincial town, and caters for children with moderate, severe and profound learning dis-abilities and / or autism from 4-18 years under the patron-age of a religious order. It follows the curriculum identified in the National Guidelines for pupils with moderate, severe and profound learning disabilities, rather than the general application of the Primary School Curriculum in the other case study schools. Parents collaborate with teachers and a multi-disciplinary team in the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for their children. Daily communi-cation between home and school is facilitated through the use of communication diaries, and parents are particularly involved in supporting their children to settle into school, sometimes working alongside teachers in classrooms. The-school has an active Parents' Association which is supple-mented by an additional 'Action Team Partnership' (ATP). The aim of the ATP (http://www.npc.ie/primary/partner-ship-schools-ireland) is that parents, teachers and the wider school community would work together, in equal partner-ship, to improve educational outcomes for children. In the context of School 4, the ATP is currently working to make improvements needed on the school building and ground in order to improve the children's learning environment.

School 5.
School 5 is a Gaelscoil located in a suburb of a large city. All education takes place through the medium of Irish, and the school places a strong emphasis on partnership with parents. Irish language classes are provided on-site for par-ents. It is a mixed, vertical school under the patronage of the Catholic Diocese. The children and families served by the school are almost all indigenous Irish, and the school population is relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background (middle-class) and language.

Participants.
Once the case study schools were identified, they were in-vited to participate in the research. When Principals and Boards of Management gave consent, we then proceeded to identify the specific participants who would take part. The research team relied on school Principals as 'gate-keepers' to access participants and arrange logistics. Principals dis-tributed consent forms to teachers, parents, children and HSCL coordinators. Younger children were given letters ad-dressed to their parents, although they were given the op-portunity to verbally confirm or rescind permission given by their parents later, and all children's 'assent' was negotiated on an on-going basis throughout the research process (see section on Ethical Considerations on page 33). Older chil-dren were given two letters, one addressed to their parents and one addressed directly to children themselves. Consent was sought from parents for their children to take part in the research, and parents were asked to include their own.

Table 1: Case Study Participants

Location	Group	Format	Number of participants
School 1	Children	Focus group	8
School 1	Parents	Focus group	4
School 1	Parents	Interview	1
School 1	Teachers	Focus group	8
School 1	HSCL	Interview	1
School 1	Principal	Interview	1
School 2	Children	4 Focus groups	16
School 2	Parents	Focus group	3
School 2	Parents	Individual interviews	10
School 2	Teachers	Focus group	4
School 2	Principal	Interview	1
School 3	Children	Focus groups	12
School 3	Parents	Focus group	5
School 3	Teachers	Individual interviews	3
School 3	Principal	Interview	1
School 4	Children	Individual interviews	9
School 4	Parents	Individual interviews	6
School 4	Teachers	Individual interviews	4
School 4	Principal	Interview	1
School 5	Children	Focus groups	26

As part of the focus group process, children were asked to draw a picture relevant to the research e. g. a picture of themselves doing their homework. All interviews and focus groups were anonymised through the provision of a code for each school and for each participant. They were then translated where necessary and transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

Data Analysis and Analytic Strategy.

The data analysis process began by holding a two-day workshop facilitated by QSR International to support the research team in developing a data analysis strategy using NVivo software. This software allows codes to be assigned to segments of data electronically, so that all stages of the analytical process are traceable. Another half-day workshop was facilitated by QSR International at the half-way point of data analysis to ensure appropriate progress and planning.

All of the data underwent rigorous and multi-layered coding and analysis to afford it due thorough examination and richness. The data analysis process consisted of five layers or phases. As data were collected, they were anonymised and inputted into NVivo. The first step in analysis was to code all the data. The data were first scanned for general or broad nodes that created the basis for coding. Once an appropriate number of general nodes had been identified, sub-nodes were created and all the data were coded according to both the general and the sub-nodes. Secondly, once all the coding was completed, a category was created for each of the six research questions, in NVivo, and relevant nodes were matched to each question. Thirdly, once all the relevant nodes were matched to the questions, a case study approach was taken to data analysis so that the coded and matched data were analysed with regards to trends emerging for each school and for each stakeholder category within each school. Thus for each research question, answers are provided by exploring each school's situation with regards to that research question by looking at the perspectives of the Principal, teachers, HSCL coordinator, parents and children, respectively, within that school.

Fourthly, once the case studies were analysed accordingly, key themes emerging for each question were identified and further explored in the coded data. Lastly, once the final thematic analysis had been conducted for each question, the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model was applied to the thematic analysis and provided the final layer of analysis, leading to conclusions and recommendations. Thus, the analytical strategy can be summarised as follows:

8. Identification of codes and coding
9. Coding matched to the six research questions
10. Case study analysis from stakeholder perspectives
11. Thematic analysis
12. PPCT analysis (theoretical framework)

Language Workshops

Part 2B of the research called for the delivery of workshops to support parental involvement in meeting the learning goals of the primary language curriculum (2015). The methodology for the workshops section replicated that of a parent-child dialogic story reading project called The Storytime Project (Kiely, 2017), which aims to empower parents to support children's oral language development and reading. The workshop shared information with parents about the primary language curriculum; it described how to engage in a dialogic approach to story-reading and it provided examples of oral language activities that can be practised in entertaining ways in the home. These activities fulfil some of the aims of the primary language curriculum as well as providing a context for parents and children to interact with one another around learning activities in an informal way. The workshop itself followed dialogic principles in that parents were invited to collaborate by contributing ideas, giving their views on homework practices in their children's schools and on homework practices they would like to see in their schools. They also got an opportunity to explore some of the story choices that their children were to be offered as part of an alternative–to-homework project. The workshop facilitated parents to trial this new approach to homework, for a two-week period, based on developing their children's oral language. Each of the participating schools agreed to abandon 'traditional' homework for a designated two-week period and practise instead the oral language activities as shared at the language workshop. Volunteer parents at the workshop agreed to keep a journal to describe and analyse their experience of the two- week alternative-to-homework experiment. Two weeks after the language workshop, researchers, parents, teachers and children reconvened to review their experience of the alternative homework. The methodology employed for the review of the two-week workshop was focus group interviews with parents, focus group interviews with children and individual or paired interviews with classroom teachers. Again, these are well-established methods for qualitative research (Mukherji and Albon, 2011).

Methods.

How the workshop was devised.

The language workshop was designed by members of the research team in line with the aims of the project and rooted in best literacy practice as identified in the literature (eg. Cole, Maddox & Lim, 2006; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011; Mc Gee & Shickedanz, 2007; Mc Keown & Beck, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). There were several iterations of the structure of the workshop as the researchers endeavoured to achieve its aims in a one- hour engagement with parents and teachers. Discussions considered how best to conduct the workshops in a manner that supported children, parents, and teachers logistically, while at the same time achieving the aims of the research. The design of the workshop was informed by theory that sees learning as an active and constructive process that is situated in the learner's particular social and cultural context (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Schools decided on the time and venue for the language workshop. Workshops were conducted in schools – one in a staff room, two in dedicated parents' rooms (DEIS schools) and two in classrooms. The pilot workshop and one other workshop, one hour in duration, were conducted in the evenings at 7pm and 7.30pm. This was to facilitate the attendance of parents in their particular school context. Other workshops were conducted during the school day, at 1.30pm, an hour before parents were due to collect their children from school.

Appendix 4 includes a copy of the presentation used at all five schools. Table 2 provides details of the workshops and review sessions that were held, including a pilot workshop held in Dublin. It should be noted that the special school involved in the case study decided not to participate in this phase of the research study as the oral language workshop did not meet the particular, highly individualised, needs of the child and parent participants. Furthermore, children in the special school did not get homework, therefore the emphasis on alternatives to homework in the language workshop did not address their needs. A more nuanced approach to support was offered to the school by members of the research team, outside the remit of the current project.

Content of the workshop.

The workshop aimed to –

13. Identify and discuss what homework children currently engage in
14. Share some information about the new primary language curriculum
15. Introduce and discuss enjoyable ideas for homework to improve children's oral language development in line with the learning outcomes of the new primary language curriculum
16. Plan two of those enjoyable activities with parents to be conducted with their children over a two week period for twenty minutes nightly

Description of current homework.

Parents were invited to discuss with one another and then in plenary session the nature of children's current homework. They discussed content, duration, challenges and opportunities in relation to homework. As this discussion came to a close, parents were invited to consider a different approach to homework for a two- week period. It was suggested by the research team to avoid using the word *'homework'* in relation to the suite of different activities proposed. The pilot workshop found that when the word *'homework'* was used, many children and parents felt negatively disposed towards the new activities. For that reason, it was agreed that children would be told that there would be no 'homework' for two weeks and that instead the relevant guardian in the home would read a story to their child and play a game. It was envisaged that the new activities, based on oral language development, would take approximately twenty minutes a night. Some parents were concerned about abandoning other subjects (eg. Mathematics and Irish) for the duration and sought reassurances that their child would not 'fall behind' in those areas. Classroom teachers gave reassurances that classroom work would be modified to cater for homework changes and children would not be disadvantaged as a result.

The primary language curriculum.

Within the workshop, the researchers shared the 14 learning outcomes in the primary language curriculum with parents, and gave examples of interactions/games that would help to achieve those outcomes in the home. The researchers also invited parents to share their ideas on how they already support children to achieve the outcomes. The content of each outcome is listed below. Each outcome is prefaced with the same opening phrase – "Through appropriately playful learning experiences, children should be able to…" Learning outcome 1, for example, reads as follows: Through appropriately playful learning experiences, children should be able to show interest in, demonstrate joint attention and actively listen and attend for enjoyment and for a particular purpose.

1. Engagement, listening and attention
2&3. Social conventions and awareness of others (e.g. eye contact, tone)
4. Sentence structure and grammar

Table 2 Language Workshops : Context and Demographics:

Workshop Date	School	Class	Numbers attended language workshop	Numbers attended review/follow-up focus groups and interviews	Comment
23-1-2019	**Pilot School** Dublin co-ed junior school under the patronage of the Catholic church. School population: Approximately 400 children.	First class	31 parents and 2 teachers attended in the large staffroom of the school.	Review Date: 13-2-2019 Evening Focus group interview in the large school staffroom with 25 parents (one man and 24 women). 2 teachers and the school principal were also present at the focus group. Questionnaire interview with one teacher.	One evening language workshop. Parents were for the most part from middle to higher income socioeconomic groups and a large majority of the group was indigenous Irish. Two parents spoke English as a second language.
7-2-2019 & 11-2-2019	**School 1** Dublin DEIS Band 1 co- ed junior school under the patronage of the Catholic church. School population: Approximately 200 children.	Junior infants and first class	22 parents in total attended the workshops in the parents' room of the school. The Principal and whole school staff attended the teachers' session. Four language workshops were held in total; one for parents of junior infants, one for parents of first class and one for teachers. The workshop for parents was repeated four days later to cater for parents who could not attend the earlier workshops. The full teaching staff attended the teachers' workshop for CPD purposes.	Review Date: 28-2-2019 Focus group interview with 7 parents(one man and six women) in the parents' room of theschool. A second man arrived but left before the workshop began. One individual interview with a parent. One interview with 2 classroom teachers Focus group with 17 Junior Infants Focus group with 15 children in first class	All three language workshops for parents were held during school hours; 9.00am –10.00am, 12.30pm– 1.30pm and 1.30pm-2.30pm, The teachers' workshop was held after schoolfrom 2.40pm-3.40pm. Parents were mostly indigenous Irish. At least one parent spoke English as a second language. Some parents who attended the review session had children with additional learning needs.

12-2-2019	**School 2** Urban DEIS vertical Educate Together school. School population: Approximately 300 children.	Junior infants, senior infants, first class and second class participated. Data collected from children in first classes only.	30 parents and two teachers attended the first workshop in the school's parents' room. 5 parents attended the second workshop.	Review Date:13-3-2019 Focus group interview with 4 parentsin parents' room ofschool. One interview with two teachers who teach first class. 2 focus groups with 21 children in 2 different first classes. Six children declined the offer to participate.	Two languageworkshops for parents 1.30pm - 2.30pm and 2.30pm to 3.30pm. Parents came fromdiverse cultural groups including Africa, India, Ireland and Europe.
25-2-2019	**School 5** Dublin co-ed, vertical Gaelscoil under the patronage of the Catholic church. School population: Approximately 250 children.	Junior infants to second class parents attended. Data collected from children in senior infants.	18 parents and two teachers attended the workshop in a classroom of the school at 7.30pm.	Review Date: 11-3-2019 4 focus groups with children, 3 with senior infants (10 children in each) and one focus group with 5 children from first class and6 children from second class. These were conducted during schoolhours. Two interviews with teachers, one a class teacher and one learning supportteacher conducted during schoolhours. One focus group with 10 parents held in a school classroom at 7pm.	One evening language workshop. Parents were largely from middle to higher income socioeconomic groups and comprised of indigenous Irish for the most part. Some of the parents who attended were teachers by profession.
20-3-2019	**School 3** Rural co-ed vertical school under the patronage of the Catholic church. School population: Approximately 230 children.	Second class	13 parents, the class teacher and school principal attended the workshop in aschool classroom. The children in second class were given four books and a pocket chart of language games during class time and it was explained to them that they were taking a break from traditional homework for twoweeks.	Review Date: 10-4-2019 One focus group with 9 parents, one focus group with 24 children and one interview with the class teacher	One language workshop for parents and teachers at 1.30pm. Parents were mostly from middle income socioeconomic groups and were mostly indigenous Irish.

Table 3: Numbers of participants that attended the review of the language workshop

Location	Group	Format	Number of participants
School 1	Children	Focus Group: Junior Infants	17
School 1	Children	Focus Group: First Class	15
School 1	Parents	Focus Group	7
School 1	Parent	Individual interview	1
School 1	Teachers	Interview with 2 teachers	2
School 2	Children	Focus Group: First Class	16
School 2	Children	Focus Group: First class	21
School 2	Parents	Focus Group	4
School 2	Teachers	Interview with 2 teachers	2
School 3	Children	Focus group	24
School 3	Parents	Focus group	9
School 3	Teacher	Individual interview	1
School 4	NA	NA	NA
School 5	Children	Focus group senior infants	10
School 5	Children	Focus group senior infants	10
School 5	Children	Focus group senior infants	10
School 5	Children	Focus group first class	5
School 5	Children	Focus group second class	6
School 5	Parents	Focus group interview	10
School 5	Teachers	2 individual interviews	2
Pilot school	Parents	Focus group	31
Pilot school	Teachers	Interview	1
Total			**204**

5&6.   Acquisition and use of vocabulary

7.   Demonstration of understanding

8&9.   Requests and questions

10.   Categorisation (Beef is meat, apples are fruit…)

11.   Retelling and elaboration

12.   Playful and creative use of language
         (word play, puns, nonsense language)

13.   Information giving, explanation and justification

14.   Description, prediction and reflection

The fourteen learning outcomes in the primary language curriculum were mapped on to an episode of dialogic story-reading using particular dialogic story-reading strategies (see Appendix 5). This demonstrated to parents that by reading a story to children using dialogic story-reading strategies, the majority of the outcomes of the language curriculum are realised.

Books and dialogic story-reading strategies.

The research team provided a choice of four books (see Appendix 6) for each child participating in the project. The children were asked to choose two out of the four books to read, one a week. The researchers emphasised the importance of children making their own choices around book selection as a key driver for developing and sustaining an interest in literacy (Gambrell, 2011; Reynolds & Symons, 2001). Parents were given an opportunity to explore these books at the workshop along with a bespoke tip-sheet to accompany each book. The tip-sheet was offered as a support to parents to implement dialogic story-reading strategies as they explored the book with their child. They were not intended to be prescriptive and use of the tip-sheet was optional. Appendix 7 contains examples of tip-sheets designed for the project. Three dialogic strategies were employed on each tip-sheet, namely –

1. Use of open-ended questions beginning with "I wonder…". For example, "I wonder why Louisa the Pig was feeling disgruntled…"

2. Relate events of the book to the child's life experience. For example, "Tuffy the cat was blamed for something he didn't do. Did that ever happen to you?"

3. Explore new vocabulary encountered in the book together

Parents were encouraged to use these dialogic strategies as a means to encouraging conversation around the books. Having shared and discussed dialogic story-reading strategies, the workshop then moved its focus to oral language games.

Oral language games.

Parents were invited to share examples of how they infor-mally support their child's language development at home. Responses included listening to and singing along to nurs-ery rhymes and songs on cds while travelling in the car, making shopping lists together, playing board games, discussing how to operate various digital devices such as phones and tablets and chatting at meal-times about the events of children's and parents' respective days. Other suggestions from parents included playing an alphabet game while walking to school, eg. think of a name of an animal for each letter of the alphabet; read words of songs (print out song lyrics) together and sing them and play a family version of *Ireland's Got Talent* (TV talent show).

The research team then shared a number of examples of activities or games that could be played at home to develop children's oral language (See Appendix 8). They emphasised that games could be played at any time, for example walking to school in the morning or coming home in the afternoon, in the car with other passengers or before bedtime.

Example 1: Invent stories about people who live in houses that you pass. What do they do for work? Favourite food? Do they snore? Are they afraid of spiders?

Example 2: Build a story with another person at home. Retell in school.

Example 3: Pick a colour and challenge your child to tell you 20 items that are this colour, eg. Blue sky, blue eyes, blue sea, blue mould, bluebells…

Reporter activity: Use home-made or pretend microphones to report on the weather, review a favourite book, TV programme or song, family activity or tell a joke…

Interview with a friend, aunt etc. Pick something that is interesting to the child and unusual. Eg. An aunt who has an unusual job, a neighbour who is famous…

Each parent was provided with a pocket compendium, designed in concertina fashion, of oral language games devised by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and a website sponsored by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) called helpmykidlearn.ie and developed as part of the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 – 2020 (DES, 2011). Parents were given the opportunity to explore some of the games and identify some that they thought might appeal to their children.

Participants were invited to trial the approaches shared

at the workshop, and parent volunteers were sought from the group to keep a journal to document the process over the two week period. A date for a review session was then provided by the researchers and after further invitations for comments or questions, the workshop came to a close. The review session, planned for two weeks after the language workshop, involved focus groups with parents, children and teachers. The review session explored teachers', parents' and children's experiences of implementing the processes introduced in the workshop.

Development of topic guides.

In advance of conducting the interviews and focus groups, semi-structured 'topic guides' (Barbour, 2008) were developed in the same manner as those developed for Part 2A of the research, the case studies. Schedules of questions used were designed to elicit answers to the seven questions posed in the tender document (and listed at the beginning of this report) and to discover how parents and children fared during the two-week experience of the alternative-to-homework. See Appendix 2 for an example of a schedule of questions used.

Sampling.

Participants were drawn from the schools that took part in the case studies section of the research, with the exception of the Special School (School 4), used in the earlier phase of part two of the study, and the addition of a school for piloting purposes. The pilot school is a co-educational infant (Junior Infants to First Class) school under the patronage of the Catholic Church in a relatively affluent suburb in a large Irish city. Approximately 400 children attend the mixed, infant school. The children and families served by the school are principally indigenous Irish, but there are families from Latvia, Lithuania, India, Vietnam and Australia attending the school. The school has an active Parents' Association.

Principals and in one case the Home-School-Community-Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator chose classes in each school to participate in the alternative-to-homework trial. In making these choices, they consulted with the research team and chose classes and teachers to participate based on the school's needs and priorities. For example, if a class had already participated in a research project or if a substitute teacher was working with a particular class, the Principal might decide to choose another class for the project. Logistical arrangements were then made, i.e. dates, times and duration of workshops were arranged with schools, and the length of the oral language homework period for re-

search purposes was agreed. A pilot study was conducted to test the plan and method of the language workshop and to explore parents' responses to the workshop in the review session two weeks later.

114 parents in total attended the language workshops, 56 parents attended the review meetings and 133 children participated in review focus groups across five schools. Table 3 provides details on numbers who attended the review sessions following the language workshops.

Learning from the pilot workshop.

Learning from the pilot study did not result in any major change to the design or delivery of the workshop. Thabane et al, (2010) argue that it is acceptable to combine data from a pilot study with data from the main study provided that the sampling frame and methodologies are the same. This can increase the efficiency of the main study. This was the case in relation to the pilot and main study, so data from parents and teachers in the pilot study were incorporated into the analysis.

Learning from the pilot workshop included the following: Parents disliked the word 'homework' and associated it with obligation and pressure. The research team presented the story-reading and oral language games as an alternative approach to homework from the children's regular experience but realised from parents' reactions that it was better to abandon the term 'homework' altogether, which was done in subsequent workshops.

Tip-sheets were provided by the research team as an accompaniment to each story to support parents in discussing the story with their children and sharing new vocabulary with them. Although most parents welcomed the support offered, others found the tip-sheets a chore. One parent talked about doing the 'alternative' homework and then relaxing with her child later to read her a bedtime story. In subsequent workshops it was emphasised that activities were intended to be fun and to be a relaxing experience for parent and child.

Bedtime story-time could be used to read stories in an informal manner and the story tip- sheets were optional rather than prescribed.

Some parents in the pilot group reported that their children insisted they wanted to read themselves rather than listen to their parents read to them. Other parents used the books to get their children to practise their reading and children found this difficult. In subsequent workshops the research team emphasised that parents could read to their children or allow children to read the books themselves if they opted to do so.

The team also learned when reviewing the pilot workshop and the two-week alternative-to-homework period with parents, that parents generally forgot the section of the workshop which related to the primary language curriculum. Some parents recalled the information that reading stories accounted for the fulfilment of several of the learning outcomes in the language curriculum but they could not recall anything more about the language curriculum. Parents had considerable work to do just to implement the dialogic story-reading and to engage with the oral language games and it was probably ambitious to elicit their views, share dialogic story-reading strategies and language activities with them and talk about the language curriculum, all in a one-hour workshop. While the language curriculum was highlighted further in subsequent workshops, the data revealed that parents continued to have difficulty recalling anything about it.

Language workshop in the Irish-medium school.

The language workshop conducted in the Irish-medium school, though largely similar to the workshops that took place in the English-medium schools, included certain emphases and additional resources to support parents in working with their children through Irish.

Particular consideration was given in relation to the following areas: (a) the special role that schools play in promoting the Irish language, a minority yet the first official language of the State (b) parents' language confidence and proficiency in a second or additional language, (c) messages and support that parents give in relation to Irish homework, (d)children's experiences to date of Irish-language books in the home, and (e) structures and approaches that support parents in doing homework in a second or additionallanguage.

Since the foundation of the Irish Free State, the education system has had a crucial role in national language revitalisation efforts (Harris, 2008). Indeed, primary schools have borne and continue to bear the greatest responsibility in producing competency in the language in the next generation, and in society more generally. While the over-reliance on the education system to reverse language shift has been re-evaluated in more recent times (Dunne, 2015; 2019; Harris, 2006), it still remains that schools are the forum in which children usually receive the greatest exposure to the language. Irish homework is a tangible way for the language to move past the school gates and into the home domain but supports are needed to empower parents and children to feel comfortable in using the language at home.

As noted in the literature review, parents' own experiences in school can impact on their confidence in engaging with their children's schooling (Räty, 2010). In the case of schooling through Irish, there is the additional challenge of the homework for all subjects except English being done through Irish. In a study of parental engagement in their children's Irish homework and general language development, it was found that parents' proficiency, confidence and use of the language at home, not surprisingly all positively impacted on their child's progress in and attitudes to Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile & O'Gorman, 2006). While some parents of children in Irish-medium education may report high proficiency in the language, it is likely that this is a minority case scenario as census data and recent studies show that only a small percentage of Irish adults feel comfortable with their competence in Irish (Darmody & Daly, 2015). This can discourage them from taking part in their child's Irish homework. Even amongst highly proficient speakers, issues of insecurity can prevail. Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey (2018) outline the issues that can affect language confidence for both native speakers and new speakers. A 'new speaker' is defined as someone who acquired their language in a context other than the home, such as through immersion or other bilingual education, or as an adult, and who now uses the language with 'fluency, regularity and commitment' (O'Rourke and Walsh, 2015, p64).

Contemporary new speakers of Irish who have reached high levels of proficiency may still feel a lack of authority when speaking Irish when compared with the native speaker ideal whereas native speakers can feel that their Irish is not as accurate as new speakers.

National language attitudes surveys conducted to date, e.g. CILAR (1975), Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1984; 1994), reveal deeper beliefs about how bilingualism was viewed by society, and particularly the divide between native speakers and what are now considered 'new speakers' (Dunne, 2019). The term 'new speaker' is relatively recent but is considered more inclusive than previous terms that utilised a deficit model in describing language confidence and proficiency, such as 'non-native' speaker. The thrust of the correlational analysis in the afforementioned studies however, rely on static details to explain language use and beliefs amongst the Irish population, such as place of birth or language of schooling. As Harris and Murtagh (1999) point out though, parents through their engagement with children's homework represent an active community of Irish speakers. More recent analysis of language use and attitudes based on comprehensive data in the Growing Up in Ireland lon-

gitudinal study show that it is engagement with general literacy practices in the home, such as reading for pleasure in their first language, rather than static measures alone e.g. place of birth and schooling, that can predict a child's positive attitude to Irish (Devitt, Condon, Dalton, O'Connell & Ní Dhuinn, 2018). Negative attitudes to learning Irish amongst primary school children is an issue in the teaching of Irish (Harris et al., 2006; Devine, 2003; Dunne, 2015) and although more positive attitudes to learning Irish have been reported following the introduction of the 1999 curriculum and its communicative approach to learning Irish (Devitt, Condon, Dalton, O'Connell & Ní Dhuinn, 2018), it is worth exploring parents' role in encouraging and maintaining positive attitudes amongst theirchildren.

A secondary issue is the value that parents place on homework in Irish and how this is communicated to their children. Praise and encouragement from a parent are important to help the child's attitude and motivation (Hickey, 2001). Harris and Murtagh (1999) reported that parents adopted a "hands-off approach" to the correction of children's Irish homework and were less likely to praise progress in Irish compared to other subjects. Praise for oral langue progress was also the least likely compared to the other language skills. Though this study was conducted in English-medium schools, it may also be relevant for parents in the current study who report low levels of confidence in using the language, and also because children in Irish-medium schools have reported that their parents' engagement with their Irish-language reading in the home is limited (Dunne & Hickey, 2017). When parents do praise children's efforts in Irish, there is shown to be a significantly positive effect on children's attitudes to the Irish language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). This is an important finding because it is a relatively easy way for parents to become involved in their child's Irish homework even if they have insecurities regarding their own proficiency in the language.

Another related issue is that contemporary children's experience of Irish books is often restricted. Despite a growing canon of high quality children's literature in Irish, children's main experience of reading in Irish is confined to the class text book in schools (Stenson & Hickey, 2016; Uí Choistealbha, 2012). School libraries often have much smaller Irish-language collections compared to English books (Harris et al., 2006). In a recent reading club conducted with children in Irish-medium schools, it was also found that children can have limited exposure to books in Irish and need support in choosing a book (Dunne & Hickey, 2017). Another finding was that often when children are exposed to books in Irish, it's of a limited variety so they may not be aware of

the range of genres available to them. On a positive note, young readers identify that they would enjoy reading in Irish with a parent or sibling at home (Dunne & Hickey,2017).

Research on parental involvement in education, and in relation to reading in a second or additional language, shows that the approach needs to be structured, easy to implement, and empowering for parents and young readers. Examples of easy to follow programmes that have been successful include Hickey's project with audio books (1991), Kiely's (2017) dialogic-story reading group with parents, and Rasinski, Rupley, Paige & Nichols' (2016) project with clear steps to reading and discussing poetry. Existing research has found that repeated reading is generally facilitative to L2 development for children (Liu & Todd, 2016) but this approach also allows parents to become more familiar with the story and become more comfortable in reading in a second or additional language. Dialogic story-reading offers a clear framework for encouraging parents and children to talk about a story and has been shown to be very effective in other national projects, e.g. The Storytime Project (Kiely, 2017). This approach was used in each of the schools that took part in the homework project but certain additional supports were included for parents and children modelling a similar initiative that was implemented in infant classes in an Irish-medium school (Dunne & Ní Fhaoláin,forthcoming).

In choosing the books for the homework project, it was decided that some stories that parents are familiar with would be appropriate Two fairytales from the Ladybird series were selected: *Na Trí Mhuicín* and *An Tornapa Mór Millteach,* an approach used by Kelleher (2005) too in designing a reading programme in English for Traveller parents. Two contemporary books were also chosen: *Uinseann Donn* and *Beag Bídeach* to increase parents' and children's awareness of high quality contemporary works. Additional supports were included so that parents would be enabled to engage in each of the reading activities:

1. Text of the story andtranslation
2. Prompt questions and suggested activities
3. Words ofencouragement
4. Oral language games

Translations of the story were provided so that parents were comfortable with the plot and could understand each part of the book. Childers and Tomasello (2002) claim that children need to hear a word several times before they are comfortable enough to use it.

Arguably for a second or additional language, especially a minority language, the exposure they have to new vocabulary is more limited. Recommendations for best practice in supporting oral language development supplied by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) stress the need to develop auditory skills. As Irish orthography and pronunciation differ somewhat from English, the first language of most parents involved in the project, where available, a link to the audio version of the text on Sound Cloud was given. The suggested activities focused on developing confidence in pronunciation too e.g. reading the story in different characters' voices. The other suggested activities mirrored the dialogic story reading framework used in the English-medium schools, for example, 'I wonder' questions and relating the story to their own lives. Words of encouragement were also included, such as "Maith thú!" and "Coinnigh ort!" to allow parents to meaningfully comment on their child's progress and so that the reading experience could bepositive.

No Irish-language oral language games resource currently exists equivalent to the small paper concertina devised by NALA and given to parents in the English-medium schools, so a pack with ten different oral language activities was devised. The activities included simple rhymes in Irish which parents were encouraged to say in different voices, to clap or to recite while skipping. A link to alternative rhymes was also given. Other oral language communicative activities included jokes, proverbs and riddles. For each of these activities, parents and children were encouraged to compose a new version after talking about the example in the pack. A suite of simple games was also provided e.g. 'Feicim le mo shúilín' and word tennis. Like the homework packs in the English-medium schools, parents and children were given a choice of which book and which activity they would like to use. It was hoped that additional supports would give parents (additional) opportunities to enjoy reading in Irish and talking about books in Irish with their children, as well as playing oral language games, and that the addional supports would build their confidence in actively engaging with Irish-language homework.

Data Analysis and Analytic Strategy.

The first phase of data analysis for Part 2(B) consisted of reading, re-reading and becoming familiar with the data. The seven questions posed in the tender document were used as thematic headings and data from each school was 'housed' together under each question, and sub-categorised by stakeholder as appropriate. Data from the five schools relating to question four, for example, were together and re-organised according to stakeholder.

Patterns in responses began to emerge, differences and outlier responses were noted and cross school comparisons were made. Common themes emerging from each school were analysed.

The overarching question was - How can the key messages from the literature review inform schools' work with parents and, in particular, in helping their children's oral language (teanga ó bhéal) development? Key messages from the literature review in relation to homework are listed in Table 4 and include the need for schools and parents to communicate around appropriate learning activities in the home that are interactive, related to the child's interests and 'fun'; a focus on partnership in nurturing relationships between home and school; and the fact that flexible systems for supporting parental involvement are necessary because parents are not a homogenous group, differing in terms of language, culture, ability/disability, working/stay-at-home parents and socio-economic status.

Table 4 : Key messages on homework as sourced in the literature (O' Toole, Kiely, Mc Gillicuddy, O' Brien & O' Keeffe, 2018)

1. One of the most effective homework strategies amongst children who struggled with school work was when they were given 'real life' assignments. The use of homework planners and getting pupils to keep their own record of homework completion were also effective homework strategies for children who found school work overly arduous (Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein, 1998 as cited in Rudman, 2014, p.22)

2. Dialogue between parents and teachers about homework would give clarity to expectations around homework and might lead to a shared vision about the purpose of homework (Rudman, 2014).

3. Use a metacognitive approach to homework, do not grade homework, make homework fun and connect homework to children's interests (Felicello, 2018).

4. Teachers should make available several kinds of homework instructions along with various types of homework assignments to meet specific learners' needs (Hong, 2000, p.139).

5. If homework were planned to meet students' individual learning styles, it would be more effective as a learning tool (Rudman, 2014, p.15). However, Cooper's (1989) research into home-based learning, based in North American schools concluded that individualising homework assignments had a minimal effect on pupil achievement but added substantially to teachers' workloads (as cited in Rudman, 2014).

6. Personalised homework (Vatterot, 2017) can work. Students could sometimes create their own homework assignments and self-monitor their progress. Individualized homework develops learner confidence and allows students to be in control their own learning (Vatterot, 2017).

7. Parent-teacher collaboration and parent-training workshops may improve the quality of parental involvement in their children's homework (Cunha, Rosário, Macedo, Nunes, Fuentes, Pinto, & Suárez, 2015).

8. Homework needs to coincide with the child's own interests (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001; Trautwein et al., 2006).

9. Interactive assignments are more suited to children than pedestrian repetitive tasks (Van Voorhis, 2004).

10. "Giving homework does not result in greater student achievement. Giving well-planned, purposeful, and engaging homework is more likely to affect student achievement in a positive way" (Hayward, 2010, p.63).

11. Homework should be "more experiential, more collaborative and more oriented to opportunities offered by families, communities and environments if it is to be designed with 'enrichment' in mind" (Gill & Shlossman, 2000, p.50 as cited in Jackson & Harbison)

Ethical considerations for Part 2(A) and Part 2(B).

Any research with human respondents requires a thorough consideration of ethics, and all research conducted in Marino Institute of Education must receive ethical approval from the Marino Ethics in Research Committee (MERC). Ethical approval for the current research was granted by MERC on 10th April 2018. Leedy (1997, p. 116) provides a concise treatise on the subject of ethics, and the kinds of considerations taken by the current research:

The principles of ethical propriety... resolve into simple considerations of fairness, honesty, openness of intent, disclosure of methods, the ends for which the research is executed, a respect for the integrity of the individual, the obligation of the researcher to guarantee unequivocally individual privacy, and an informed willingness on the part of the subject to participate voluntarily in the research activity. Certainly no person should be asked to cooperate in any research that might result in a sense of self-denigration, embarrassment or a violation of ethical or moral standards or principles.

Ethical consideration was given in the current research to many aspects of academic convention and of engagement with research participants. Such consideration included maintenance of anonymity of participants, secure storage of taped materials, avoidance of plagiarism, and acknowledging support and help from various sources. However, we also considered differences in world view, concerns, communication and power in society and between academics and the people being studied. Such power-based ethical considerations are particularly relevant to research on children's subjective experiences in natural contexts (Hill, 2005; Mukherji and Albon, 2015; Smith, 2011). Traditionally research has been on children rather than with them or for them, but this has begun to change with the emergence of new approaches (Fargas Malet et al., 2010). Participatory approaches recognise children not as subjects to be studied but as agentic (Niemi et al., 2015). However, in spite of the increasing emphasis on children's right to 'voice' in theory and research (largely stemming from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), in every-day life the experience of children may be as subordinate to adults, particularly in educational settings, and children may find it difficult to disagree or express an opinion other than that they think an adult wishes to hear (Greene and Hill, 2005; Hill, 2005; O'Toole, 2016). It may be that increased parental involvement in education has inadvertently led to a decline of participation of children in decision making, because children are increasingly seen as dependent on and contained within their families rather than being viewed as individuals in their own right.

Christensen and Prout (2005) refer to this as 'familialisation'. Certainly, as Hill (2005) points out, adult perceptions of what children think, do or need may differ substantially from what children themselves say. The methodological choices were made with this in mind.

The choice of whether to use focus groups or individual interviews with specific participants was made based on a number of factors, including ethics and the preferences of participants. According to Barbour (2008), it is ethically appropriate to use focus groups in situations where respondents might find one-to-one interviews intimidating or where there are balance-of-power issues at stake. She particularly identifies children as a group for whom these approaches are appropriate. Focus groups were used with the majority of children in the current research, due to both ethical and methodological concerns. Allowing children to discuss their experiences in groups allays some child protection concerns, and may also allow children to feel more comfortable expressing their views with the support of their friends (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). Among the benefits of using focus groups with children,

identified by Lancaster and Broadbent (2003), are new meanings and ideas generated through interaction, development of confidence and empowerment since children are positioned as experts, access to insights on shared understandings of children, and the fact that many children are familiar with these types of approaches through experiences of 'circle time'.

However, the children in School 4 were interviewed individually rather than in focus groups in order to support appropriate communication. It was particularly important to be creative in developing appropriate methods to access the voices of the children in School 4, many of whom had significant disabilities and communicative impairments. The voice of children with disabilities remains relatively absent from educational research (Beresford et al., 2012), and children with developmental disabilities (Rabiee et al., 2005) are particularly vulnerable to exclusion as are children with communicative impairments. The development of participatory methods recognises children's multi-modal communicative practices (Maconochie, 2017) making them suitable for children with communicative impairments.

As with all children with or without disabilities, the sample within School 4 was heterogeneous. Therefore, we followed the recommendations within the relevant literature for researchers to have an open and flexible approach utilising a multiplicity of tools (Carroll & Sixsmith, 2016; Frank-

lin and Sloper, 2009; Mitchell and Sloper, 2011) chosen to reflect the particularities of the persons involved and appropriate to cultural context and the research questions (Christensen and James, 2000). Taking guidance from the school's Principal on the unique abilities of each child, we developed an 'asset based methodological approach' (Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016; Clarke and Moss, 2005), whereby each child's natural mode of interaction and communication led the data collection process. This culminated in the development of an individualised, participatory approach, with an emphasis on flexible multi- modal data collection methods (Fargas Malet et al., 2010).

Child protection concerns in the context of the current research meant that consent for working with children was granted, contingent on the presence of a teacher in the room at the time of the focus groups. While this was of course a valid stipulation on behalf of schools and parents, it could perhaps have limited the ability of children to express dissent, representing a potential limitation of the current work. Certainly, many children are unaccustomed to being asked their views or they may feel that their views are often disregarded by adults (Hill, 2005; Smith, 2011), and young children in particular may be vulnerable within research processes as a result (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Therefore, it was important to supplement the findings of the focus groups and interviews with analysis of the children's drawings, giving potential for a more nuanced depiction of concepts, emotions, and information in an expressive, empowering, and personally relevant manner (Kiely, 2017; Literat, 2013).

The issue of 'informed consent' is also an important ethical consideration in this work (see Harcourt and Conroy, 2011). With adults, this involves, for example, taking account of literacy issues through use of 'plain-language' materials (www.nala.ie), and emphasising the

right to withdraw from the research at any point. The idea of consent becomes even more complex with children, because 'informed consent' requires that participants understand the purposes of the research, what precisely they are being asked to do (for example how long an interview will take), anonymity, their right to withdraw, how the data will be stored and what it will be used for (Mukherji and Albon, 2015).

Informed consent by children, adolescents and adults in this project was sought through language adapted to the linguistic understandings of each group of participants, including checks and repetition (O'Toole, 2016). Written consent was sought from parents and older children, where-

as younger children were given the opportunity to verbally augment or rescind the written consent that parents had given on their behalves, commonly known as 'assent'. Assent was negotiated on a 'moment-to-moment basis' (Mukhaji and Albon, 2015), as guided by Skånfors (2009) concept of an 'ethical radar' whereby children's agency and assent is negotiated on an ongoing basis, recognising that children, particularly young children, may have ways of expressing their acceptance or withdrawal other than verbally,

e.g. through physically moving to leave or join a group or exhibiting non-verbal indicators of interest or discomfort. Data collectors ensured that they were attuned and responded appropriately to these cues from children.

Summary of Methodology

The current research consists of two parts. Part 2(A) entailed case studies conducted in five primary schools in Ireland where the perspectives of children, parents and teachers were accessed using a variety of qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups and analysis of children's drawings. Part 2(B) consisted of language seminars conducted in four of the same schools from the case study, as well as in an additional pilot study school. We now proceed to outline the findings from both parts.

Findings

Findings are first presented here through provision of comprehensive answers from the data to the research questions provided by NCCA and NPC for Part 2(A) (Case Studies) and Part 2(B) (Language workshops). Insights from the data are supplemented by comparison to the data from the Growing Up in Ireland Study. GUI is the national longitudinal study of children, one of the most significant surveys of its kind to take place in this country, whose aim is the improvement of children's lives through greater insight into their development[1] It is intended to give a complete picture of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment. Therefore, comparison with its data can contextualise the findings of our smaller scalestudy.

This initial response to the research question is followed by conceptual analysis using the PPCT framework (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), leading to development of recommendations for policy and practice regarding parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education in the primary years.

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[1] The study follows the progress of two groups of children: the Child Cohort which includes 8,500 nine- year-olds; and the Infant Cohort which includes 11,000 nine-month-olds

Question 1: How do parents actively contribute to good parent- school partnerships with a particular focus on children's learning/ education?

In keeping with the literature (Harris and Robinson, 2016; Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013; Kavanagh, 2013; Robinson and Harris, 2014), our data suggests that there may be a wide interpretation of the concept of parental involvement. Many of the activities identified do not take place in school, but rather, also in line with the literature (Benner and Sadler, 2016; Brooker, 2015), participants across the five case studies identified the importance of the home learning environment (HLE). Educational activities that these parents contribute to outside of formal structures include teaching children to use money or read the clock (mathematical skills), manners and appropriate ways of interacting with others (social skills), getting out into natural environments (parks, forests or seaside), playing sport or games outdoors (physical / motor skills and health / wellbeing) and playing together (multiple benefits, particularly oral language skills). Participants across the case studies emphasised the importance of talking and ongoing conversation for children's development, as well as the importance of parents' interest in and positive attitudes towards school and learning. These findings bring to mind Harris and Robinson's (2016) concept of 'stage setting'. It is also supported by the GUI data which showed that activities with mothers in particular were understood as reinforcing parent-child bonds and important in nurturing life skills in children. Shopping, physical and sports activities were identified, however, the one most frequently engaged in, by mothers with their children, was listening to the child read (66% at

least once a week, including 37% every day). Less common was computer use with their child, though it was identified as mainly for educational purposes (13%) (GUI,2018).

Despite commonalities across the five case study schools, significant differences were also evident in how parents understand their role in children's education and thus in the home learning environments that children experience. We therefore provide a detailed description of parental beliefs around parents' own role as educators and the consequent home learning environments they seek to create for their children. For each school four aspects related to parents' role in their children's education will be discussed, namely 1) parents' views on their role as educators, 2) the home learning environments they seek to create for their children, parents' school-based activities, and finally 4) parents' involvement through communication with the school. In the discussion of these four aspects, the relevant stakeholders' perspectives will be compared andtriangulated.

School 1.
<u>Parents' views on their role as educators.</u>
As a DEIS Band 1 school, School 1 is the most disadvantaged of the sample and while the parents interviewed certainly take an active role in their children's education, formal as well as informal, there were nonetheless visible differences in the approach taken to supporting children's learning at home. Echoing the emphasis placed by researchers such as Eivers et al. (2010) and Kavanagh et al. (2015) on positive attitudes to education, parents in School 1 believed that if they, as parents, showed an interest in their children's education, it

would help their children feel more positively towards school. Parents in School 1 expressed value in parental involvement and believed that their own involvement would contribute positively to their children's education. However, these parents did not seem to view themselves as significant educators in their children's lives, despite engaging in a range of educational activities with them. Beyond instilling a positive attitude, they indicated that they did not see themselves as much involved in their children's education otherwise. They described their role as one of ensuring that their children complete their homework and get to school on time. This mirrors attitudes of parents of lower socio-economic status reported in other studies (Robinson and Harris, 2013). However, a crucial dynamic emerged when probed further; these parents described educational activities like teaching their children the time, teaching them about money, reading stories to them and instilling moral values such as manners and appropriate communication, in their children. Yet, parents here did not attribute much value to these activities and to their own role as educators, perhaps linked to self- efficacy beliefs and self- concepts around education (Bandura, 1994; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), as suggested by the HSCL Coordinator:

The Maths for Fun didn't happen last year. We started it off but the parents did drop out. Again it is something you just have to get up and running. I am finding that one more difficult I have to say, whether it is just down to the parents ideas about I am not good enough, how can I teach Maths?

While these parents were in fact engaging in educational activities with their children, they did not credit themselves as educators in the manner experienced in the other schools.

This is congruent with a finding by Lareau (2000) who noted that parents marginalised by poverty tend to see what goes on in school as being outside their level of expertise; "They are ideologically inclined to view school and home as separate spheres" (p.xii). There was one exception to this, a mother who had gone to the school herself and was currently not only very active in the school but also spoke at length of the variety and depth of experiences in the home learning environment that she seeks to create for her children. This mother, in contrast to the other parents interviewed, considered her parental role as an important educator in her children's lives.

According to the school personnel, including teachers, the HSCL coordinator and the Principal, parents' own experiences of school were considered a significant barrier and challenge to parents' current involvement with their children's education.

Again I think it is socioeconomic, their background, they will tell you that they haven't had a positive time in school themselves even though a lot of them, it is funny, I am dealing now with parents and grandparents and I am thinking I don't remember you necessarily being very unhappy in school. But that is what they say to us.

This reinforces the work of Räty (2010) who identified parents' own school memories as a mediating factor explaining variance in parental involvement, particularly for parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Certainly, one of the mothers interviewed mentioned her husband's illiteracy and thus his sense of panic and disengagement with regards to anything school related. As a consequence, she was the sole parent engaged with the school in their household. This was an issue that was extensively elaborated upon by the school personnel who saw parents' literacy issues and own poor school experiences as a significant barrier to current parental involvement, thus requiring particular efforts by the school to address. This resonates with literature identifying the need for schools to be proactive in drawing parents into the life of the school, since parents' proactivity may be limited by intimidation (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Yet, it was also obvious from the focus groups with children that parents talked to them about school. The majority of the children interviewed were aware of how their parents had felt about school when they were young although they rarely knew why they had felt the way they had. According to the children asked, some parents had liked it and had therefore wanted their children to go to the same school while other parents, especially fathers, had not liked it or had only liked certain aspects of school, such as PE in secondary school. Some of the parents interviewed had gone to the school themselves as children. The strong intergenerational aspect was evident for one child who said they attended the school because their Mum had and she liked it. Most children said their parents enjoyed school when they were their age except one child. This was somewhat in contrast to the parents' own reported experiences of school. While parents did not express much in the way of their general impression of school as children, they spoke at length of their own fear of the Principal when they had gone to school and compared this to how school was currently for their children.

They spoke very positively of the Principal and the teachers, and how different school had become for children in the sense of becoming much more child-centred, supporting similar points made by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) on the changing nature of schools and parental involvement over time.

This suggests that the Principal's encouragement to speak positively to their children about school and going to school was being implemented by parents in masking their own school experiences. It also suggests that while some parents may have had negative experiences of school themselves, several parents felt very positive about the school now.

This highlights the potential for other factors, such as positive relationships between children and adults, to mediate barriers to parental involvement (O'Toole, 2016)[2].

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[2] It must however be remembered that the parents who chose to engage in this research must be assumed to generally engage relatively well with the school as otherwise they would have been unlikely to participate. Thus, the parents interviewed cannot be assumed to be representative of other parents.

Home learning environment.

The HLE in School 1 is one in which children have ample time to play with their siblings, friends and cousins in their local vicinity and one which is less structured by organised activities than is the case for children in the other schools. Thus in their focus groups, children spoke primarily of spending their days playing with their siblings and sometimes friends and cousins. Children also spoke of playing with their parents, and especially loved playing football with their fathers or on the trampoline with their mothers. For some children such play seemed to happen occasionally while for other children it seemed to happen more frequently. Yet it was also evident that parents did not attribute educational value to such play and did not recognise the importance for themselves as parents to support and sometimes get involved in such play. This supports the findings of O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012) on the complex and sometimes contradictory notions that parents may hold on the value of play for learning. In fact, there were some data here to suggest that parents felt this playtime to be somewhat troublesome and a nuisance. One parent when probed by the interviewer as to whether she engaged in pretend play with her children, confirmed that she would do this when the children asked her to do so but would do it for five minutes or so and then try to find an excuse to exit the play.

Thus, parents did not generally seem to get much enjoyment out of time spent playing with their children and engaged more superficially in play-based activities related to children's learning. As it required some probing by the interviewer to get the parents to talk about play time with their children, it suggests that this is either not something they consider as part of children's learning and education or that they do not place value on the parental role in children's play, or indeed both. In interviews with school personnel, it also became evident that school personnel did not think parents spent much time directly involved in play with the children. Parents and children alike spoke about the park and the cinema as being important places for them to go to as a family but parents only offered these activities when probed very directly and therefore did not immediately see these as relevant to their role as parents in their children's learning and education. This was again with the exception of the one mother referred to above who offered her children a rich variety of family leisure activities, including regular trips to the zoo and watching the Discovery channel on TV to build on her children's interests in particular animals and things like the pyramids in Egypt.

Both Eivers et al. (2010) and Kavanagh et al. (2015) note the importance of limiting children's access to certain technologies in order to maximise learning. This is supported by the GUI data. For the children contributing to GUI themselves, screen time marked a pursuit heavily engaged in. 90% of 9-year-olds reported spending some time watching TV/DVD on both weekdays and weekends while 15% spent two or more hours doing so on weekdays. In managing their childrens' screen time usage, mothers reported instigating rules around time spent, content and the time of day. Over half of the mothers reported trying to engage the child in alternative activities in an effort to reduce screen time (GUI, 2018).

It was evident that parents in School 1 did not enforce many rules around children's use of technology however. School personnel were of the impression that children used their devices for most of the day and indeed children did talk about playing games on i-Pads and watching YouTube considerably more in School 1 than in the other schools. While some parents said they always engaged in bedtime story reading with their children, others allowed children to watch screens whenever they wanted. Screen time was in some cases used as a disciplining tool, where good behaviour led to more screen time and bad behaviour led to the threat of no screen. Similarly, bed time stories were seen by some parents as a treat in that if children were not behaving well they would not get their bedtime story or if they wanted another ten minutes of playing on the road the children would have to choose between the additional play time or story time.

The trend of children from low income families participating, or not, in activities with potential learning and educational benefits was witnessed in another GUI data led report.

Nine- year-olds' out-of-school and recreational activities were examined and their relationship to the domains of family, school and neighbourhood and the connection with their academic performance at school (McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2012). In analysing recreational activities, five distinct clusters emerged:

1. The *TV/sports group,* who spend their time playing sports, being with their friends and watching television; they have a very low level of computer usage.
2. The *social networker group,* who have a high and diverse use of ICT, being the only group to use it for social networking; they spend a lot of time with their friends, and also spend time reading and taking part in cultural activities.
3. The *sports/computer games group,* who spend more time on sports and computer games than other groups, spend less time reading and have no involvement in culturalactivities.
4. The *cultural activities group,* who combine solitary and organised cultural activities in the form of reading for pleasure and after-school lessons/groups.
5. The *busy lives group,* who are characterised by the diversity of their activities, spending some time on ICT, reading, cultural activities, sports and video games. (McCoy et al., 2012,p.6)

From these clusters of activities, distinct patterns emerge and differences noticed, the pressing message being that children's school experiences are associated with what they do outside of school. "...that children from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage in the kinds of out-of school activities which appear to enhance academic performance. In the longer term, children's recreation patterns may serve to widen the social class gap in achievement (McCoy et al., 2012,p.7)."

School-based parental activities.

School 1 does not have a formal Parents' Association (PA) and although some parents do contribute to the school with work often carried out by a PA, no formal Association has been established. The HSCL coordinator relayed that a PA has not existed within the school for approximately 20 years and that each year they send out a text asking parents if they would be interested in re-vamping the PA but very few show up. This is set against a backdrop of parents willing to come in and help out, suggestive that it is the concept of the Parents' Association that appears problematic. This reinforces Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) point regarding the

need for both formal and informal approaches from schools, particularly with parents from traditionally marginalised groups, to support genuine engagement. This is discussed further with regards to Question 2 below.

With regards to other school-based parental activities, the parents initially stated that they were not involved beyond ensuring homework was done and their children arrived at school on time. They mentioned the availability of the parent room in the school and the open welcome to use this room at any time, however they did not mention ever using it or being involved much otherwise. As the focus group progressed, however, it did become clear that again they were underestimating their contributions to their children's education. It emerged that they did participate in some school-based activities and desired to do more in some regards. Some parents had been involved when the children were preparing for their communion and one had come in to help with group work, finding that very beneficial.

However, as soon as she had suggested this, she stated that she had enough trust in the teacher, seeming to imply that she did not feel the need to come in to help out, and the other parentsimmediatelytookherupon this,allsuggestingthattheydidnotseethatmuchofaneed for direct school-based involvement because they trusted the teachers to look after their children's education. This reinforces the interpretation that parents in School 1 do not seem to have confidence in their own role as educators, and echoes the literature on the impact of socioeconomic status on parental role construction (Robinson and Harris,2014).

Finally, the parentssuggestedsomeinterestinparticipatinginschooltoursbutthatthis was no longer done, possibly due to garda vetting. They remembered such school tours and parents' involvement from their own schooling but said that this was not done in the school.

The parents expressed a keen interest in participating in such tours. From the focus groups with children, it also emerged that parents come in for events such as sports days and a Danceathon that the school held, as well as for parent-teacher meetings and other important meetings in the school. The parents themselves mentioned the Danceathon and had been impressed that the Principal also participated in this, and mentioned a meeting about homework, but otherwise did not mention other meetings or activities they participate in in the school, again under-selling their involvement. The mother who brought her children to the zoo regularly, in contrast to the others, did speak at length of all the activities she participated in the school, including attending coffee mornings and maths classes to be better able to support children in their maths learning, and being

actively involved in a story sac project across the junior and senior school.

Regardless of how much the parents actually participated in at the school, all parents agreed that the school did a lot to involve parents and was a very welcoming space. When they were asked if there was anything else they felt they needed from the school, one of the mothers suggested that the school teach her children about sexuality, menstruation and related topics around body safety and puberty. When the interviewer repeated her statement, asking if she wanted more support from the school in having such conversations with her children the parent was adamant that she did not want support but wanted the school to have those conversations with the children. The interviewer then mentioned SPHE as a subject in school where these conversations would take place and the parent confided that she was not aware of this, as her children did not communicate to her much of what went on in school. This confirms international findings that parents tend not to be very knowledgeable about curriculum contents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Another parent also wanted more support in this area but was more willing to engage in these conversations at home and had looked up books to help her doso.

Communication.

In terms of parents communicating with the school, all the parents felt that their opinions were valued, that they were always welcome to come to the teacher or Principal with anything they wanted to discuss, and that they could do so informally upon dropping or collecting their children. However, from the perspective of school personnel, communication was identified as one of the main challenges in parental involvement. This provides an alternative picture to that provided in much of the literature, which generally indicates that parents consider schools to be less open than they think themselves to be (Hall et al., 2008). In this case, the parents felt that communication was better than the school did. The HSCL coordinator and Principal both expressed the difficulty in getting parents to read information sent home so that most communication happens via phone calls or at drop offs and collection time. This may be related to the literacy difficulties identified by some parents. The difficulty in engaging parents also became evident in data collection as School 1 had the lowest response rate amongst parents interested in participating in focus groups and interviews during both phases of data collection. The literature would predict that such reticence may be related to a sense of intimidation often experienced by parents of lower socio-economic status interfacing with schools (O'Toole,

2016), although it should be noted that none of the parents who did participate indicated such feelings, and of course, by the nature of it, there is no solid data to explain why those who did not participate chose not to. Interestingly, these parents did not comment on ever going to the school with new ideas or with things that they would like to get involved in, as often happened in the other schools, despite having valuable ideas for involvement. This reinforces the need for proactivity from schools since many factors can limit parents' capacity to be proactive in seeking contact (Gonzales et al., 2013; Ma et al, 2016).

School personnel also noted potential tensions in negotiating the dynamics of home school relationships, commenting that while parents' ideas are welcomed there are also boundaries that need to be put in place and it is not always easy to take on board parents' ideas. A particular issue noted was that while some parents might come forward with good ideas they may not themselves be able to implement them, leading to a reluctance on the part of the school to take on board such ideas. Thus, while parents say they feel welcome and the school goes to great lengths in involving them in their children's education and life in school, there does seem to be a more invisible barrier in that the parents interviewed did not seem to express a belief that they are active partners in their children's education and do not seem to see themselves as active contributors to children's academic education outside the home. This stands in some contrast to the other schools where parents seem to have a greater sense of being an active partner with the school, confirming extensive national and international literature identifying such barriers for parents of lower socio-economic status (Robinson and Harris,2013).

Similarly, while School 1 recognises the importance of a welcoming atmosphere and bringing parents into the school, and indeed to bring them in as equals in a partnership, in reality it is not so much a partnership of equals as an attempt to bring parents into the school environment (see Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Parents' own school experiences, literacy levels and general socio-economic status and life circumstances were seen as challenges in this regard by school personnel.

School 2.
Parents' views on their role as educators.

In terms of parents' perception of their role in their children's learning, the parents in School 2 were perhaps the most reflective and deliberating in discussing this role. This is to some extent not surprising in that this is one of the key foundations of the Educate Together ethos (https://www.

and many parents specifically chose the school for its practices around parental involvement. On the other hand, such engagement by parents is, due to a variety of sociological barriers, somewhat unusual for a school designated as sufficiently disadvantaged to qualify for DEIS status (Harris and Robinson, 2013; O'Toole, 2016). In focus groups as well as interviews, the majority of parents reflected extensively on their own role in their children's education and articulated it in a way that was not evident in the urban DEIS school, nor indeed in the other schools. For example, in one focus group with three mothers of children in first and second class, all were clear that they had a very active role as their children's primary educators. What differed between the mothers was their understanding of what 'educator' means in the context of the HLE and how this education is achieved. The following excerpts are illuminating:

Parent 1: Well we believe we are the primary educator, we are the educators at home and we teach them how to live their life, teach them manners and all that. That is our role and then the school is second to that.... My husband is a secondary school teacher as well so we try to educate the whole time and school is second to that I think.

Parent 2: I am similar but a little bit different. I try not to educate them at home. I think my job at home is to listen to them and play with them and they can learn themselves through their own led kind of learning. So I wouldn't do maths at home or English at home or science at home except when you are doing it as part of an activity.

A key distinction between parent 1 and 2 is their differentiation between formal and informal learning, a similar distinction to that drawn in much of the literature (Benner and Sadler, 2016; Gileece, 2015; Harris and Robinson, 2013). An important and interesting aspect here is the influence of the teacher-as-parent or parent-as-teacher. As is suggested above, families where one of the parents is a teacher seem to have a more fluid understanding of the informal-vs-formal distinction. This in itself is important to note, as a considerable number of families in School 2 seem to have a teacher parent or have parents involved otherwise in the school through giving or attending different kinds of extra-curricular classes. The teacher-as parent or parent-as-teacher is also important to note as a number of teachers have expressed that they have different opinions on the same issue depending on whether they act as a teacher or as a parent, most especially with regards to homework (explored below). Similarly, the presence of several teachers who are also parents of children in the school and the extensive emphasis on bringing parents into the school also seem to encourage a more fluid understanding of whate ducation looks like in the school context and inthe home. Thus,several parents emphasised the more holistic understanding of education offered in School 2 and it is clear from the data that the heavy involvement of parents in the school contributes to this more holistic view.

Home learning environment.

In School 2, HLEs varied depending on whether one of the parents works as a teacher.

The 'parent-as-teacher' seemed to encourage an emphasis on curriculum areas whereas the parent who is not a teacher tended to emphasise informal learning that revolves around empowering children to learn from their own interests and in ways that suit children themselves, through play and child-led learning opportunities, with curriculum material only built in where the interest arises. Such play and child-led approaches to learning are supported by the literature, particularly for younger children (Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny, 2017). We are not aware of any existing literature that explores the dynamics of parental involvement when a parent is also a teacher.

On the face of it, this is not particularly different from parents' views in School 1 except that from the interviews and focus groups with parents in School 2, parents take an obvious pleasure in playing with their children and mentioned this as the first activity in their role as children's primary educators. In School 2, there is strong consensus across conversations that play is how children learn best and their role as parents is to ensure that children have enough play time. Interestingly, while parents in School 1 felt children had too much play time and wanted the school to offer more structured out-of-school school-based activities, parents in School 2 felt that children did not have enough play time and wanted them to have less school- based activities. Some parents preferred for children to be given more time to spend by themselves outdoors. What stands out in terms of the HLE for School 2 is the diversity of the experiences that children have access to within their homes and the emphasis parents put on providing rich family experiences for their children. Many parents emphasise that they are deliberately unstructured on weekends because they want the weekends to revolve around what children want to do. The examples given by parents include going for long walks in the woods, bringing dogs out for walks, cooking and baking together, ordering pizzas to learn about fractions, encouraging rich pretend play and generally valuing positive family time and experiences with opportunities for

communication and conversation. Many of these leisure activities were also mentioned by children, in particular baking and going for walks, and supports the literature identifying the importance of such informal modes of learning (Benner and Sadler, 2016).

Despite the significant emphasis on free play time, what emerges for School 2 is that the HLE is dominated by a fairly predictable structure for children (who are not in after-school) in that the first half an hour to an hour after school is spent on homework (less for younger children), and then children spend considerable time playing before they get a set amount of screen time or time spent on various devices, around which there seems to be some regulation of use for a lot of children. Such regulation has been linked with positive educational outcomes (Eivers et al., 2010; Kavanagh et al., 2015). Children in School 2 emphasised play with siblings, friends and cousins to a similar extent as children in School 1. In particular, children described playing with lego, engaging in pretend play and having different games they play with friends, a level of detail around play not provided by children in School 1. Some children also mentioned playing computer games with friends via Facetime. Interestingly, however, while parents in School 2 emphasise play considerably more as an important element of the HLE and something parents actively encourage and say they do with children, several children in School 2 confided that their parents never or rarely have time to play with them because "they are always busy". Thus, while a good number of children confirmed that their parents do play with them, another significant number of children said their parents are normally too busy to play with them. Some of the same children who said their parents do not play with them, however, said that they often spend time at grandparents' houses on weekends and these are occasions where their parents often play with them more. The primary factor here may be that their parents work and therefore mainly have time to play with their children on weekends. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) have noted the impact of work and time on parents' capacities to engage with educational activities.

When children were asked what they liked to do on weekends, many of their answers revolved around what they liked to do for holidays and minibreaks, such as going abroad or going away to other counties in Ireland, speaking to the higher socio-economic status of some children in this school than in School 1. Of more local activities, children enjoyed going to the park, accompanying their parents to the shops, going swimming or going to the cinema and a local arts centre. From all the focus groups with the children it appears that they have a good selection of books in the home and that many of them enjoy reading popular children's books and

that those who do not yet know how to read have parents who read to them at night. Access to books in the home is one of the key elements identified in the literature as contributing to a positive HLE (Gileece, 2015). Reading for fun was an activity that was deemed very popular in the GUI data also, with 70% of 9-year-olds reading several times a week for fun. Children in higher income families reported the highest rates of reading for fun while children in families of lower income or lower maternal education read infrequently, less than once a week.

Worryingly, a decrease in reading for fun since 2007, in children from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds, has been documented. The report (GUI, 2018) posited that either reading alone or with their parents is understood to have positive effects on children's language development, providing crucial foundations for in-school learning. Given this and the links of reading with long-term educational attainment and transitioning to school, this trend amongst socially disadvantaged children is particularly worrisome.

While children in School 2 seem to buck that trend in that there are high levels of reading in spite of the school's disadvantaged status, one thing the children felt they do not have enough of is time with and attention from their parents. Thus, in addition to feeling their parents are often too busy to play with them, when asked what wish they would make for their parents, several children answered that they would like more attention from their parents (FG 1), for their parents to be less stressed, and generally to be nicer (two children) and that they would like for their parents to have more money, which might suggest that they feel their parents need more money in order to be less stressed and better able to help their children more.

School-based parental activities.

With regards to school-based activities again there is great diversity in the types of activities that parents get involved in. This is partly due to the school being an Educate Together school whose ethos explicitly values and proactively seeks parents' involvement both within classrooms but also for ideas for extra-curricular activities. The parents primarily expressed very positive opinions around this involvement. In particular, the parents enjoy coming in as *Mystery Readers* in infant classes and to assist with Aistear in the classrooms. Children similarly expressed in the focus groups that they really enjoyed the *Mystery Reader* as they loved the surprise of having their parents in and valued the additional time they could spend with their parents. One difficulty in this type of activity, however, as expressed by children and parents alike, is that working families sometimes struggle to partic-

ipate much in such activities and some children certainly expressed disappointment and a sense of exclusion that their parents could not contribute to their school day in this way. This again highlights the importance of understanding a diversity of families' circumstances in designing approaches to parental involvement (O'Toole, 2016). Other school based activities that parents participate in include running the library and helping out with yard duty. Several teachers also bring in parents to the class room if parents have particular skills. One parent comes in and takes children for gardening classes and has built a little garden for the school, whileanotherparentcomesinforcookinglessonsandotherparentscomeintohelpwithMaths or science for fun. Finally, parents are involved in a variety of non-academic events such as Halloween, Easter egg hunts and sports days. Unlike many schools, parents here do not just participate but help to run the events.

The school has an active Parents' Association (PA) although this was not discussed to any great extent by parents. One parent mentioned having served on the PA but having since left, and suggested that the PA was primarily a fundraising body and thus involved mainly in organising seasonal social events to bring in money for the school. This confirms the fundraising focus of many Irish PAs highlighted in the literature (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). It seemed that the biggest issue of the PA was the belief amongst several parents that it was run by the same group of parents, who had the time and energy to give it and who were thus felt to have a greater say in how certain things should be run. In this sense, the PA contributed to a feeling of division between very involved parents and less involved parents.

Such divisions were evident in other schools also. These inter-parent dynamics have not been explored in any great detail in the literature to date. However, parents in School 2 felt so welcome to go straight to the Principal with ideas and suggestions there was perhaps not considered to be the same need for a strong PA in order to facilitate parental involvement, supporting Epstein and Sheldon's (2016) emphasis on the importance of schoolleadership.

This is explored in more detail with regards to Question2. The PA was mentioned more by the Principal and the teachers than the parents. Teachers spoke of some of the events and activities carried out by the PA, while the Principal spoke more generally about the role of a PA.

According to the Principal, the heavy involvement of parents is not just due to the ethos of parental involvement so central to Educate Together schools but also for pragmatic reasons.Likeallnew non-denominationalschools,theparentswerecrucialtotheschoolbeing founded and getting up and running. Thus without parental involvement, the school would not exist in the first place. Once that level of parental involvement has been established along with the sense by parents of being crucial to the running of the school, it becomes self- reinforcing. As a number of parents described, School 2 is known in the general community as a school that values and runs on deep parental involvement and is therefore also known as very democratic and welcoming school. According to the Principal, however, that also means the school becomes dependent on parental involvement to do the things the school deems important. As he expressed, due to issues of funding he often has to rely on students and teachers to do things not normally expected in more traditional schools. Thus for this reason he finds himself spending a lot of time pleasing people. In other words, extensive parental involvement comes with a heavy management role.

Communication.

Communication is an important aspect of School 2 according to its parents. Two of the interviewed parents had moved their children out of other schools in the area, partly due to the difficulty experienced by parents in communicating with the school around their children's education. This reinforces multiple findings in the literature on parental involvement regarding the importance of communication between home and school (O'Toole, 2016).

Parents in School 2 also consider it of huge importance in their own role that they communicate and check in with their children to get a sense of children's well-being and academic level in school. Thus parents consider communication with their children as well as with the school as a crucial element of parental involvement in their children's education. Such emphasis on three-way communication between parents, teachers and children is also evident in the literature (Smyth et al., 2004). Parents in School 2 emphasise that one of their key responsibilities with regards to their children's learning is to talk to their children about their school day, to collect them from school whenever possible in order to get a sense of their children's mood when they leave school and to check in regularly with the teachers about how their children are getting on. In the home, it means that many parents value meal times together as spaces where they can talk about their day, including school. In relation to the school, it means that many parents emphasise using email extensively to communicate with the school about their child, or to talk to the secretary, teacher or Principal whenever they feel there is something they need to discuss or address. Such use of technology to support positive home- school communication is highlighted by O'Toole (2016).

The sense that emerges from the focus groups for School 2 more so than the other schools is that because a culture of parental involvement has been so deeply integrated with the school ethos, parents are very proactive in communicating with the school and seem to feel that they are a very active part of the school day, the school environment and indeed in the running of the school. The greater fluidity that seems to exist between the school learning environment and the home learning environment is considered positive for children's holistic development and education by parents and teachers, as there is greater synergy between what they learn in school and at home, and thus the opportunity for continuity and reinforcement is greater (see Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Nonetheless, some parents experienced challenges in getting involved in the school, particularly parents who work full time, are single parents or have poor access to childcare or live far from the school, or who just generally have little time to give to the school. However, participants generally provided a picture of School 2 in which parents were integral to the life of the school and felt highly valued. This offers a very positive example of the types of home-school relationships highlighted by the literature as conducive to positive outcomes for children (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012; Desforges and Aboucaar, 2003; Emerson et al., 2012; Gileece, 2015; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2008; Johnson et al., 2016; Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013; Ma et al.,2017).

Such fluidity also comes with certain challenges, most significantly around boundaries, which emerged as an important issue in a number of focus groups and interviews. Several parents raised the issue that it is primarily the same group of parents who always get involved in school activities. This was felt to be a problem by the involved parents themselves but alsoby the parents who could not or did not want to get as heavilyinvolved.

One of the key issues is that the heavily involved parents were felt to have too much power and be too deeply involved in the running of the school, to the extent that some parents were thought to be as present and visible in the school as the teachers. A number of parents explained,

And then the same parents then would be called upon again and again, and that becomes difficult for the person who's called on time and again. Or are difficult because they might have their particular point and then other points we can't get to look at… So personal management problems would depend upon the Principal, um, whoever it's taking turns to manage that carefully (Parent 1, School 2).

There are some parents that practically are in there more often than the teachers and I don't know, it just makes me feel very uncomfortable. And I know I have talked to quite a lot of parents who feel the very same way (Parent 2, School 2).

I think it is great that the parents come in so that the kids realise that parents have been to school and they do know things. But then I also think that some parents think they run the place, that is where I find I have to run back a bit because I am not into any of that politics. And I do find that a little bit with parents' involvement. I think they can be over involved… sometimes you will see the same group of parents wandering around the school all the time, it doesn't matter what time day or night you come to the school there is a certain group of parents who would always be around doing something. Now in fairness they are probably helping the way that they feel they want to help but I just feel that is too much. I think it is too much for a parent to be here all day, or even three or four hours out of a day because then it makes it difficult for the child to associate this is school and not home. So I would come in and do what I have to do and then go home. And that is the way parental involvement, I think, should be (Parent 3, School 2).

Thus, while a general issue seems to be that some parents are uncomfortable with other parents always lingering, and indeed lingering on in classrooms after lessons have started (to the annoyance of the teachers also), moreserious issues raised revolve around child protection concerns and parents taking the right to interfere with or comment upon other parents' children. Some parents raised concerns that parents were always coming and going, having direct access to children without proper supervision and safeguarding in place. Other parents raised concerns that parents who help run the library have a very clear view over the yard during break time and some parents felt it appropriate to comment on children who seemed excluded or otherwise noticeable in the yard to those children'sparents.

School personnel also commented on the issue of boundaries. The Principal noted that he often had to work hard to find balance between the wishes of heavily involved parents, teachers and children themselves. Similarly, two teachers expressed in a focus group:

A blurring of boundaries, particularly with such an open school as we just described there, people can go, okay in the last school the door was closed but in this school it is…Wide open…And we have read that the Educate Together ethos is

that it is partnership with the parents and sometimes they can cross boundaries there, which can be difficult to remain open and communicative and also have to draw the line, actually you stepped across it there.

Thus, while one group of parents agreed that the school was avery positive experience for them in terms of parental involvement because *"it has no barriers at all",* for otherparents the lack of barriers is the main critique they have of the school and some of these parents seem to feel very strongly about this. While this issue of boundaries is raised repeatedly anecdotally in discussions of parental involvement, we are not aware of previous research that has deconstructed it in any detail.

School 3.

Parents' views on their role as educators.

Parents in School 3 did not reflect extensively on their role in their children's education, although a few of the parents in the focus group did list a number of things they did at home to teach their children various academic and non-academic skills. Parents in School 3 suggested that their primary role in their children's education was to address any struggles or difficulties the child may have in relation to school through appropriate communication with the school and in ensuring an appropriate HLE. Parents in this school were perhaps more clear than parents in other schools as to the resources and workshops they would like from the school, the NPC or the NCCA in order to support their children's learning.

Home learning environment.

Like School 2, what emerges is that the HLE is dominated by the same fairly predictable structure of homework, play and technology use. Similar to other schools, children again emphasised play with siblings, friends and neighbours. Specifically, children discussed playing with Lego, playing with pets and playing outdoors as well as playing on devices with their friends. When asked whether their parents play with them, the majority of children confirmed that this was the case, except for one child who said her mother is sickly and her father is too busy. While parents in School 2 emphasised the role of play in the HLE but children felt their parents did not play with them a lot, in School 3 children felt that their parents are generally available to play with them, but play was interestingly less of a topic in conversations with their parents. Play was in fact only mentioned by one parent in the focus group. This may be because parents in School 3 spent less time in the focus group discussing and reflecting

on their role in children's learning and more time discussing the details of communication with the school and the structure of homework. This could be because some of the parents in the focus group had slightly older children who looked after themselves much more so that parents were no longer as involved in activities with their children as other parents participating in the research in the other schools. This supports the changing forms of parental involvement over time that are highlighted in the literature (Daniel, 2015), as parents mentioned that their involvement with the school tends to decline as the children get older and do not necessarily like having their parents involved much. They felt that as they get older, children are better able to communicate about their day and experiences in school and navigate school better by themselves so that parental involvement becomes less necessary.

This is in opposition to research evidence that parental involvement is advantageous for children of all ages (Cox, 2005; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

In terms of books and reading, younger children generally said that their parents read to them if they like books but a number of children mentioned that they do not like books and therefore their parents read primarily to their siblings. The children in question seemed to be still listening in or looking at photographs in the books being read. Parents in particular mentioned sports activities, going for walks and bringing their children shopping and getting them involved with shopping lists and money in order to learn important social skills and more concrete academic skills such as addition in real life situations, baking together on weekends and playing board games. Parents also mentioned playing various oral language games in the car, such as 'I spy…' and finding things of particular colours. One parent also mentioned the need to simply "step back from the madness" of daily routines and activities. A number of children said they go on frequent trips to the zoo and do a variety of rich cultural activities, such as Russborough House, the National History Museum, amongst others. Thus, in comparison to School 2, parents in School 3 were more likely to emphasise more directly educational play where parents in School 2 placed greater emphasis on the educational value offreeplay, again highlighting the complexity of concepts of learning through play (O'Gorman and Ailwood, 2012).

School 3 is particularly interesting for the outspokenness of school personnel in their perceptionofparents'rolesintheHLEandwhattheyshouldbedoing.ThePrincipalwasvery strong in her belief that parents do not do enough to teach their children empathy. As a consequence, according to the Principal, the school has to spend increasing time and ener-

gy managing children's interactions and peer relationships. This is interesting in the light of literature that highlights parents' support for the development of self-regulation and pro- social behavior as a key factor in explaining the effectiveness of parental involvement in improving educational outcomes (Gileece, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). This emphasis must be understood in a wider context that school personnel in School 3 were generally more negative around parents, taking a more deficit approach to parental involvement than was evident for the other schools. Thus, school personnel seemed to believe that parents generally need to focus more on moral behaviour of children, including the ethical use of technology and social media, similar to the emphasis on regulation of technology access in work such as that of Eivers et al. (2010) and Kavanagh et al.(2015).

However, the school personnel also felt strongly around parents' own engagement with technology and social media, so it is not clear how they would then expect them to teach better skills to the children. School personnel felt that parents may have greater work to do on themselves before they turn to the HLE.

School-based parental activities.

Parental involvement in School 3 primarily takes the form of involvement with the particularly strong and active Parents' Association. As in most schools there is a mix of working and stay-at-home parents and many children have a minder or attend afterschool and extra-curricular activities. Parents' role in creating a positive HLE particularly revolves around ensuring an appropriate balance between homework, play time, structured activities and technology use. According to one teacher, parents who were more heavily involved in fundraising and generally in the PA felt more connected to the school, which helped them to be more empowered as parents. This supports research such as that of Hornby and Lafaele (2011) Kiely (2017) and O'Toole (2016), which showed that involvement in children's schooling can be beneficial for parents, leading to increased parental confidence, satisfaction and even interest in their own education. While experienced very positively by all stakeholders, School 3 faced some of the same problems as PAs in the other schools, namely that it is the same small group of parents that get involved. The Principal maintained that parents need direction and guidance from the school for the PA to run smoothly.

When data collection was taking place, the PA was fundraising for a new Computer Lab, which brought parents in to school on a regular basis. The PA seemed considerably stronger and more visible in School 3 compared to the other schools, as children in this school weretheonlyonestoknowfullywhattheParents'Associationdid.Thus,inSchool3,anumber of the parents interviewed for this research project served on the PA and spoke of it as a body through which they could work in partnership with the school to get things done. In focus groups with the children, it also became evident that they were used to each other's parents coming in regularly to help with various things in the schools, such as raising money for a computer room and helping to sort school books. This was not something the children felt strongly about. More so than the other schools however, children knew exactly whose parents were in the PA and what role they had in it. As long as parents did not come in because they were in trouble, children seemed indifferent to having their parents in the school.

The parents in the PA were particularly tuned in with school affairs where other parents felt less informed about school activities, informal rules around homework and other engagements by parents. Interestingly, however, a teacher at management level in the school voiced a very different opinion of the PA:

They don't take an active role involving parents, like an information evening about different aspects, it is mostly a fundraising committee, it has turned into now. I would love to see a parents' council where they would support behaviour strategies or something like that, an information evening or that kind of thing, or how to promote good study skills and things like that. The Principal gets in an outside agency to come in and do that for the kids here, how to study, good study skills, and they do an information evening for the parents on the same evening. But again only a handful turn up and you wonder is it worth it. It costs the Board of Management to get these people in. The students benefit from it all right but you needthe parents on board as well to make sure they know what is going on, how to get their children to study properly. Especially for the transition into secondary school. But I would love to have a parents' council that would do that kind of thing, interesting things for parents rather than just a fundraising committee. They look after the social end of it and I know that is important too but I would love to see them doing more.

This teacher's observations on the PA must be seen in light of his/her perception of parental involvement in children's education:

It is so important that the parents are on board. All too

often they send them to school and that is the teachers' job now. It is not, it is a team event, it is a team effort. In school we are a team here as well because there is a team of teachers, there is a team of SNAs and a team of children, we are all a team working for the one benefit.

In other words, according to the teacher working at management level in the school, the parents spent their energy on the wrong priorities for the school and for their children's education. This is interesting in the light of literature that shows how parents can sometimes internalise implicit messages that that parents should be involved to support (and not question) the aims and values of the school, and so tend not to move beyond activities like fundraising (O'Toole, 2016).

The Principal was however much more positive about the input of the PA, valuing not just their role in raising money for the school and organising social events but their significant effort in making sure parents feel welcome and get to know others. While recognising that they did serve an important fundraising function, the Principal also highlighted the many other uses she sees for the Parents' Association and indicated that she has on occasions involved them in reviewing and renewing school policies and procedures, amongst otherthings.

Yet, the Principal also saw considerable challenges relating to the same issues of boundaries as mentioned in relation to School 2. Significantly, like School 2, in School 3 boundaries around parental involvement was a prominent theme in interviews with parents as well as the school. The following quotes capture some of these difficulties:

So we do involve [parents] in so much as we can. But at the same time we don't [want] too much either. You would have to consider what would be best for the school, maybe confidentiality wise, be careful of who you choose. It is not everybody you could give certain jobs to. So the

Principal and myself would decide between us, should we or shouldn't we involve a certain person. But we deal with it as far as we can, general things around the school, they do get together and do a painting job or something, that kind of thing is okay, something that wouldn't involve other parents' children. You would have to consider carefully who you would nominate there (Teacher, School3).

We don't want to encourage too much building relationships…You have to be mindful that we are in a community, you do want a superficial relationship per se with the parents inyour child's class so that it is respectful. And I suppose we are in a small community, I have two thoughts on this. I do

think there is a huge opportunity for people to get to know new people, especially if you have come from a situation where you are new to the area, you don't know anybody. This school could afford parents a huge opportunity of a social network with regard to getting to know the people in the school and in their class and all the rest. But you also have to be mindful of the social aspect of it, you don't want to overstep the line. The kids are going to school, the parents are dropping the kids at the gate, it is lovely if you can get the parents of each year together for a cup of coffee or an informal thing with their kids there present. That is a fantastic opportunity… But I think you have to be just a bit cautious on the over socialising side too…(…). it is like they are not your best friends or anything, they have to have the teacher relationship. You don't want people coming in all the time going, I have got this problem, I have got that (Parent, School3).

This commentary highlights the need to consider contextual factors with regard to parental involvement (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; O'Toole, 2016), such as community and relationships external to the school.

Communication.

A main point of disagreement in the focus group with parents was the nature of communication between school and home. Specifically, parents who were involved in the PA had one view of how communication happens and how open the school is, while parents new to the school or not involved in the PA had a different impression of home-school communication. This may indicate a split in the parental cohort, similar to that in School 2 that is under-reported in the literature. Some of these communication issues revolved around homework and children's particular learning difficulties or special educational needs but there was also a general sense amongst the less involved parents that the school was not easy to communicate with and that for some things they were referred directly on to the PA. Thus, it appeared that the PA was identified as the primary mode of communication with the school, creatinga barrier for parents who either could not or did not want to get involved in it and who did not have close links to parents acting in it. In this regard, it seemed that it was mainly the parents who were active in the PA who felt heard in the school, while the parents who were not active in it felt that communication was somewhat of a challenge and that their ideas were not necessarily taken on board. It was also more of a struggle for these parents to navigate the unwritten rules ofcommunication.

School 4.

Due to the nature of School 4 as a special educational school and the profile of its children, many of whom have significant disabilities and / or are non-verbal, parental involvement works somewhat differently there and is much more integral – out of necessity – to the smooth running of the school and the day-to-day welfare of the children. Thus, this research responds to the calls of Goldman and Burke (2017) for further research on the specific needs and experiences of parental involvement when a child has a special educational need.

Parents' views on their role as educators.

Because of children's very specific needs in this school, parents had a very acute sense of their role in their children's learning. The parents who were interviewed spoke especially of their role in encouraging life skills, in particular around independence, and working in close collaboration with the school to reinforce the children's learning from school. While the Parents' Association here is very active and some parents discussed involvement in it, most parents are heavily involved in their children's education in a much more immediate and direct sense. Parents focused on their child's particular educational and physical needs but also spoke of the need to balance this with siblings' school work and extra-curricular activities. The focus was much less on their role as educators and much more on parents' role as carers and on the struggles they face on a daily basis in simply getting through the day. This is not surprising given some of the children's extensive physical needs and challenging behaviour. Despite parents' greater emphasis on their role as carers, parents

still also acknowledge the importance of the home learning environment and their own role in supporting their children's education. Interesting in this regard is that one parent mentioned that she did not think the school placed enough emphasis on children's academic education. In contrast, a teacher voiced that some parents have academic expectations of their children that are too high while other parents do not recognise the educational value of the school and the academic work they do with children. This reinforces previous literature highlighting a child's special educational need as a mediating factor in the relationship between home and school (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; O'Toole, 2016). Some see the school as a childminding service or care centre. Thus, where in some of the other schools discussions revolved around formal and informal learning in the home, in School 4 this discussion revolved around the academic and formal learning work of the school. Parents and teach-ers alike recognised the deeply integrated nature of formal and informal learning, or the combined educational and caring role that parents have, reminiscent of Hayes' (2004) concept of 'nurturing pedagogy'.

Home learning environment.

In School 4, parents' role at home focuses heavily on improving their child's communication skills, including learning and teaching Lámh (Irish sign language) and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), as well as learning to communicate via technological devices. For many parents, the HLE continues to focus on working with children's physical needs, such as toilet training. For the more able children in the school, parents also ensured that they attended extra-curricular activities that are particularly suited to that child's needs and interests. From interviews with children conducted through a mix of verbal conversation, Lámh and PECS, children described learning environments in which they were closely attached to their parents, siblings, grandparents and pets and they also described lives that were filled with play time and story reading. Some parents confirmed that nursery rhymes, story time, messy play, jigsaws and outdoor play, sports and trips to the beach are important elements of the home learning environments they aim to create for their children, showing the importance of such activities for all children, regardless of ability (Hayes et al., 2017). The immense juggle of balancing all their children's different needs and still finding time to engage with the different schools and work with each of their children's learning is particularly challenging for this group of parents, reinforcing the points made by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) regarding the impact of family structure and other care-giving duties. This is particularly the case for parents who have other children who despite attending mainstream schools also have diagnoses or need additional learning supports and specific work at home.

School-based parental activities.

Despite the challenges faced by parents of children in School 4, a small number were very actively involved in the Parents' Association. In addition to the PA, the school recently established an Action Team Partnership (ATP), mentioned earlier in the section on sampling. Some parents are heavily involved in the ATP whose goals relate to a partnership approach (community, school, teachers, children parents) to improvement in the areas of curriculum, behavioural matters and the welcoming atmosphere of the school (http://www.npc.ie/primary/partnership-schools-ireland). In the context of School 4, parents spend significant energy fundraising for

the school so they can get better resources for the children. The ATP meet once a month and discuss their current project, which relates to improvements needed on the school building and grounds. The various partners including school personnel and any interested community members, do the work together themselves. In an effort to promote good nutrition, the ATP has also brought a new initiative called 'Fruity Friday' to the school.

The PA and the ATP serve different purposes. According to one teacher, one of the parents of a child in her class was struggling to come to terms with her child's special needs and place in a special school. The teacher suggested she get involved with the PA, which immediately helped the parent to get more involved with the other parents and through them come to terms with her child's needs and having to go to a special school. Again, this highlights the importance of inter-parent relationships (Kiely, 2017), a factor which has not been widely emphasised in the literature to date. According to the same teacher, parents who were more heavily involved in fundraising and in the PA felt more connected to the school, which helped them to be more empowered as parents, consistent with research showing the benefits of parental involvement for parents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Kiely, 2017; O'Toole, 2016). While the PA and ATP were experienced very positively by school personnel and parents alike, they also faced some of the same problems as PAs in the other schools, namely that it is the same small group of parents that get involved and, as mentioned by the Principal, need direction and guidance from the school to function well and run smoothly.

While some parents expressed frustration that only a limited number of parents are involved in the PA and ATP, perhaps not recognising the individual challenges and capacities of different families, the teachers and Principal were very cognizant that some parents had limited ability to get involved to any great extent in the school beyond their own child's particular educational needs. Where this is the case, teachers spoke of the necessity of having positiverelationshipswiththeparentsinordertofacilitatesomeofthesamebenefits thatmore direct involvement in formal structures would elicit, reinforcing the work of O'Toole (2016) on the crucial nature of relationships for parental involvement. Teachers found it particularly beneficial to establish positive relationships with parents from the beginning so that expectations around children's abilities could be managed and so that parents feel more comfortable in providing ideas and feedback on their children's learning. This allows the teachers to optimise their teaching and the learning opportunities they provide for each child.

Communication.

The needs of many of the children in School 4 are of such a scale that it requires daily communication between home and school. Daily communication books are used for this purpose. These communication books are filled in daily by teachers and as often as possible by parents and revolve mostly around children's physical needs, mood, tiredness and general well- being on any given day. Some teachers then use specific apps to communicate with parents around the educational contents of the day in order to give parents a sense of what children are doing and learning throughout the day. This is particularly important for the many non-verbal children. According to both teachers and parents, as well as the Principal, parental involvement either through the PA, ATP or on a day-to-day basis through communication books and general communication with the school, contributes to a more holistic education for children as it facilitates to a greater extent marrying academic, social and life skills and helps to adjust expectations of each individual child. This supports previous research showing that parental involvement can build bridges between home and school learning (Hart, 2011), and challenge erroneous assumptions made by school staff, allowing for advocacy roles and ensuring appropriate provision for any special needs (Hartas,2008).

Indeed, according to one teacher, the school is not getting enough of parents' ideas, which the teacher saw as being restricted by all the policies, procedures and guidelines in place in the school. Overall, however, parents and teachers alike felt that there was ample opportunity for parents to engage with the school, either on an informal, personal basis or more formally through the PA and ATP. There is no doubt however that parental involvement in a special school is of a particular nature and can be a very sensitive issue. Thus one parent while generally in high praise of the school felt that there is quite a fine balance between working collaboratively and communicating around a child's need and professionals, including therapists and teachers, not always listening appropriately to the parent's view or perhaps coming across as judgmental or critical of the parent's capacity to care for their child. In the main, this did not seem an issue for most parents, but both parents and teachers could think of instances where this was the case.

Teachers especially emphasised cases of parents who had either found it difficult to come to terms with their child having to attend a special school, or parents who had had very poor experiences in school and therefore struggled to understand the work of the school currently with their own child. The impact of parents' own school memories is a recurring theme throughout this research, supporting the

work of Räty (2010). This is where the daily communication book and more formal involvement in the PA were considered particularly beneficial – especially where it allowed for networking and relationships with other parents, consistent with the emphasis on relationships in the PPCT model framing the current work (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Indeed, one parent suggested that it could be valuable for the PA to engage in more relief activities for parents where they could come together in a more friendly manner and have more space and time to realise that important and valuable friendships could be created so that the special school would not feel like "such a bad place". Teachers, however, also believed that too much parental involvement could become counterproductive for the parent him- or herself in cases where they put themselves under too much pressure or where their expectations of their child suddenly rose due to greater insight into what other children in the class might be doing. Thus, boundaries were again raised in this school as an important point for consideration. Again, the importance of positive relationships was emphasised to counter this pressurising of parents.

According to both teachers and parents, parental involvement is absolutely crucial to the smooth running and day-to-day work of a special educational school, and the daily communication between the home and the school is integral to this partnership. More so than any other school in the current research, parental involvement in School 4 is grounded in a strong ideal of 'partnership' in the sense deconstructed by authors like Epstein and Sheldon (2016). This partnership is based on a mutual recognition that the integrated care and education of children in the school would be impossible without a positive, balanced and equal relationship between parents and the school. Consequently, school personnel dedicated a lot of time and energy to building strong, positive relationships with parents from the moment a parent approaches the school and are constantly alert to parents' needs as much as tothechildren'sneeds,takingtheproactiveapproachadvocatedbyHornbyandLafaele(2011). Thus, where teachers sense that parents may be struggling they increase their efforts in getting them involved in some form or another in order to help the parents feel more included, not just in a partnership but in a community with other parents who can offer moral support. Similarly, parents understand the immediate need for the school to know what goes on at home and do what they can to support this communication, and indeed to help ensure that the school has the resources needed to care for and educate their children.

School 5.[3]
Parents' views on their role as educators.

In School 5, a Gaelscoil, there in strong consensus amongst parents that they play an important role in children's education but that this role changes as children get older, as identified by Daniel (2015). Like parents in School 2, parents in School 5 hold very nuanced views of their role as educators.

However, where parents in School 2 spoke mainly of play- based learning or more academic skills development in the home, parents in School 5 seem to see their role as facilitators of children's learning. Thus, parents describe their efforts as something akin to 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) their children to become independent learners by striking a balance between being involved but not overly involved (See Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). In other words, parents see their input as revolving around ensuring their children complete their work and do so as well as they can but that they as parents should not direct them too much herein or do the work for them. This is not dissimilar to the beliefs of parents in School 1, which is particularly interesting given the schools' contrasting socio-economic status. They also differ significantly however in that parents in School 5 very much see themselves as educators and facilitators of their children's learning whereas such self-belief was absent in School 1. Thus, a parent in School 5 expressed:

Well the biggest role is probably at home and there are two aspects to that. One is creating a learning environment in the home and making the home somewhere where children get exposed to other learning opportunities that they mightn't get in school. Sothat is one aspect. And, the other aspect is the support to the learning that is going on in school so in terms of the formal education they are getting as well. But also supporting them, giving them other learning opportunities that they mightn't get at school and in lots of ways it could be through sports clubs, through other organisations, Scouting and things like that, so giving them other opportunities as well. And also encouraging, I always think that reading is very important and encouraging them to develop a love of books and a love of reading and learning for themselves and exploring for themselves....

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[3] Please note: the interviews for School 5 were for the most part conducted through Irish, except for when parents expressed a preference for English. Quotes are provided here in English, as the language of the current report.

Home learning environment.

In the GUI studies, children attending Gaelscoileanna were identified as having a distinct profile, one of being strongly engaged in cultural aspects and least likely to 'fit' into the TV/sports group previously highlighted (McCoy et al., 2012). In terms of reading and mathematics performance, distinct differences were reported by GUI with children who engaged in cultural activities performing better than other groups. Those who took part in sports/computer games also were reported as having higher reading and mathematics scores, even when a 'wide range' of background factors were accounted for. Those with the lowest test scores in these subject areas were children who spend their time on TV/sports and among those with 'busy lives'.

In the data presented here, based on their views of themselves as facilitators of children's learning, parents emphasised two things in relation to HLE. Firstly, they noted the need to encourage things that their children are interested in and to complement the learning from school through children's own interests. Secondly, they identified the need to ensure that whatever was not taught or discussed in school would be covered at home. Thus, where in School 1 parents felt that this was the responsibility of the school – to cover things that they felt children were missing out on – in School 5, parents considered it their role as parents to cover any important areas that were not covered in school. Again this could conceivably be linked to the self-efficacy beliefs of parents of different socio-economic status regarding their ability to provide educational experiences for their children (Hornby and Lafaele,2011).

The picture emerging from children's and parents' interviews in School 5 is that parents offer their children rich HLE's with an abundance of books and reading, sports, family time, family excursions to cultural centres, doing household chores together, going on hiking and hill walking trips, weekends at family's houses, music, baking, cooking and walking to the shops together. These are the kinds of environments identified by authors like Benner and Saddler (2016), Eivers et al. (2010), Gileece (2015) and Kavanagh et al. (2015) as supporting positive educational outcomes for children. However, parents also described an environment where children have much less freedom to play independently than their peers in the other schools. What came out particularly strongly in the parent interviews for School 5 was that as their children are getting older, free play and playtime in the family gets increasingly replaced by structured activities, busy schedules and less parental involvement in children's lives. Parents do however continue to place an emphasis on academic skills being strengthened at home through activities that reinforce reading, arts, Science and to some extent Maths, depending on parents' own interests and strengths.

Parents in School 5 are also the most likely to enforce strict rules around technology, with some parents offering that they do not allow screen time at all, which was confirmed by the children. Such restriction of access to some technologies is again consistent with beneficial HLE's identified in the literature (Benner and Sadler, 2016; Eivers et al., 2010; Gileece, 2015; Kavanagh et al., 2015). However, watching TV together was seen by these participants as an important family activity. When children themselves were asked about their HLE's, they described playing with friends and cousins, like their peers in the other schools, playing games like tag and hide and seek, playing with their pets, playing with lego and pretend play but also enjoying bouncy castles, funfairs, going to restaurants and trips to the park and nature areas, as well as weekends away at family's houses, playing football and going on holidays abroad. Books seemed the most prevalent across all interviews in School 5, compared to the other schools, with most children suggesting they have large collections of books and engage in reading activities on a daily basis. Several children also attend afterschool and extra-curricular activities. Unlike School 2, children did not express the unavailability of parents due to being busy. Interestingly, the lack of time and general business of life was something that bothered many of the parents interviewed, who desired to have much more time to engage in various playful activities at home, as well as cooking, baking and gardening together. Large sibling groups, busy schedules of structured leisure activities, busy jobs and long working hours were some of the reasons given as to why parents feel they do not have enough time with their children. This supports Robinson and Harris' (2016) assertion that lack of engagement with formal support structures like information evenings may be a function of busy lifestyles as opposed to disinterest in children's education.

School-based parental activities.

In terms of school based activities, parents and teachers alike spoke at length about parent-teacher (PT) meetings, to an extent not observed in the other four schools. Parents consider these meetings important in order to be better positioned to support their children's education. One parent gave the example of how such a meeting helped her and her husband to address their daughter's problems in Maths and therefore felt that these meetings were particularly useful and made them feel well-supported. This supports the work of O'Toole (2016) who showed that both formal and infor-

mal approaches to parental involvement are required. The teachers, interestingly, took a somewhat different view on the meetings, stating that some parents took them too seriously and focused too heavily on the details of children's academic skills, wanting especially to know about test scores and progress to the extent that the teachers felt cross-examined and that the focus was not necessarily on the bigger picture of the child's overall progress, development and well-being. This is reminiscent of the work of Hall et al. (2008) who identified the often differing agendas for PT meetings on behalf of parents and teachers.

Other school based activities here included parents coming in to teach in the classrooms, volunteering in the library, helping to run the book rental scheme, helping with the credit union and supervising the school yard. Despite the variety of activities parents could contribute to in the school, the challenge of garda vetting was mentioned and felt to restrict the extent to which parents could engage. Some parents also mentioned that these activities are only possible for parents who do not work full time, supporting the points made by Hornby and Lafaele (2011). While parental involvement seems prominent and very active in the school, some restrictions were still felt to be present. One particularly interesting challenge, mentioned by a parent, is the difficult logistics of managing school drop-offs and collections. These difficulties make school "feel like a bit of a pain in the neck", taking up whatever mental energy could otherwise have been dedicated to proper education-focused parental involvement (see Robinson and Harris, 2016). As the logistics of school collections, especially where siblings finished at different times, was a concern across most of the schools, this may be a significant contributor to many parents' reluctance to get involved more directly in school.

School 5, like School 4, has two different Parents' Associations, each with a different purpose, although these seem neither clearly defined nor easily distinguishable from one another. One is associated with Gaeloideas and is responsible for fundraising, social events and promoting the Irish language. This council operates solely through the Irish language and thus is not as inclusive of all parents as is the more traditional Parents' Association that also runs in the school. This reflects the unique difficulties for parental involvement identified by Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) where children take part in immersion education (learning through Irish) when their parents do not speak the language. Due to the affiliation with Gaeloideas, the Irish-speaking Parents' Council could not be linked to the NPC. Therefore another Parents' Association was set up for that purpose. What this second PA does it not as clear, other than attending NPC meetings and reporting back to the school. Operating through English, it is more inclusive of the general parent population.

Communication.

Communication with the school came up much less in interviews with parents in School 5 than those in the other schools. Parents mentioned that they were encouraged to leave their children at the school gate rather than to follow them into the school but that they felt there was a multitude of ways to communicate with the school and that communication was rarely an issue. This opposes the findings of O'Toole (2016) who indicated that such drop-off and pick-up arrangements can limit home-school communication. The school uses an app to communicate two ways with parents, and parents mentioned emails and phone calls. Parents' communication with the school however seemed to revolve mostly around the parent-teacher meetings. Interestingly, parents mentioned that they had rarely felt a need to communicate with the school because their children had not had any particular difficulties and had had an easy time in school, thus not requiring much parental involvement in this regard. Parents mentioned communication when they suggested more information on what their children were doing every day in school would be helpful so they could reinforce at home, or greater notice around events to allow for working parents to participate more. Workings parents also mentioned the desire to have better ways to communicate with other parents so as to make it possible to organise play dates and thereby increasing their involvement in the school. Again this highlights the importance of inter-parent relationships not previously explored in any detail in the current literature.

Summary.

In examining the data from the five case study schools, it is clear that parents can actively contribute to good parent-school partnerships in a wide variety of ways. The modes of parental involvement may vary based on contextual factors such as the socioeconomic status of the school cohort, the ethos of the school, and the needs of the children. With a particular focus on children's learning/education, it is note-worthy that some parents may need support to understand and value their potential as the primary educators of their children. Equally interesting is the key role played by relationships – those between children and their parents, those between parents and teachers, and those between parents and other parents. Common themes emerging across the five case study schools will be explored using the PPCT framework in the concluding section of this report.

Question 2: How do the schools support parents' involvement in their child's educational journey?

In keeping with the literature (Bastiani, 1993; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Hart, 2011; Hegarty, 1993; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; O'Toole, 2016; 2017), data show that proactive support is needed from schools to maximise the potential for parental involvement in their child's educational journey. Despite some commonalities across the five case study schools, significant differences were also evident in how teachers and school systems support and value such involvement to greater or lesser extent and using a variety of approaches. We therefore provide a detailed description of the attitudes and approaches for each of the case study schools, exploring four aspects related to support for parents' role in their children's education:

1. the school's ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationshipbuilding,
2. access andcommunication,
3. school basedinvolvement
4. barriers to and benefits of parental involvement with theschool.

In the discussion of these four aspects, the relevant stakeholders' perspectives will be compared and triangulated. Some of the concepts emerging have already been explored in detail in answering Question 1 regarding parents' active contributions, and where this is the case, they will be touched on briefly here with specific emphasis on the school's role.

School 1.
Ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building.

A common theme identified by parents in School 1, the urban DEIS Band 1 school, was that of *approachability,* both for parents engaging with school personnel themselves, and for children engaging with the teachers and Principal. In particular, the parents in this school concurred with Epstein and Sheldon's (2016) emphasis on the importance of school leadership in setting the tone for parental involvement. The Principal was identified as a figure who was heavily involved with parents and families, including dressing up at Halloween and participating in the Dancethon as mentioned regarding Question 1. The Principal herself was also aware of the key role she played in this regard:

I suppose making it a welcome atmosphere so that parents feel that they can come in... So, I suppose my job as the Principal, or my involvement rather as the Principal in that would be to give the opportunities to let that happen and as I said to create an atmosphere that parents feel they can come in.

Openness and being welcoming was identified by the Principal as central to encouraging parents to see school as a positive place, particularly for those who may have had more negative feelings around their own school experiences, as reflected in the work of Räty (2010):

So, I suppose what we have to say to the parent is it doesn't matter if you have problems with literacy, it doesn't matter if you have dropped out of school. We want the best for your child and so in order to do that we need you to come in, we need you to look at what we are doing, how we are doing it.

The importance of attitude, was acknowledged by the Principal, in terms of parental transmission of concepts of school engagement to their children (see Räty, 2010). The Principal saw her role as one of encouraging parents to be positive about the school to their children, to let their children see they are interested in the school and to want them to be there. A proactive and encouraging approach with parents was identified as crucial to foster a positive attitude toward the school, reinforcing previous research (Hornby and Lafaele,2011).

The changing nature of educational experiences historically (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) was identified in this regard. Parents indicated that going to the Principal's office was not an activity seen as negative, which contrasted with the parents' past experiences during their own school days: *"So they have no fear of the Principal. Years ago they did".* One parent had the current Principal when she was in school, and so was accustomed to her style of interaction. However, the remainder of parents spoke of the fear they had of going down to Principal's office or interacting with the Principal. As noted with regards to Question 1, parents' own educational experiences can be powerful influences on their involvement in their child's educational journey (Räty, 2010). This was acknowledged by the Principal and school staff, and they saw their role as reassuring parents that the school was a positive place for them and their children. For the parents who had had negative early experiences, it appeared now not to be a barrier to their involvement with the school given their positive experiences now as parents.

This reinforces the work of Hornby and Blackwell (2018) who highlighted positive developments in home school relationships in recent times in this regard.

Another example of the Principal's approachability in the parents' eyes was the existence of a positive reward system called the 'Golden Ticket', which was used to create a positive association with the Principal's office for children. Children who behaved well were rewarded by having their photo taken and a prize given. One sensed from the parents' discussion that something such as 'going to the Principal's office', was a barometer of the ethos and attitudes central to the school and its views of the children and parents. This image of leadership encompasses a shift from the traditional concept of Principal as sole leader to a leadership style encompassing vision and openness to create space for the school community to grow, reminiscent of the 'side by side' approach advocated by Epstein and Sheldon (2016).

Teachers and the HSCL coordinator were also seen by the Principal as central to the process of supporting parental inclusion:

My position and the teachers, and [HSCL] in particular because of her position in the school, we all try as much as possible to say to parents, come on in, we will show you what we are doing.

Thus, the Principal described parents, teachers and herself all working together as a school community team, to support children. It is worth noting here, however, that the point was made in Question 1 that parents in School 1 are not always considered genuine partners, particularly when it comes to parental input in matters concerning the school.

Other activities that proved popular were ones situated outside of the school environs and within the community. These were identified as an opportunity for social interaction and relationship building between parents but also between parents and teachers. Using 'Operation Transformation', a popular TV show aiming to develop public engagement with physical activity and healthy eating, the HSCL coordinator in the senior school organised a weekly walk in the park:

We went down, every single Thursday to meet them in the park, we must have done it for about two months, we went with them, and you could say we are friends now. Just-walking around the park on a first name basis, talking about our children, and they don't see us then as that teacher. It is really important.

The strengthening of relationships was a central focus of these activities, as was seeing beyond formal or rigid boundaries of parent and teacher. This provides an example of the 'school, family and community partnership' featured in Epstein's more recent work (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016; Goodall and Montgomery 2014). Within this notion of partnership are multiple and interacting strands consistent with a bioecological conception of parental involvement (O'Toole, 2016): parents' own early experiences, teachers' attitudes, opportunities to form trusting relationships and seeing parents as the main educators of their children.

Within the data, the younger classes appear as particularly significant for schools in building relationships and supporting parental involvement from the start, again highlighting changes in involvement over time (Daniel, 2015). New parents or those with children starting Junior Infants are identified by most schools in this study as a group where additional effort and supports are put in place to support their involvement in their child's learning in the school. In School 1, from 1st class onwards, parents' responsibilities were likely to be taken over by siblings in the school and the opportunity for building relationships and continual support significantly reduced. Thus, this time is understood as a sensitive one where if it is a positive experience it builds strong foundations for the remainder of their time there. The HSCL coordinator spoke of her role in moving the information from beyond policies directly to parents:

I put together a little pack for the new parents coming in. The secretary does the official parts of the documents, the policies and all that, and they get that when they come to their meeting. But I like to put little tip sheets of things in for Junior Infants, a story book and colouring books and whatever so maybe nice tip sheets forparents.

This reinforces the existing literature on transition into school as a crucial juncture for the development of positive relationships with families (Dockett et al., 2012; O'Toole, Hayes and Mhic Mhathúna, 2013). This was particularly true in School 1 for children experiencing difficulties in their learning, as highlighted by O'Toole (2016). One strategy used by the Principal was lending games and materials to families to take home and return a few weeks later. This shifting of the school beyond the narrow confines of the school day or structures such as homework to lending parents resources spoke to developing a supportive relationship with parents, one within the realm of care. The word 'foster' was used in this regard and suggests the importance of establishing strong early foundations upon which to build

relationships. This sense of trust in the school on the part of the parents was seen as supporting and enhancing the work of the teachers - *"In general, when they come in they are willing to listen to what we are saying and they are willing to be led by what the teacher will say"* (Principal, School 1).

Due to its DEIS 1 designation, the school's HSCL coordinator is a figure identified as central to fostering positive relationships between school and parents. The coordinator has a very hands-on role towards building such relationships. Her perspective on parental involvement highlighted the importance of respectful engagement from schools, careful to avoid deficit narratives regarding parents of lower socio-economic status (Hayes et al., 2017; O'Toole, 2016; O'Toole, Hayes and Halpenny, 2019):

My job as home school liaison I think is to promote the parents' belief in their own ability to be the main educators of their children because I think working in a DEIS school, sometimes you can come across feelings from teachers, children turning up without their homework done every day, children missing lots of time, that maybe those parents don't care. But I don't believe that at all. I actually think socioeconomic background has nothing to do with it, I think every parent cares about their child's education, I genuinely do, and some teachers would say you are daft, it is not true. But I do think that they do. I just think it is because of the background they come from, because they may not have had a positive or nice time in school themselves, but they just don't know how to engage and they genuinely need our help. So, I think that is what it means to be a partnership and as teachers to promote [parental involvement].

The HSCL coordinator represented a particular lens given the nature of her role, and based on responses from other teachers, it would seem that she was accurate in her perception that not all would agree with her (see below).

Access and Communication.

School 1 employed a mixture of formal and informal methods to encourage access and facilitate communication, as recommended by O'Toole (2016). Most emphasis was placed on relational forms of communication between school and parents, including informal chats with teachers and being able to meet with the Principal. Parents also mentioned newsletters and notes sent out by the school, although some parents raised the perennial problem of notes at the bottom of the schoolbag, only to be seen when it was too late. Parents expressed satisfaction with how the school communicated with them, and teachers highlighted

the importance of genuine engagement with parents - *"And I suppose when they come in I would be willing to listen to what they say, be it good or be it bad, and that hopefully I can set up situations…"*

The literature recommends two-way communication that is available in a variety of ways and a tall reasonable times (Bastiani, 1993; Hart, 2011; Hegarty, 1993; INTO, 1997). In this school, early morning meetings were provided to facilitate communication that was accessible. While the school has a wide range of educational experiences, parental literacy is problematic in some cases, as identified with regards to Question 1. For those parents, the school would ring them rather than send notes out. Within the sphere of communication, the use of first names was identified as relationship building and a way of breaking down formalities which act as barriers between parents and school personnel

I always use my first name with the parents and even that alone can break down a bit of a barrier. I don't know, I have never put it out there obviously with teachers, if they would be willing, but I think you can do it as a class teacher in the morning when you are chatting with parents, using first names is very important.

Modes of communication identified by the children included the teacher speaking to their parent when they were collecting them, notes and texts. School reports were seen as another way the school lets parents know about their children, "At the end of the year she gives our mummies and daddies these little books and it says if we have been good or bad and every year it says I have been good". When asked about the best way they thought the school should contact their parents, most children said ringing them or talking to them. The sense of the relational and human communication appears important in children's minds and suggests that, on the whole, children feel that the relationships are good between parents and school.

School-based involvement.

As identified in relation to Question 1, parents had a number of opportunities to engage in activities in School 1. For example, parental involvement was supported in the school through volunteering to help children with Maths for fun or reading.

I done [sic] it one day last year with the Junior Infants when the little one started, she is in Senior Infants now, and they were looking for volunteers just to come in and help the kids with their group work. So, I went in and did one day

and it was good, just helping them with their reading or the certain games learning their letters and stuff like that.

The children's perspective of the school's role in supporting parental involvement was limited to why their parents came into the school and their feelings around it. Children identified the school as the place where their parents went for parent-teacher meetings and activities such as Sports Day and the Dancethon. One child said they went to the school when their parents were voting. Most of the children saw their parents coming into the school as a positive, especially if they were coming in to help out, that it made them happy because they get to see their parents and their parents get to see how they're getting on in class. For these children, parental involvement was having their parents see them in class, also suggesting the children saw being in class and their learning as a positive experience and one that they wanted their parents to see. The children also identified some parents coming into the class to help with FirstCommunions.

The existence of a Parents' Room was touched on by some participants within the lens of how the school is accessible and encouraging of parental involvement, *"There is a parent room and they tell you to go into it whenever you want and they are always asking for volunteers to come in and volunteer with group work and all that. So, they do invite you".* The Parents' Room offered a space for parents to drop in for a cup of tea, particularly in the gap between infants and older classes finishing school. Yet its scope was broader and used by the HSCL coordinator to run courses for parents, including yoga, gardening and First Aid, and for different activities such as Maths for Fun, which parents help with. One such activity illustrates the activities in the school that are seen as supportive of parental involvement:

Our Storybook Project, the way we do it ourselves. Because we start it in Junior Infants and we call the junior infant parents in at the end of September, beginning of October, and we do a little talk with them about how to read with their children and just the importance of it. And this year, for the first time, I really felt like I got through to them. This is my fourth year now in the role.

The reason identified for this perceived breakthrough was the use of the smaller and more intimate space of the parents' room rather than the hall and smaller groups allowing for easier communication. The HSCL coordinator spoke of the positive impact of the parents' room, speaking of parents being more willing to ask questions than they had been in the more formal school spaces of the hall or within the structure of a parent-teacher meeting.

I believe part of it was it was more intimate, we had asmaller number of parents, we were sitting out here in the parents' room as opposed to in the past it has always beenin the hall, and it is always more difficult for me and it is more difficult for the parents. It was really intimate, really nice and we had a nice chat about it at the end.

Courses run in the Parents' Room was also seen as a mechanism for encouraging parents with limited English and new parents into the school and to see it was a warm and welcoming environment. It also marked a way to transition and build parents' confidence to become involved in the classroom - *"It definitely makes them feel more comfortable in the school. Then the next move is to hopefully get them in to help in the classroom."*

In contrast to the HSCL coordinator, other teachers were not convinced that the parents used the Parents' Room as much in the last few years. Reasons given included the axing of parents making breakfasts and lunches for the school, replaced now by a private company. Having parents constantly in the room encouraged other parents to come in. With few now occupying that space, parents were less inclined to be the first parent or one of few in the room. The time between 1.30pm and 2.30pm did not entice parents into the room as much as in previous years, with many choosing instead to call to a nearby friend or family member instead. Teachers did speak about the importance of being able to *'catch'* parents and not *'having to chase'* them. The time of dropping a child off was seen as such an opportunity, yet it was with younger children in Junior and Senior Infants where parents were more likely to bring them to the door. This opportunity to 'catch' parents and have channels of frequent and informal communication with them offered a continual loop of information as to how their child was doing and opportunities to involve parents in supporting their children's learning - … so it is much easier now having infants because parents drop them to the door and they collect them at the door so you see parents more often. So, you immediately have a closer relationship at infant level".

Regular contact with parents allowed for greater support to be given such as tip sheets and in terms of parent-teacher meetings:

And I find as well, especially being in the junior infant, senior infant end, that come parent-teacher meetings then you

are not dreading it because you know them [parents] and if their child has fallen behind or whatever you have already told them so you are just looking at their progress and that.

Other activities that support parental involvement in the school included Sports Day, Science Day and so on. Parents are encouraged to volunteer to come in and help out at a station (station teaching is used a lot), Maths for Fun and Reading for Pleasure.

Like we are lucky with our home school liaison teacher here who runs a lot of different courses and things and parents come in and volunteer and all that. The teachers as well, particularly in Junior Infants, would have parents coming in and just volunteering to help out with different things.

For these activities the school invited the parents in and explained the activities to them. Encouraging parents into the school was evidently important to teachers, most especially in Junior Infants. Activities for such parental involvement were not once or twice a year but constant *"So, really they are involved throughout the year"*. One element of schools supporting parents' involvement was seen as parents helping out in the classroom. This presented positives but also challenges.

I have to say though, I had one amazing year last year, it was more an exception than the rule, where I had eight parents, two on a Monday, two on a Tuesday, two on a Wednesday, two on a Thursday and they never missed a session thew hole year. And it was funny then because all the other kids were hassling their mams and dads. I actually had a reserve list of another seven parents. It was an amazing year. And because the Junior Infants had a big class with little or no support, we did group work all year and it was fantastic.

However, this was considered the exception, as teachers spoke of some parents not showing up and the difficulties it caused on the day and then those parents being more likely to avoid interacting with school - *"Then you have everything prepared and one group are on their own because the parent couldn't make it and then the parent is embarrassed because they couldn't make it"*.

The benefits of schools supporting parent's involvement in the classroom was discussed, while acknowledging parents' fears of not 'knowing' enough, again pointing to the low self-efficacy beliefs of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One once in the classroom such beliefs,

the parents' worries and fears, tended to dissipate. Consequently, parents' participation in the classroom benefitted everyone:

They [parent] got to know the kids and they saw their own child in action and meet all the other children. And talk about building a relationship then, it was great, I was on first name terms with them and a great sense of community and working together.

This could be seen as one method of addressing the underestimation by parents of lower socio-economic status of their own skills identified for Question 1:

But something for parents themselves, which is what [HSCL coordinator] does, that it is nothing maybe to do with their children but kind of helps themselves. That helps their own confidence and makes them feel like better parents.

Barriers to and benefits of parental involvement.

A number of barriers to parental involvement were highlighted, as discussed under Question 1. Parents identified school trips as a mechanism to support their involvement, suggesting that such involvement leads to their child feeling happy and 'proud' to have their parent involved. However, increasing bureaucracy such as the requirement of Garda vetting, was seen as a barrier and a discouragement to parents being able to participate. The issue of literacy was identified, for one parent her partner's difficulties with reading and writing rendered him unwilling to participate with the school except dropping off or collecting their children. Parents working was also identified as a potential barrier to parental involvement in theschool. All of these barriers, with exception of vetting, have been previously highlighted in the research literature (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; O'Toole,2016).

A tension appears around more formal structures appearing to dampen or prevent parental involvement in this school. Already mentioned was the use of the parents' room as a more intimate, informal space and the positive impact on parents' involvement it had. The suggestion by the HSCL coordinator to use people's first names was found to be helpful in building trust and breaking down barriers with parents. The Parents' Association may fall under that sense of a formal structure and one that parents in this school are not comfortable with, as discussed with regards to Question 1. Regarding the time limit of five years for each HSCL coordinator before they had to return to their teaching duties, while acknowledging this was in place due to concerns of

teachers losing their teaching skills, *"the other side of it is home school liaison is losing my skills and the new person has to gain all that trust all over again"*. Further time was needed to build up relationships, trust and a sense of the role: *"…this is my fourth year, I will have one more year, when I finally think I absolutely 100% know what I am doing [laughs]"*. This sense of time needed and taken to build knowledge and develop relationships appears crucial to the work of HSCL and arguably to allteachers.

The removal of the HSCL after five years just when the person has perhaps really settled into the role seems one that is potentially injurious to the continued fostering of parental involvement in schools.

However, parental involvement was seen to benefit the school as *"if you have the parents on board things are just going to go better"*, for parents with negative early educational experiences it allayed some of the fears associated with school, which then benefited the child (see Räty, 2010). The benefits accrued from parents' involvement were clear to the HSCL coordinator.

And to be honest for the school it is a win, win, weare always shortstaffed, we never have enough personnel in the school and just to have an extra body in the classroom, whether it is playing Ludo or whatever it might be. So huge benefits.

In a school which was designated at the highest level of disadvantage, resources and shortages appeared acute and arguably with the most impact. Having parents involved there was seen as a way of filling a gap in numbers for the school rather than the initial emphasis being on more intrinsic benefits.

School 2.
Ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building.
As identified for Question 1, participants in School 2 repeatedly highlighted the importance of school ethos and culture, with the majority describing a school that is quite unique in its welcome for parents:

Personally I think culture was a huge factor. The culture here is completely different. I have worked in the school as well, it is very open, your opinion is valued, it is an even playing field; there is no hierarchy which is really important.

In terms of building relationships and fostering parental

involvement, a recurrent theme among participants was the key role of school leadership in setting the tone and creating a sense of partnership, echoing the work of Epstein and Sheldon (2016). Most parents viewed the openness of the school as forward thinking and not 'old-fashioned'. Parental involvement was very much encouraged and supported in the school and most parents valued, and felt valued by the Principal. Illustrations of this included knowing everyone's name.

I think just his personality is just amazing for the role that he is in, he is so open, I mean nothing is a problem to him, he will sit and he will talk to the President or to me and talk in the same way. There is no double standards.

The Principal himself acknowledged that a lot of the responsibility for creating an open ethos fell to him, and he felt that it was his role to create the kind of atmosphere where parents felt welcome. His comments on the influence of personal characteristics of a Principal for developing positive relationships with parents resonated with bioecological perspectives on the inter-influence between process and person factors (Bronfenbrenner and Morris,2006).

And some of that comes beyond my skills, it becomes down to my personality I think and that is quite a difficult thing. I can't make myself not shy. I mean I can, I can pretend, I can act, and I do a little bit, but I find it difficult to naturally go out to a big group of people and start asking about their mother, their father, kissing babies like a politician…

Of factors that influence parental involvement, the literature identifies certain characteristics as particularly important in Principals, namely leadership and, hereunder, the capacity to build relationships with parents (Ma et al., 2016). One strategy identified by the Principal in School 2 was to utilise other members of staff he identified as more naturally comfortable with parents.

I think an invitation to a parent initially should come from a classroom because that gets you in the door to help their own child and then they might say this is nice, I might help out in other ways or stay on and then get involved in actual nitty-gritty stuff. So you are trying to find that champion, the person who will do that nearly for you. And that is something I have tried to delegate to people who are a bit pluckier at asking parents. But I do think it is something that all staff members in a way need to have a welcoming atmosphere towards parents so it isn't just left up to the Principal to say,

'hi why don't you come in to do X, Y and Z.'.

Central to the ethos of this school is being welcoming and cultivating partnership with parents, which also resonates with findings from the other case study schools. In rejecting tokenism, the Principal spoke of the importance of 'meaningfulness', be that in ethos, interactions or in parental involvement itself.

I think the problem with parental involvement in a way, it can mean a lot of things to different people so to me the biggest word about parental involvement is 'meaningful.' Where a parent's involvement within the school isn't just a tick the box exercise or for something that doesn't really benefit the parent and the school. I think it has to benefit both. So simply being fundraising machines I don't think is a good example of parental involvement. But I think for me it is children seeing their parents active in education, that is really the nub of it, and where it becomes meaningful is where that happens.

This emphasis on meaningful involvement is an increasing focus in the literature on parents' role in their children's education, as the narrative moves from 'involvement' to 'engagement' to 'partnership' (Stefanski, Valli and Jacobson, 2016).

Also central to the ethos of the school is its Educate Together roots, with a 'child- centred' approach identified as a pillar of particular importance. Collaboration with parents was identified as central to the ethos of the school and seen in all facets of its functioning. The atmosphere in the school, largely defined and directed by the Principal, was seen to determine the high level of parental involvement. Its welcoming and open ethos was touched upon by many participants and underpinned the motivation of teachers - "And again it depends on the kind of atmosphere there and whether teachers want them to come in or not or whether the Principal is as welcoming about it ornot".

Continuous opportunities and communications were seen as fundamental to ensuring parents' involvement. This is to be understood in comparison to schools where parents might only be in the school once or twice a year for meetings or a Christmas concert. In other words, most participants identified the ethos of this school as special and unique: "Whereas it is kind of like a constant rolling thing here even if it is small bits every now and then".

The majority of the parents spoke glowingly about the relationships that had been fostered in the school by the Principal, with relationships grounded in feelings of being valued and opinions listened to "The Principal is everything, believe me, I met a few Principals who were there and they didn't even know the kids, they didn't even knowthe *teachers*". This is a common theme conveyed, the sense of being known, of being valued and this relational focus can be seen in something as relatively simple as using a first name, as also highlighted in School 1. One parent also spoke of being able to approach the Principal about relatively small things, noting that if parents cannot discuss small things, they may not have confidence to go to the staff about issues of greater gravity. This echoes the work of O'Toole (2016), which highlighted the importance of day-to-day informal encountersto foster trust in school settings. It appears that from the small seeds of knowing a name and being approachable grows a sense of being able to speak to staff about bigger issues and being confident of being heard. This sense of approachability was palpable. One parent described,

I thought it was shocking, in the other school that we were in, how scared parents were of the teachers and I thought why would you be scared of the teachers, and the Principal? Because to me you are equal, it doesn't matter what your job is. So for me, I wouldn't think twice about knocking on [the Principal]'s door and having a natter and laughing about his life with him.

Trust was seen as central in the relationships that existed within the school community and one seen as bi-directional and process led (see Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). The importance of school personnel needing to trust parents, and trust in parents, was discussed as an imperative to the functioning of the school and its community. It was understood too, that parents needed to reciprocate this level of trust in the school. Furthermore, it was a depth of trust to the point that teachers felt *"we can be friends with parents almost and that is okay, I don't have any problems with that"*. Teachers' appreciation of parents' contributions was also evident,

I guess it all relies on my relationship with parents really in a way and balancing the fact that people don't need to be here, parents don't have to come to the school to help out, there is no onus on parents to be involved.

The importance of getting to know parents, and not just their children, was linked to building relationships and encouraging parental involvement. The ethos of community in this school was reflected in teachers' discussions on knowing the community of the school and all who comprised it as central to relationship building. However, the benefits for

children of positive home-school relationships were also highlighted:

The benefit to that again is it is all about relationships really for me, that it makes the children happier, makes them feel safer, they know their parents are welcome here and therefore that they are welcome here.

Relationships were and are key to the school community and from this relational place all aspects of the school are situated and inter-related and mutually beneficial.

Boundaries. As noted for Question 1 however, in spite of the generally highly positive dynamic between parents and school staff in School 2, the maintenance of boundaries did emerge as an important theme for analysis. From the perspective of teachers, managing expectations of parents was identified as key to the smooth running of relationships between school and parents:

It is not that they are not nice, it is just that they have different expectations of what teaching is about and what classroom management is about and it is just they are different expectations and they mightn't meet with our expectations. And that is when there can be a conflict or clash.

Managing expectations was seen by school staff as a balancing act and one supported by clear policies in the school. Such formal aspects were included in a Dignity in the Workplace policy, as well as rules around the use of email and speaking to teachers in the morning. Parents' motivation for involvement was seen as a powerful force in determining if that involvement was constructive or not. Relating to the child centred ethos of the school, teachers in the focus group suggested -

We often joke that some parents may believe "it is my child-centred", which is an issue. And that can be problematic in terms of parental involvement. That parents will see a school through their own child's lens, not always, but when that happens and things aren't going so well for the child that can be a problem.

Teachers spoke of the challenges of remaining so open and communicative while also needing to 'draw the line' *"A blurring of boundaries, particularly with such an open school as we just described there, people can go, okay in the last school the door was closed but in this school it is...wide open"*. Cultural differences were cited as potentially causing

conflict as the parents' expectations of the school were very different to those of school staff. In one instance given, the effect was for teachers to discourage, and be discouraged by, the parent's involvement,

It did become quite a difficult situation when every single aspect of your teaching is questioned, at times you could find that difficult. And every day after school having to explain away different things. And it kind of got to the stage where we nearly had to discourage a bit of involvement and say, it is how it is, your child is definitely well minded.

The importance of boundaries was also raised by parents. The very openness that was highly valued by most parents caused disquiet amongst others, who identified the parents' room as a place where boundaries were crossed. In one instance, a parent spoke of another parent observing their child (the room looks into the school yard) and then commenting upon that child to other parents. This and the open policy of the school was seen, by some, as a negative and illustrated that parents spent too much time and had too much influence in the school. The issue of boundaries was associated with the open ethos: *"And then it got to where it was like the parents committee and the people thought they owned the school."* While there was generally a highly positive experience of parental involvement reported, this was not the case for a minority of parents. This school was unique in relation to other schools in terms of the level of the divergence of opinion between parents toward the ethos in the school. This supports previous literature highlighting the need to acknowledge that 'parents' are not a homogenous group (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). For this minority of parents, the openness of the school culture had crossed boundaries, allowing cliques of parents with too much influence in the school. Overly involving parents was construed negatively and they were seen as too much in the school. For some parents, discomfort with the very open ethos of the school and the relationships it encouraged, was evident:

Honestly I actually think that the parents have too much running of the school, I really do. I think there are too many parents involved in there, too many parents that know everybody's child's name in there, they know what class they are in. I think it is a real child safety issue, which is something that I am actually going to bring up when my child leaves. Whether anything comes out of it or not I don't know.

The themes of balancing and boundaries are powerfully witnessed here, and as previously noted these are under-explored in the literature to date. It is challenging to tease apart this question given it is so influenced by parents own perceptions which are not unilateral. This heterogeneous nature of parents highlights that such balancing is a perennial, parents have different viewpoints of what is their involvement or engagement and how, if at all, they wish that to be (O'Toole, 2016). An over-reliance on the Principal was also noted:

I mean if anything goes wrong in a primary school it is like, I need to talk to the Principal. Straight away. And you are like, you are going nuclear here. So I think that also moves into that area of for good things too, the Principal should be there, and the Principal should be all things to everybody in a way and ultimately that is an impossible ask...

Risk was inherent, in the Principal's opinion, in being so open to people who did not work in the school. However, he felt that *"it is quite freeing to realise actually we can't control what happens when parents come in here".* Trust was evoked as pivotal in managing boundaries. The push back against overly formalised structures or dictats was visible in the promotion instead of a positive atmosphere,

I always notice if I go into a shop like Argos or something like that, they have this big thing on the wall saying, 'we will not accept the following behaviour or we will prosecute you.' It is not that kind of thing. I go into Argos and I think, gosh that must happen quite a lot that they have had to put up that sign, this must not be the best atmosphere. The purpose of it is to say if we all agree to be nice to each other, the likelihood is we will be nice to each other.

Access and Communication.
In keeping with the ethos of openness to parents, a number of formal and informal measures were employed in this school to proactively encourage parental involvement. The secretary in the school was seen as a key person in facilitating communications between the school and parents. Parents spoke positively of her approachability and helpfulness and the speed with which she responded to parents' enquiries.

And I find also the secretary or the main person to answer the phone. It's very important. Their attitude towards questions or passing on information to the relevant teacher is very important. Then if the secretary or the admin staff

around is open, welcoming, and doesn't sound like they're too busy to talk to you. I think that'll help encourage parents to call and communicate.*

The benefits of feeling able to communicate with the school and for that to be accessible allowed for parents to feel confidence when difficult situations arose. One parent spoke of a situation where a child was being bullied and her child was one of those believed to be bullying that child. The parent spoke of how difficult this was and sensitive: *"His teacher would ring us and tell us what her opinion was and everything so it was all very open communication even in very difficult circumstances".* This is testament to how important open channels of communications were in fostering trust in the school's ability to work on difficult issues with parents. Being included and 'kept in the loop' by school personnel allowed for the parent to work with the school to support resolutions.

In School 2, technology was utilised to facilitate communications with parents. Email was extolled as very effective with teachers responding to queries by email usually by the end of day or within 24 hours. Another benefit was that it reduced the need for parents to have to arrange to go in for meetings or speak with teachers directly. While parent teacher meetings were identified, in keeping with other schools, as significant by other participants (see Hall et al., 2008), the Principal argued that technology had made the need for parent teacher meetings redundant. No parent in the school went into a meeting now not knowing already what was going to be said or how their child had been doing throughout the year. The use of email had enabled the free flow of information between teacher and parent on a continuous basis -

There is constant communication between parents and teachers here and other staff members and if there is anything that a parent needs to know they will know about it before, they will know about it very quickly.

This negated waiting weeks for meetings with teachers should an issue arise and was seen by the Principal as an easier way to communicate between school and home. A system had been put in place where before teaching started in the morning parents were welcome to drop in and have a quick word with the teacher if needed before the bell went and also afterschool but only for a few minutes.

There has to be that respect of look, it is like cold calling, you get a minute and if it is longer than the minute than be-

tween the two of you, you organise hey how about we meet tomorrow or some other time.

As seen, 'day to day interactions' formed the backbone of fostering parental involvement in the school and building a sense of trust in parents. Interestingly parking was seen as a 'flashpoint' by teachers for some parents as it impacted on their ability to drop off their child and pop into the teacher for an informal chat. Parents could no longer park directly outside the school and walk in, this restriction on access had caused consternation amongst some parents and illustrates how access and the ability to communicate can reside in physical spaces (see O'Toole, 2016). Class Dojo was an app used by some teachers to send a message though if it was of a sensitive nature a chat was seen as preferable. Teachers in this school were very comfortable with informal mechanisms of communication, valuing them as a way of supporting parental involvement.

Children spoke of parents dropping them off to school in the morning, and the reasons they commonly suggested for parents being in the school were for parent teacher meetings.

Children were aware that communications between parent and school were through the Class Dojo or notes home.

School-based involvement.

As with School 1, parents saw the Principal's office as a positive rather than negative space, possibly a shift in parents' thinking from their own school-days. The use of a reward system known as the Golden Ticket was used and children were motivated to go to the Principal's office. As witnessed in the previous school, this shift in attitude was transmitted from child to parent

So they are all the time trying to get to his office to be praised and as a result the parents see that as a positive thing too because the children are always saying, 'oh I got into [Principal] office today, it was great.

Activities organised by the Home School Community Liaison coordinator offered another opportunity for parents to be and feel consulted, with one parent telling us *"It is asked of the parents what they want to do as opposed to just offered".* Thus the ethos of participation was not just words spoken but actively integrated into the fabric of theschool.

An example identified by a parent included additional classes that were put in place for a gifted child, whereas in the previous school that the child attended, little support was offered.

So in this school it was recognised, I never said it to them and they contacted me, we are going to give her extra Maths classes, we are going to give her extra English classes, how would you feel about this, how would you feel about that?

This proactive approach, on the part of the school, was visible to the parents and reflected an ethos of engagement. A homework club staffed by teachers four days a week for an hour after school was a positive activity by the school. The school has a parent's room and in keeping with the school's ethos was an open and very accessible space. It acted as a social space in addition to its other functions: *"We invite parents to anything we possibly can".*

True to this, the school supported parental involvement through a range of activities from encouraging parents into the classroom to activities outside such as Sports Day and other events centred around celebrating Christmas, Autumn Fest and multi-cultural day.

These events were seen as opportunities for parents and children to socialise together. Other activities discussed were those organised by the Parents' Council and included Halloween and Easter events, in addition to fundraising. Coffee mornings every Friday organised by the Parents' Association, were facilitated by the school by making the Parents' Room available. Classes for parents such as Zumba and Art were run and the ethos of consultation was evident

We run a load of workshops for parents as well and we ask them at the start of the year what would you like. For example, today we have a three-week workshop on wellbeing for parents. That was something they asked for. Earlier in the year we had an artist who came in and did art with a group of the parents.

As noted for Question 1, within the classroom, having a *Mystery Reader* with infants was deemed particularly effective in supporting parent's involvement and one that was of enormous benefit to the children.

In infants we have a Mystery Reader thing where a parent comes in and none of the children know who the parent is, it is all done hush-hush. So the first time the child sees their mum or their dad coming in is a surprise, there is a built up for that. And that is a lovely simple kind of thing. You also have one off things like teddy bear picnics in Junior Infants, initiation days, open days, those kind of things. And that is in a way to at least show that schools are welcoming places. And then as they get older and the kids don't really want their parents there convincing parents to come in to look at projects they are doing.

Of course, as already noted, this could unfortunately cause a sense of disappointment for children whose parents were not in a position to attend. However, the sense of community and the creation of an informal atmosphere was a thread that ran throughout the school and through all facets of it. An example was the Gaeilge workshop that the Principal was hoping to run for parents who had little or no Irish. It was intended to use peer learning so they could help each other, eschewing tutors as *"that formalises it too much"*.

Junior Infants was recognised, as in other schools, as a sensitive time and one central to setting foundations for encouraging and supporting parents to see the school as welcoming (see Dockett et al., 2012).

And I suppose most of us would, at the start of the year, would welcome parents into the school, especially as Junior Infants teachers we would always, with new parents and that, we would have an open day for them, we would welcome them in, we would invite them back another time. We would always give them a really nice show around when they would come in so they would never have that frosty reception, or we are too busy, that never happens here. So there is always a welcoming approach to parents coming in the door so I suppose that consistently happens to the 6th class.

The importance of first contact is captured here and extends beyond Junior Infants; if a positive start can be generated this is likely to extend through the entire time the child is in the school (O'Toole et al., 2013). Having parents involved in the classroom, in helping with *Aistear* or *Mystery Reader,* was welcomed by teachers, who recognised parents as a resource supporting the school. Benefits for the parents themselves were identified as knowing what their children are learning, *Aistear* was such an example. Parents were given a workshop on *Aistear* before they came into the school to help.

So, they understood what Aistear was all about and then came in to help out during Aistear time. And as well as that it gave them the language so the kids were going home talking about Aistear so it made sense to the parents to know what Aistear meant because sometimes the terminology we use in school isn't the same as they would have at home.

Some children expressed happiness at the idea of their parents coming into the class.

Younger children linked their parents' presence in school to being collected early. Older children appeared much more ambivalent about having their parents in the school, tolerating it and suggesting it as something younger children appreciated more: "Well I don't really know but she teaches my little brother's class and he seems okay with it". This reinforces Daniel's (2015) work on changing involvement over time. The older children were able to recount parental involvement more, indicating parents helped as SNAs, in the library and for a while as substitute teachers noting when the school had more money they were not needed in that capacity.

The approach used for *Aistear* was replicated with classes provided to parents by the Home School Community Liaison coordinator in the areas of Science and Maths. In the latter, parents were trained on different Maths games for particular strands of the curriculum.

Parents would come into the school for six weeks to play those games, and teachers noted that parents were especially keen to volunteer for this activity. As this activity is for 4th class, this perhaps reveals that parents need and desire support with their child's Maths learning as they progress into more senior classes and parents might feel their own knowledge no longer suffices. Finally the teddy bear's picnic, starting in Junior Infants, was seen as another way of fostering parental involvement; all family members were welcome to join.

The parents' room too was seen as another facet signifying the school as a welcoming place and one that welcomed parents into the school.

Barriers to and benefits of parental involvement.

Apathy was described by the Principal as the greatest barrier to parental involvement.

He empathised with parents' busy lifestyles, and indicated that the reason for consultation regarding activities was to maximise the benefit to parents and children and appears to, in part, stem from a desire to reduce such apathy. The busyness of parents' lives and parents just needing some free time from their children was offered as possibly responsible for some parents' lack of involvement in the school.

For children, having their parents involved in the school showed them they were interested in their education. The Principal spoke of how excited most children were if their parent was in the school, *"they absolutely adore it; it is like the highlight of their year".* The Principal acknowledged however, that some children disliked it because they were upset that their parents were not coming in to school for *Mystery Reader* while other parents were coming in.

As one child noted, "none of my family will come in because they are all in work". This perennial issue of parents needing to be available during the school day to participate in classroom activities such as Mystery Reader, by virtue excluded parents who work, for example. While benefiting children whose parents were able, and willing, to come in, this potentially had a negative impact on those children whose parents did not, as expressed by one child in the school. This highlights the theme of balancing an activity or approach, in this instance one that appears highly beneficial, but not to all.

As touched upon earlier, parental involvement and partnership with parents was overall seen as very positive for the whole school community of parents, teachers and children. Parents' unique position in their child's life was captured with teachers relaying how they would struggle to get children to listen to several books in a row but when a parent was reading the children are captivated as it is *"more fun"*. Though the benefits were clear to teachers, it was tempered by the motivations of parents involving themselves in the school and especially within the classroom itself.

I would like them come in if they knew what they were doing and if I thought it was going to be beneficial because if a parent is just coming in for the sake of being nosey, and it happens, if they just want to come in and have a nose around, there is no point. They are coming in for ulterior motives, there is no point. But I think most of the time it is fairly positive but it depends on the parent and what is going on in my own opinion.

This seems to be the landscape, where trying to strike a balance is a constant endeavour, in this instance between wanting to encourage parents into the classroom but balanced with a concern that the parent come in for the right reasons and the reality, that some parents do not.

The importance of matched intentions, aspirations and values appears at the heart of genuine and constructive partnership between school and parents.

School 3
Ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building.

School 3 provided a somewhat different picture of parental involvement than the other case study schools in the current research. Here, like elsewhere, the importance of parental involvement was noted by teachers - "Of course it is [important], like education is a three way thing, the parents, the teacher and the child and if there is only two involved

and the third is not getting involved, the child will lose out".

In addition to valuing parents and the triangulation of relationships within the school toward a common goal of supporting children's learning, shared values were put forward by teachers as fundamental to the smooth running of the school. However, translating this into reality was challenging in School 3, and tension could be witnessed around how this relational process should operate.

One immediately noticeable feature of this school when compared to others in the current research was the lack of a space for parents to use for meetings, to spend the hour between their younger child finishing school and the older one, or for other activities. Like much of the literature (Kim and Bryan, 2017; O'Toole, 2016), one parent saw the provision of such a space as the responsibility of the school and was dismayed by the school's response when this was raised:

I did ask last year. Next year I will be sitting in my car for an hour doing homework with my daughter because it will be too far to drive home to come back to pick up my son. I asked could we have a room to do our homework because I didn't want to have to sit in the car with her, because if the homework is not done straight away her attention span is gone. And they said it was up to the Parents' Association. I don't feel it is up to the Parents' Association, I think it is the school, it is the school property. While this issue deals with accessing the school, there is arguably a sense that parents were not particularly welcome within the school walls. This demarcation between the school and parents and the confines of the school's role in supporting parents is noteworthy, certainly for this parent - "So for me it is just trying to keep [us] in the loop, trying to keep communication open and then trying to help [us] feel like [we] are a big stakeholder in the whole process".

It must be acknowledged, however, that many primary schools struggle with issues around their physical environment and are constrained in what they can provide by their budgets/state funding. Two of the schools in the research study have parents' rooms but this provision exists because of their qualification for the DEIS scheme (DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/Lessons-from-Research-on-the-Impact-of-DEIS.pdf). Schools in areas of socio-economicdisadvantage receive funding from the DEIS scheme. Part of this funding is for the provision and resourcing of a parents' room. There is no specific government funding for

parents' rooms in primary schools that do not qualify for the DEIS scheme.

The Principal of School 3 spoke of having an open door policy in operation though that had become more formalised with the introduction of Garda vetting. Open door approaches were spoken of by teachers also, and while parental involvement in the school was seen by school staff as positive in theory, challenges were raised around boundaries and teachers reported a lack of respect on the part of some parents. In one instance a teacher mentioned the need for better locks to be placed on the classroom doors, such was the feeling of threat from parents *"We have gotten locks on the doors and stuff, it went to that. And I know most schools have but we were literally like you could push open the door".* This was foregrounded by teachers against a backdrop of "entitlement" of some parents who were perceived to be willing to *"rip intoteachers".*

This needs to be understood though as a minority of parents; teachers spoke in glowing terms regarding the involvement of most parents. Nonetheless, that an atmosphere had grown in the school to the point that teachers felt it necessary to have locks fitted to the door is noteworthy. The cause of this shift in atmosphere was identified by teachers as the attitudes of some parents and a willingness to cross boundaries.

On the other extreme, challenges in supporting parental involvement were identified by teachers due to an apathy or disengagement on the part of some parents.

It is so important that the parents are on board. All too often they send them to school and that is the teachers' job now. It is not, it is a team event, it is a team effort. In school we are a team here as well because there is a team of teachers, there is a team of SNAs and a team of children, we are all a team working for the one benefit.

The experiences in this school highlighted the points made by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) regarding the need to be proactive in inviting parents into schools rather than relying on 'open door policies' that many parents may not make use of due to feeling intimidated or due to other indicators that their presence is neither expected nor particularly welcome. In seeing shared values as central to a positive and constructive partnership, it is noteworthy that while the majority of parents were viewed very positively by school staff, and teachers spoke of parents being part of the team, this was not applicable to all parents. Certainly parents who either were 'disinterested', 'entitled' or not engaged within the

school's understanding of what parental involvement meant, were identified by teachers as problematic. Teachers, in conceptualising what parental involvement meant to them foregrounded it in terms of parents' willingness to engage:

I suppose it means to me how much parents are willing to engage with their children in terms of learning, like with homework or even with the school in terms of coming in and doing some after school activities or even PE

There is resonance here with Munn's work in the early 1990's, describing situations that were termed 'partnerships' but where parents were still expected to uphold school values, through ensuring homework was done, or dress codes were adhered to, but a parental role in identifying the values the school would embody was rare. Parents who challenged school values were instead (like their children) perceived as 'problems' (Munn, 1993). Even within this close knit community, 'hard to reach' parents were identified by school staff. In attempting to involve such parents in the school and their child's learning teachers seemed genuinely flummoxed, not just as to how best to do so but more that they would even need to,

I don't know how you do it, it would have to be kind of a carrot, I don't know. I don't know what the reasons are, why they wouldn't turn up. Maybe they feel intimidated, I don't know, I can't see why you wouldn't go to an information meeting like that, it is so important. If you are a new parent starting out wouldn't you love to have all these little tips to help you along the way with your children?

Thus, this school provided a microcosm of the kinds of factors identified by authors like Reay (1998) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011), with educators' narratives around parents and the capacities of individual families to contribute impacting on the dynamic between home and school. Parents who were well disposed towards the school and felt supported were generally involved though the Parents' Association or the Board of Management, or were more 'present' within the school collecting their children from the school gates or coming in to help in the school. It appeared this was reciprocal, with the school more involved and engaged with such parents. For parents who identified as having children with additional needs or those unable to be 'present' within the school, this sense of satisfaction was absent.

The Principal of School 3 critically engaged with Munn's (1993) ideas, interrogating the idea of 'partnership' and

echoing much of the literature on this terminology (Dockett at al., 2012; Gileece, 2015; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), although perhaps not identifying the factors that excluded parents from the school. As the Principal explained:

In saying that, maybe I was naive when I first started, I kind of felt yeah it would be great to be partners but I don't know if I really understood. We tried different things where parents got involved in helping run the library and coming into the classroom and things, but that can be difficult. This is a small community. I think it can be difficult for parents to be objective and there is a lot of pressure on the parents to be very careful about coming into the school and not having opinions about other people's children or not just looking after their own children. It is a very big ask to expect parents to be involved within the classroom. That is just from my own experience.

As highlighted within our bioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), the issue of context is key; here the location of the school in a small community is identified by parents, teachers and the Principal alike as a significant factor in understanding parental involvement, with communities not mentioned to the same extent by schools in high density urban areas. One parent noted that the size and composition of the school could make it difficult to respond to all parents' needs: *"It is impossible to deal with all of them and we have a relatively small school, we have a relatively non-diverse school which is unusual for this 21st century".* The blurring of the relational within the school into the community, while having positives, clearly presents challenges. This duality arguably is touched upon in terms of parents having knowledge of and access to potentially sensitive information of other people's children. This strong sense of community rooted in a small parish was a powerful influence on relationships within the school. As one teacher noted, *"Everyone knows each other from infants, that is such and such's mammy or if they see a parent coming in, even to collect them for the dentist, Sarah your mammy is coming in to collect you".* While this sense of closeness allowed for intimacy and close ties, the theme of duality can be witnessed here in balancing this against the best interests of the child. Consideration was given as to *who* could be involved in the school grounded in terms of maintaining confidentiality, a decision made by the Principal and in consultation with thestaff.

One very positive element of the school being in a small community could be seen in the closeness of relationships between the school and the pre-school which was the main feeder for most children coming into the primary school. More than just being a feeder into the school, connections and relationships between teachers and the pre-school staff had been fostered with the latter providing invaluable insights into the children coming into the school.

The teacher spoke of going down to the pre-school, *"just to observe, just to see what they are like in, what I call, their natural environment. I have seen some of them here, so it is just to see what they are like down there".* The pre-school staff also ran an after school homework club so the staff knew them from collecting the children from the school and saw them on a daily basis. This close and continuous connection, facilitated by the intimacy of a small parish provided for rich transitions and continuities of learning and care. In light of recent the NCCA (2019) *Mo Scéal* initiative, attention and recognition for these important transitions and their role in supporting children and parents (Dockett et al., 2012), this school certainly appeared to have maximised such opportunities. Such connections are almost universally identified as a positive influence on children's experiences of transition (O'Kane, 2015). It was recognised that most of the children already knew each other as did parents, and this was very positive in marking a smooth transition for the child and their parents, and this resonates with the literature, already noted with regards to Schools 1 and 2, that experiences on transition into primary school can be crucial for future family engagement (Dockett et al.,2012). This was acknowledged by teachers:

A lot of them know each other anyway but it is harder for those who have sent their kids to another pre-school... most of them have gone down to the pre-school there. That has made a huge difference because that pre-school wasn't there when I had infants first and when the kids were coming in they were coming from different pre- schools so there wasn't that connection between them.

School 3 worked in tandem with the PA to foster parental involvement by running 'Welcome' meetings for parents of Junior and Senior Infants. A workshop explaining homework is run by the school, the PA attends at the end of the workshop to introduce itself to new parents "so that at least all the new parents are putting a face on the ones that have *been around a bit longer, so that helps".* The meeting with Junior and Senior Infant parents was seen by all participants as an important date in the calendar and an activity that was highly effective in the school's role of supporting parents. The meetings allowed teachers to explain about homework

and different learning activities such as phonics. In addition, children had two 'play dates' where they could come into the school and play with toys and meet the other children who would be starting with them. This was held in the evenings and also offered parents a chance to meet each other and socialise. Parent-teacher meetings used to be held in February but they had been moved to earlier in the school year to November, as it was felt that it was too late to speak with parents about how their children were doing or address any issues that might have arisen. Finally, parents discussed their willingness to come in for activities when children first start school and how that waned as the children progressed. Further, parents who had several children in the school reported, *"Like if you have had two or three children in before you are not going to come a second, third or fourth time"* (see Daniel,2015).

Like in Schools 1 and 2, the crucial role played by the Principal was identified as key in supporting parental involvement through the establishment of ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building (see Epstein and Sheldon, 2016). Parents said of the Principal that she was willing to listen to new ideas brought to her, as noted by one parent who was a member of theParents' Association. This parent saw support from the Principal as pivotal: *"I think the Principal has to lead it or else it is probably not going to happen at all".*

Like in School 2, some teachers here felt that some parents viewed interactions and involvement through the lens of their own perspective and that of their child rather than through a more global viewpoint. This sense of objectivity playing a role in the maintenance of relationships would appear a significant one and one that transmuted into messages about how parents were or should be involved in the daily running of the school.

Yeah I think bringing parents into the classroom and ensuring that it happens in a way that they perform in whatever role that you are giving them in an objective way that they are going to... Even if they do hold confidentiality and everything, I suppose they are getting a lot of perceptions about different kids and friendships, just to protect the kids I feel can be tricky.

The Principal understood this challenge in terms of protecting and ensuring the well- being of all children. It is interesting to see this in contrast to School 2 where it was parents who expressed concerns around boundaries and child safety with regard to parental involvement in the classroom. School 1 also touched upon the pragmatics of having parents in the classroom and implications for confidentiality and boundaries. This perhaps sheds light on the more structured approach within the school with the Parents' Association central in organising events to involve parents and offers a possible explanation for the separation of school from being heavily involved in involving parents in the school.

Our parents' association, they have done great work and they have done a lot of training, and then they have made a big effort to get to know people and to network and through their own initiatives... They make a big effort tomake sure people feel welcome and just to get to know others and all this sort of thing. I know they are always looking for more ways to communicate with each other and the school comes under pressure a lot with regards to could we facilitatemore-inthesharingofinformationandemailaddressesand numbers, but we don't get involved in that at all. I suppose we just leave themselves to sort that out.

Access and communication.

Parental involvement in School 3 is through more formal and traditional mechanisms of the school working in partnership with the Parents Association. It is the PA that is the central hub for generating and fostering parental involvement rather than the direct relationships between parents and teachers noted in other schools and highlighted in the literature (Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Hayes et al., 2017; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). The opportunities the PA created for parents to share information was mentioned as being very important. As one parent noted - "I sometimes think if the parents in the year can network together and get to know each other, that is brilliant because then you have the support of other parents". Again this raises the importance of inter-parent relationships not yet explored in any detail in existing literature. In terms of the school and its role, the school gate remained a place where parents could interact; exchange information, socialise and was an opportunity for parental involvement in the school. However, the message was quite clear that this was the appropriate place for parents, rather than within school walls. Communication was through the formal mode of the PA. The Principal also spoke of the newsletter as a mode of supporting parents' understanding of their child's learning, NCCA tips and links were included in the newsletter and recently a piece on standardised testing included. Technology also played a role in supporting communications with parents and was used in facilitating time slots for parent- teacher meetings, giving parents autonomy in choosing a time-slot that suited

them. The Principal viewed this initiative as popular with parents and suggested parents *"liked having a little bit more ownership"*.

This desire on the part of parents, and recognition from teachers, that more support and information needs to be given to parents is particularly visible in terms of the curriculum and how it is applied in class. This seemed more pertinent too as the child progress into more senior classes

The feedback from that meeting was that the parents had actually no notion of what the kids were actually learning in 5th and 6th class curriculum. We went through the functional writing scheme that we do and the comprehension, Building Bridges, and the ways in which we try to teach them practical skills that they will be able to transfer over to 2nd level.

This supports international literature which highlights parents' limited understanding of curriculum (Johansson, 2009). The Principal spoke of how positively curriculum workshops were received and it was noted that parents were more interested in finding out about the actual content of the curriculum than meetings just to talk to teachers about their children. The Principal spoke of her desire to roll out these workshop through 1st to 4th class given how beneficial they were to the 5th and 6th class parents.

School-based parental involvement.

With regards to activities for parents that took place within the school, teachers indicated that when activities are run to encourage parents, it is the same parents who go and the same parents who do not. An example given was an internet safety talk which was very well received by the parents who did attend. There was little recognition by teachers of the point made by Harris and Robinson (2016) that lack of engagement with formal support structures like information evenings may be a function of busy lifestyles as opposed to disinterest in children's education. Other activities in the school were reading night where children attended in their pajamas with their parents though this had not run this year as the PA had not been able to get it off the ground. As already noted, the PA was the central organising body for activities in the school, though done in consultation and with the support of the Principal. Some parents viewed involvement in the PA and Board of Management as a vehicle that allowed schools to support parental involvement. One parent spoke enthusiastically:

So I think when the parents are involved and even to

come in, yes get involved in the parents' association and board of management and whatever else you can get involved in because you learn so much more about the actual workings, what the kids are exposed to.

As already noted, the twinning of parental involvement in the school with that of involvement in the PA was noteworthy and suggested a demarcation of sorts existed within the school with more structured and rigid understanding of how parent's involvement in the school was operated and managed. Again, the Principal exhibited some critical engagement with this, highlighting a disconnect that can present between teachers' expectations and parents' perspectives regarding supporting children's learning.

These are things that teachers think are so common sense but actually I think our generation are too busy to think about it, there is nobody guiding them at all. I just think parents want a bit of guidance and a bit of support and I think I know myself talking at a parents' association meeting, they are always so interested when I talk about reading or the handwriting policy or technology and stuff, they are always so interested in that part of the whole part of the meeting. So I think if we don't teach them how to do stuff then they are not going to know...

In other schools, this sense that parents need and want more support in terms of understanding how to support their child's learning seems to be more clearly appreciated across school staffs.

Parental engagement was further constituted within a framework of activities, such as after school classes, helping in the library and one parent who volunteered as an SNA as part of work experience for a course in which she was enrolled. Other activities revolved around religious aspects such as First Communions and Confirmation for which parents' committees existed. Sport is another area where parents were involved, in partnership with the PA. Parents run the athletics team, training teams after school with the support of the teachers; *"but those parents are leading that which is brilliant. And I am quite happy to let them on"*. This may illuminate why parents who are involved in the PA spoke glowingly about their involvement and the school's support of parental involvement while parents not involved felt more disconnected.

They [parents] can't do it on their own, there has to be a teacher present but the parents that have got involved are not looking for the teacher to lead or coordinate. They have

taken on those roles and the teacher is there to support, help supervise and help manage the kids, so that has been great and has worked out well.

Interpretation of this dynamic depends on perspective, one can see this as parents having ownership of their involvement in the school with the school overseeing it and offering support where needed, or that parental involvement is understood in a more contained fashion.

In outlining why their parents would be in the school, reasons identified by children included if a child was sick or had forgotten something. Two children identified that their parents were on the Parents' Association and the Board of Management and as such would be in the school for that reason, the latter helping the Principal with computers in the computer room. These children also identified activities such as signing cheques in relation to fundraising as additional reasons. Parents actively involved in the classroom was not something salient to the children. In terms of wanting to have their parents involved in the school, the children were mostly ambivalent, one child was against it whilst many said they didn't mind. A handful thought it would be positive though these were located amongst the younger children. When asked how parents were different from teachers, the majority of children saw teachers as figures who knew them well from a learning perspective, *"Teachers know where you are struggling as well"*. Parents were not automatically understood as being privy to the same insight in terms of their child's education.

Whereas your parents may not know that. Sometimes your parents may understand you a little bit better than your teachers will just because they understand what you struggle with out of your whole life rather than just your school.

School 4 (Special School)
Ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building.
As noted in relation to Question 1, the particular nature of School 4 meant that the school had a role in supporting parents that went beyond the needs of parents in other schools. As noted by one teacher,

I suppose it is different to mainstream, we have to work as a team because of the medical needs and behavioural needs of our children we always work as a team and we don't consider ourselves school and home. We are all involved in the child's life.

Parents generally were very appreciative of the extent of support offered to them - "I don't think she [Principal] can do anything else. I think she is doing the best job to her ability that she can do. I don't think there is another thing that she can do".

Most felt that the school staff were doing all they could to support them through open channels of communications and in a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The school's pupils had disabilities ranging from moderate to profound and including children who were verbal and non-verbal. The school facilitated having numerous other personnel on site, or having access to the school, personnel such as speech therapists, physiotherapists and counsellors, to meet with the children there. This team approach resonates with Epstein and Sheldon's (2016) ideas around home, school, community partnerships. The counsellor was identified as the linchpin by parents who would manage these appointments, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and organise meetings should parents wish. This sense of other professionals operating in tandem with the school and yet being integrated within the school, existed. Teachers would often be present during appointments with thesepersonnel.

To me it is the courtesy, respect, all of that for parents is really important. I find that very easy in this school because the parents have a tough time as well. I don't feel sorry for them, well sometimes I do, but in mainstream, because I worked there as well for a long time, it is not always as easy to be so empathetic because parents can be quite aggressive at times and assertive. But here I just think they have enough to deal with and the school is not going to be an added stress, we are going to be as helpful and as proactive and it does work. That is the approach.

This Principal identified her role as one of ensuring parental involvement which requires being proactive (see Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). An important part of this process was learning as much as possible about the child which means *"that the parent in tandem with the school work with us"*. Consultation was a hallmark of this school and the centrality of parents to its work and to working with their children. This consultative approach was used to solve some of the challenges involved in supporting parental involvement in the school. Some parents live quite far away from the school *"but we have worked really hard on that over the past few years trying to think outside the box"*. One example given was using the school bus to collect parents who did not drive so they could come into the school for a meeting. When parents who were car drivers realised that some par-

ents needed a lift to school meetings, they stepped in to offer lifts themselves. After that intervention, the bus never again had to be used to pick up parents. *"But that came from the action team partnership, that discussion about using our school bus to collect parents who couldn't drive. So it was just a simple thing. But it was all of that discussion"…* This example highlights the multiple and interacting processes within the school. At the centre of all of this though was consultation and discussions which, according to the Principal are at the heart of the school and reflected in all aspects of its running.

The recurring theme across schools of the role of the Principal as critical to the ethos and running of the school was also identified by teachers here (see Epstein and Sheldon, 2016). One teacher commented that of all the schools she had worked in, this Principal would be the most involved, would know information about all the parents and their children so when greeting them she could ask personalised questions and this showed a genuine interest and care and something the parents really valued. The breaking down of barriers and formalities was seen as important in the school ethos, that all were on the same team. One teacher commented that the parents see her not as the Principal but as [name identified].

Leadership was recognised as the thread that ran through the school and started from the Principal. As one teacher put it, *"Strong Principal, strong school, she gets involved…she facilitates a lot of it, a lot of the parent evenings".* Being hands on and actively and proactively involved in the school was seen as central. The Principal was seen to run workshops for parents and would be present and interacting with the parents at it. That the Principal was non-teaching was identified as core to enable this and to be available to parents at all times. Teachers noted that this allowed for the Principal to be *"the go-to person, if there is any kind of an issue arising with a parent she would step in straight away and be the person who deals with it so it is not done in the class time".* This all contributed to the ethos of the school being one that was open and welcoming. The importance of inclusion, that parents were central to the children's lives and that they needed to be included in all things and consulted was another dominant theme.

The structure of the school, running the educational part while also allowing for access from other personnel allowed for a complicated tangle of relationships within the school. In terms of parents' sense of relationship with the school staff it was predominantly very positive. Most parents spoke glowingly of the Principal in terms of her approachability and accessibility and a feeling of trust was expressed. This too extended to the teachers. Parents spoke of the close relationship that had developed, and was needed, in supporting their children. Again, this shows how children's special educational needs can be a mediating factors in the relationship between home and school (O'Toole, 2016). Ongoing daily communication between teacher and parent was essential given the complex needs of the children including medical ones and this communication was bi-directional. Overall parents in this school spoke very positively about their relationships with the Principal and teachers. However, some conflicted relationships with other personnel who would be on site, such as therapists, were noted by parents. Though parents appreciated not having to visit locations for their children to access speech and language therapy or occupational therapy, feelings of frustrations with these individuals at times coloured feelings toward the school *"But with speech therapy I am just dumbfounded. And I know it is something that is part of the HSE but it is also, I think tightly tied into school because communication is so important".*

The fundamental nature of relationships to support parents (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) is particularly present and felt for those whose children have additional needs. Qualities needed in staff include that they are non-judgmental and that a place of trust exists. While these are all characteristics that support parents, it had added significance for parents in this school.

The following excerpt is reflective of this, the parent who otherwise speaks glowingly of staff in her child's school talked of her upset, almost a betrayal of not being supported by school personnel as she had hoped during an encounter with a speech therapist in the school. She spoke about feeling undermined and disappointed that the teacher had not defended her.

I don't expect anyone to say you are a wonderful mother. I think myself I am doing a good job with her, we are doing the best we can and there are a lot of sleepless nights with them… I know it is not her [teacher's] fault, it is just one of them things, I totally understand that. So sometimes there is support there and then there are other times when I am trying to explain the situation they don't understand.

It is perhaps testament to the bond this parent felt, or the expectations she had for the school that she felt aggrieved and disappointed. This is a timely reminder that when words such as partnership with parents and supporting parental involvement are spoken, they may have a powerful impact (Munn, 1993; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Parents knowing

that the school and its personnel were there for them as a support was vital and the basis for growing and fostering relationships. This was especially important given the nature of the school and the complex needs of the children. As the Principal noted that it is very difficult to

operate as a teacher, work with the child without knowing the parents, without talking to the parents. It doesn't happen automatically all the time, you have to work. And there are parents who don't see the school as a friendly place in the beginning but it does take time.

There was acknowledgment that for many parents apprehension existed in the beginning and it involved trying to move away from parents putting children on the bus and that being the extent of the involvement with the school, other than the daily book. To shift to seeing the school as a welcoming and supportive place, discussions and consultation were utilised but within a caring and thoughtful prism, such as recognising that some parents could not drive to the school to attend meetings. This echoes the emphasis in the literature on proactivity in inviting parents to engage (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). The establishment of the ATP, noted in relation to question 1, was another initiative created to develop connections and strengthen links. Time was a factor, demonstrating to parents that the school had commitment to supporting them and involving them was a process.

In addition to the importance of relationships with the teachers, like in School 2, the school secretary was identified as an important figure for parents as they often found it easier to speak with her. This again points to the interconnectedness of all within the school community. Continuity of relationships was identified as important for parents, and as well as the school secretary, teachers identified the Principal as offering such continuity

They know her well and that really works when the children change classes because at least they still have that relationship with the Principal, even when they go to someone new, they have someone to talk to, someone to communicate with until they develop that relationship with the new teacher.

Teachers were very clear that involving parents was not an 'optional extra' in this school, but an essential part of their role, echoing the perspective of INTO (1997).

And I suppose be very respectful of the parents' knowledge, especially in this setting. Day to day to run your class

and to develop relationships and to cater for each child's needs you must involve the parents...and you have to prove yourself that you have taken it [their suggestions] on board and show them.

The importance of building 'trust', of educational staff proving themselves to parents as picked up earlier by the Principal, emphasising that this takes time. She also indicated that her role may involve reassuring parents, especially where there might be conflict, that the teacher's intent was to be supportive. The bi-directional nature of relationship in the school, a mutuality of working together toward a common goal, was powerfully articulated by many of the teachers, supporting a bioecological conception of parental involvement (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Furthermore, teachers understood that parents whose children have additional needs, need additional supports and extra consideration:

It is very easy if someone is giving out about something or saying this happened or this happened, it is very easy to take the defensive, oh that one... So just trying to give parents a bit of a break because they are under pressure.

Access and Communication.

Parents were very happy with communication within the school, in terms of accessibility to teachers and the Principal: *"I don't struggle with communication with this school"*. The school was open to new ideas or parents feeding back what worked well at home. Channels of communication particularly centred around a daily 'book' which was filled in by the teacher and sent home at the end of the day. This was seen as a very valuable, in fact essential, channel,

He will write into the book how [the child's] day went and whether he was in good form of bad form, whether he was tired or whether they felt he had come with a seizure, it all goes into the book. So nothing goes throughout the day without [the teacher] discussing it with me through the book.

This was reciprocated by parents in the evening, so a continuous communication loop was present between teacher and parent. The parents noted that the information contained in the book did not include personal information or if there was a *"major problem",* the teacher would ring the parents instead. Parents spoke very positively as to how well this worked, and that for many parents they expressed no difficulties in communicating with the school. Some parents

mentioned trying to get a Whatsapp going for the parents, though acknowledging that many parents did not want to be as involved in the school to the extent that they did. IEPs focussed on both the child's educational and other needs. Overall, in terms of the school personnel, parents were incredibly satisfied with the channels of communication in operation. The daily book was a powerful channel, however teachers rang parents regularly to update them and parents felt able to contact any school staff member. This highlights the importance of a variety of modes of communication highlighted in the literature (O'Toole et al., 2014).

The Principal reiterated the point about the amount of communication needed in a school like this to ensure its effective running. Her teachers agreed. *"I think teaching special education has a greater role or responsibility to parents because the life skills fromhome, they need the help in school as well so it is a symbiotic relationship".* In addition to the communication book, an app called Seesaw was utilised which allowed parents to view video clips of their children and comment on them. This was another mode of supporting continual dialogue between teacher and parent. Lámh, a manual sign system used with those with intellectual disabilities was utilised and the training courses offered. The Principal saw the school as a social outlet also where parents 'unloaded' with a 'safe' person in a safe space.

The blurring of lines between education in a strict sense was at the heart of this school and contributed to parents' positive feelings toward it and the staff. Nevertheless, as in other schools, the Principal did speak of having some boundaries in place,

I don't make myself open, the school is open for parents at all times and I say if I can I will talk to you but I do ask parents to make an appointment, that I will be there, not to frustrate them. If somebody walked in off the street and they were really distressed I would do my very best to be there, but sometimes you can't.

Yet the intent behind this boundary of making an appointment (if possible) was grounded more in a relational sense of ensuring the parent could be properly supported than in some other settings in which boundaries were focused on ensuring some distance between parents and the school. Clear communication was seen as essential to ensure parents knew what was happening with their child in the school, that *"everyone was on the same page".*

While it could be challenging, teachers saw it as fundamentally important:

Good strong communication links between the school and home. At the end of the day we are all here to try and improve the lives of children with special needs. I suppose it is very different from a mainstream setting, very different.

Teachers also spoke about being able to ring parents if they need to discuss anything.

In terms of parents being able to communicate with children who were nonverbal, the teachers spoke of the classes put on for parents to aid this and included training on Lámh. Finally, parents with literacy issues were supported by teachers who spoke of inviting parents in so they could help them fill in forms and so on. The importance of supporting parents and making them feel comfortable in the school was paramount. One thing the Principal would have criticised in the past is that children are *"bussed into school"* and the opportunity for a quick chat at drop off or collection is lost. This concurs with O'Toole's (2016) emphasis on access to the school building as a facilitator of parent-school relationships. As such the school was at pains to reiterate to parents that they were 'just a phone call away'. Though the communication diaries were seen as bridging that, it was recognised as 'not the same' as that quick chat or face to face communication.

School-based parental involvement.

Major challenges to organising or running activities in the school existed and this reflected the unique characteristics and pressures experienced by these families. Whereas most parents might find going to activities in the evening difficult, having a child with moderate or profound disabilities made that more challenging for many parents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). The parents who participated in this research, by virtue of being willing to participate, were more likely involved in the school too. As in many schools, one parent said it was always the same parents who went to meetings, this though was understood in the context of the additional challenges parents in the school faced:

Parents are either working, busy, childcare, but the parents at this school are under more pressure than a parent in a mainstream school. I can't get baby-sitters for my son ever from my family so they are in a different situation, it is hard

Another parent agreed:

I think [the Principal] does a really good job and I think she tries really hard to get everybody on board. But a lot of parents just don't get involved and as I said before it is a dif-

ferent situation, it is very different to a mainstream school.

Not all parents were as sympathetic however, and in this school as in others in the current research, there were some splits evident between those parents who were in a position to contribute extensively and those who, for many reasons, were not.

As discussed for Question 1, in addition to the existence of a Parents' Association and Board of Management, the Action Team Partnership (ATP) played a significant role, comprising members of the community, teachers, children and parents - all with the aim to improve the child's school day and the aesthetics of the school. ATP operates alongside and in conjunction with the other bodies and its current projects included improving the playground and working on the gym. The ATP captured the deep rooted sense of everyone working together for the betterment of the children, perhaps in a more profound way than one might witness in typical mainstream schools. The ties to the community were inherent within the ATP and reflected the deeply relational and intersectional nature at play in the school (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Epstein and Sheldon, 2016; O'Toole, Hayes and Halpenny, 2019).

Reflective of this was having occupational therapists and others available to work with parents and teachers in supporting them around a broader range of learning than would be witnessed in a mainstream school and included life skills and behavioural management, for example. Balancing the range of activities and meetings put in place with the additional challenges faced by many parents of attending was constant and something that demanded sensitivity on the part of the school. Having meetings where several things happen, with a multiplicity of functions, was one approach used. The meeting at the start of the year was used to fill out forms, handing out of uniforms, communication diaries and the secretary *"doing all the business stuff"* but it was also used as an opportunity to meet staff and to make social connections with parents. This meeting lasted between 9.30 am and 1.30pm, highlighting a recognition of the difficulties parents have of constantly coming into the school.

Coffee mornings are held regularly for parents and events are organised in the school including fundraising and work by the ATP. The Lámh courses in the evening were very well attended and very popular with parents of children with moderate intellectual disabilities.

Teachers indicated that

They want to learn, they want to be able to support and they want to be able to allow the child to communicate.

Because communication is a massive thing. If the child is communicating, their behaviour is reducing so I think that is something that parents want, they want that support is here, help us to learn as well andkeep on the same page. Again it greatly depends on the parent.

Here the benefits to both parent and school is evident and illustrates the intersecting nature of the activities in the school in terms of supporting the students. Activities to help the children transition into the school were also in place, recognising the crucial nature of transitions to the positivity of experiences of both children and families (Dockett et al., 2012; O'Kane, 2015; O'Toole et al., 2013). Before starting parents, children and siblings are invited into the school to have a look around. A transitioning programme was also in place, where a child moving to the school from another would come in before doing so and spend some time in the school to gently transition them in and allow them to get to know the staff.

IEP meetings also allowed for engagement with parents and including them within planning for the year. The meetings took place at the beginning of the year and were multidisciplinary team meetings. Before the IEP meetings, teachers asked parents to fill in a form describing the 'perceived strengths and needs' for their child and to include any additional information they feel pertinent. During the meeting, the teachers spoke of ensuring that parents were fully involved in goal setting

It is very important we say, is there anything you would like the children to learn? And sometimes it is just, yes I would love them to be able to sign their name or to know their phone number or to clean their teeth independently. There is always something a parent would like you to work on and we would put that as probably the top priority for the learning because that is the most important thing really.

The centrality of the parents in setting goals and the teachers' focus on ensuring their involvement was another example of how this school, more akin to a community worked together towards a common aim.

School 5 (Gaelscoil, Suburban).
Ethos, attitudes and approaches to relationship building.

In School 5, like in School 2, a sense of being known and valued, in particular by the Principal, was repeatedly identified by parents:

Her [Principal's] whole ethos seems to be about relationships, she has a really tight team in the school and that just seems to trickle down to the kids that the teachers are happy and it is a very tightly knit school and everybody knows everybody, the kids all know each other and we all look out for each other. There just is a lovely atmosphere.

She knows every single parent by their first name...And the names of your children and the children who have left, she remembers everybody and she is just superb, she really is... And it just creates the atmosphere, and she seems to know who we all are pretty quickly, she would address me by my first name within a month or two of the boys starting.

This sense of being known, of being valued emanated through and highlighted a connectedness not just to current pupils but past pupils too. It also connected to the role of communication in building ethos and relationships. Parents in School 5 felt that they were a valued part of the school community:

I think it is very important for any school that the parents feel that they are part of the school and that there is no gap between that and them and that there is openness andcommunication.

Typical values of openness and parents feeling valued were evident in this Principal's conceptualisation of atmosphere that would encourage and support parental involvement, similar to other Principals in this study. While valuing an open environment where parents would not feel a 'gap' between them and the staff, regulating that space and boundaries existing within that space were suggested.

It's wonderful when parents help us with certain things. Often, it involves administration and such you know, rent scheme, savings, and maybe sharing expertise with us as well. So, it is very important I think, it is very important I think if the parents feel that they have a role in the school...

The 'certain things' points to a defined sense of role for parents in the school. The Principal touched on this again *"so as to encourage a certain kind of participation regard-* *ing the children's work, to be involved with the school".* The Principal was unsure if they did *"an awful lot"* to actively promote parental participation, trusting that the open and welcoming atmosphere in the school allowed for this to unfold organically. It may be however, that the Principal is underestimating and underselling the contribution of herself and her team to the development of such ethos and atmosphere, as the role of school personnel in such a dynamic, noted by most participants with regards to this school, has been noted extensively in the literature (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; O'Toole et al.,2013).

Supporting this literature, the Principal of School 5 was recognised by teachers in a leadership role in terms of creating an atmosphere or culture in the school that was welcoming to parents, "The openness, like, that is a thing that she recommends, so that attitude comes from her. That is her attitude as well, isn´t it?". The Principal encouraged teachers to reach out to parents first if there was an issue rather than wait for the parent to contact them. Within this framework of being open was a recognition of the central place of parents in their children's lives and learning.

It is very important really, because, as you know, in the case of parents they are the first teacher that children have and you know they see things at home that we don´t see sometimes, and sort of that the relationship between the teacher and the parent, to discuss things like that.

The need for communication between parents and teachers working in partnership is within this a bi-directional process between the two, as highlighted by Feiler et al. (2006). It was picked up across the areas of relationships and communication and activities, highlighting the inter-related web that makes up and is involved in, partnership between school and parents.

And in our school there is a very good relationship between parents and the school, it is very open, first name terms and you can call in or make an appointment if you want to speak to the teachers. It is just a very good open relationship.

Parents spoke positively about how the school encouraged parental involvement and was reflected through the ethos of the school, valuing openness. Parental involvement itself was identified as key to parents developing relationships with the school, with words such as 'nurture' used. It was clear that to some parents their involvement in the school was the foundation on which relationships were

built. A sense that parents who choose not to participate in the school were responsible for not being or fully feeling involved and a shift away from the school to parents as responsible for their involvement was present among some parents, again perhaps indicating a split between those parents with the capacity to be involved and those without, that is under-researched presently. This emanated from some of the parents and not from the school. Parents who worked and said they did not have direct involvement in the school said they were happy with their relationship with the school and felt they could approach them if they needed to.

The Principal saw her school as open and welcoming, and like the Principal in School 2, identified the importance of having trust in parents:

And you must find the balance between protecting the children and at the same time the trust we have in the parents and as well as that the parents in us and that people understand where the professional line is and when it is appropriate to speak with a teacher and to discuss something with the teacher...

This sense of trying to balance parents' involvement within the school and especially in particular spheres with that of protecting the children within the school is a theme that resonates in other schools and should be understood within the prism of confidentiality but also the relational and some parents' ability to be objective and view the school more broadly than just through the lens of their own child. The need to trust parents was seen as crucial as was the need to understand the importance of boundaries.

Access and Communication.

Again, approachability was an important theme in this school. Parents felt they could approach the school, and if there was anything they needed they would just ask the school. This was in response to questions regarding policies in the school which parents were unsure existed. Again, the spaces within the school feature as an informal but important place for parental involvement in the school (O'Toole, 2016). Working parents describe the 'school gate' as a location where information was shared and connections made, a space not occupied by them *"... and that is where all that kind of organising play dates, getting to know people happens"*.

Though it was noted that the school encouraged parents to drop their children off at the gate and leave, as noted for Question 1, unusually this did not seem to limit informal chats with teachers. Common reasons given by the teachers

for these 'chats' or meetings usually related to homework, if parents were concerned with more social aspects to the children's experience of school (trouble making friends, for example) or if there were problems at home. As in another school, teachers went by their first name, this was seen as a way to reduce formalities in the school and be more approachable for parents and children. Teachers said that parents can access the teacher before class starts during 'yard time'. If parents needed to pass on information to a teacher there were several mechanisms open to them including notes and calling the school to make an appointment. In contacting parents, email was identified as the most effective approach, notes would often be left in the school bag, particularly by older children. An app called 'Come Here' was used to send reminders out too. Regular newsletters were sent home to parents throughout the school year. Overall, many opportunities existed to get information from the school, although perhaps not so many for parents to give information apart from sending a note in or making an appointment to see a teacher.

Children's understanding for parents coming into the school revolved around meetings but also for concerts with older children identifying the main reason for a parent in the school was to speak with teachers. In terms of having parents more in the school, children were generally ambivalent though one child was very positive seeing it as an opportunity to see her mother more who she usually wouldn't see until late evening. Some older children did not appreciate parents in the school as *"it's like embarrassing".* Children identified notes and emails as ways the school communicated with their parents. Teachers 'catching parents' to talk as they collected their children was another form of communication identified by children.

School diaries were used frequently. When asked what method they thought best for the school to use, older children said if it was important or serious than a meeting but otherwise a note in their school diary. One child thought it *'strange'* for a teacher to have their parents' number.

A unique aspect of communication to be considered for this school when compared to the other four in the current research was its use of immersion in the Irish language. A range of competency in the Irish language existed amongst parents, as highlighted by Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) but in this Gaelscoil parents were allowed to communicate in English or Gaeilge. Parents generally did not identify this as a barrier in their communications with the school or in the school's communications with them, unlike the findings of Kavanagh and Hickey's research on this topic. However, some parents described having a knot in their stomach,

trying to practise their 'cúpla focal' before engaging with a teacher. This was despite parents' ready acknowledgement that they were not put under pressure to speak Irish by the school. It is possible parents were putting themselves under pressure to show the school they were making an attempt to speakIrish.

Language was identified by teachers as an area where parents might need support.

Parents who were not fluent and had not a good grounding in it were particularly highlighted.

Now, we have discussed this among ourselves, but we have not made it available to parents. So it's not that it might be a disadvantage for the child learning, it's not because of any lack or any skills that the parents have but maybe they do not understand the sounds of Irish and such and you can't assume that they understand such ... So that's the only disadvantage in this regard is that there is any sort of conflict between what is happening in the school and what is happening at home and we have the obligation rather than the parent, as they want help, they want to be involved, we have the duty to do something about that. We have not done anything at present but it is probably recognised that there may be a gap and that maybe we can do something about it.

School-based parental involvement.

For some parents in School 5, involvement in activities in the school was a portal to building and nurturing relationships with and within the school. Parents took part in yard duty, helped with the library and ran the rent scheme. Again, as noted in other schools, the age of the child was significant with regard to the degree of parental involvement in school activities.

Many parents spoke of being more 'hands on' when their child was younger, seeing early years as foundational and involvement particularly important, supporting the findings of Daniel (2015).

Some events run by the schools were more poorly attended than others; ones such as gardening during the day did not attract many parents though those that did attend were enthusiastic. This is a recurrent theme in other schools, that it is the same parents who volunteer to help. The parents' committees' annual meetings were also identified as poorly attended by the Principal. It was noted that parent-teacher meetings are always fully attended by parents.

Events identified as more popular with the parents were ones around drug awareness or internet safety and, to the surprise of the Principal events *"where the teachers* had a presentation on teacher literature or modern literature and that night was very popular and we never thought that it would be, it was very popular. An area where support was seen as needed was around how things were done in the school around their child's learning. I'm sure the parents at home, don't understand how we do things, does the curriculum change. We have some new approach and a different approach to spelling... The literature would indicate that this teacher may be correct in terms of parents' understanding of curricula (Johansson, 2006). Another school-based activity identified by participants in School 5 included running the credit union. In addition, the parents usually ran a céilí around the time of Seachtain na Gaeilge with an open invitation to all and this was seen as particularly helpful for new parents.

Barriers to and benefits of parental involvement.

Benefits were seen as manifold by most parents to their involvement in the school though not for all. The former were parents who were involved in the school, the latter parents who worked and who trusted the school and its staff to provide and support their children's learning and education. Again, this recurrent theme of heterogeneity of the parental population is highlighted in School 5 (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; O'Toole, 2016). Parents who were involved saw it as highly beneficial to their children, as it indicated to the child the importance of their learning by having their parent there. It was noted that it was younger children who appreciated this more, older children it was acknowledge were 'embarrassed' by having their parents involved in the school (see Daniel, 2015) though one parent hoped when they were older they would then appreciate the effort and time she had put in. The school was seen to benefit as parents knew their children best and this was seen as an advantage for the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al.,2001).

In terms of disadvantages to parental involvement, it depended on the parents and was usually related to crossing boundaries, although this was not as big a consideration as in some other schools, with teachers indicating that it was not an issue as most parents were "sensible" and knew not to disrupt a class.

Parents who worked outside the home saw their work as a potential barrier to their involvement in the school, particularly in relation to socialising and communicating with other parents (see Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Often a parent would hear about 'play dates' or other social events happen-

ing amongst parents after the fact. These parents described drop off and collection times as problematic for them. One parent related that other schools had earlier opening times and that if these were in place it would allow for her greater participation especially in terms of communicating and meeting with teachers. The same was said of pick up time with the concept of an afterschool club on the school premises identified as much needed by working parents and one that would allow them, rather than a minder, to collect their child and for conversations with teachers to occur then too. It is interesting that parents both in School 1 and School 5 sought access to an after-school club on school grounds. This is among many similarities between these two cohorts, in spite of them inhabiting opposite ends of a socio- economic continuum, as noted for Question1.

Question 3: How is Homework Designed to Promote a Partnership Between School, Child and Parents?

In the literature review comprising Part 1 of the current research, we identified the diversity of views on and approaches to homework in research and practice. Similar diversity is found across the five case study schools. Some of the schools in question have taken creative approaches to homework, moving outside of traditional curricular areas to include topics like mindfulness ('Mindfulness Mondays') and outside of traditional homework formats to include project-based homework spread over a period of time and drawing on a number of curricular areas at once. (See Appendix 10 for an overview of the different types of homework in each school). Echoing the literature (e.g. Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008), there have been very mixed feelings expressed with regard to homework – some parents experienced it as stressful and unhelpful, others liked the opportunity to find out about what their child was learning in school. Teachers also varied in their perspectives on homework (see Rudman, 2014), and the level of consultation with parents varied from little or none, to a full-scale consultative project on the benefits, forms and uses of homework resulting in school-wide changes. The format of homework also depended, in some instances, on individual children's needs. Here we go into further detail on the approach taken by each case study school and how this is viewed by all its relevant stakeholders. We then go on to explore the common themes that arise across the schools, paying particular attention to some of the key challenges experienced along with initiatives or approaches that seem to be working well.

School 1.

As a DEIS Band 1 school, School 1 has particular considerations to take into account when setting homework for its pupils. The school has an official homework policy.

According to the Principal and HSCL Coordinator, the junior school is generally very light on homework due to the varying abilities of parents to support their children's education. As found across the majority of the schools, however, homework is very dependent on the individual teacher in terms of amount and expectations (Rudman, 2014).

Homework is in the main contested by parents and the majority of children.

Homework approach and supports.

Homework in School 1 is for the most part relatively traditional in nature and consists of reading, writing and Maths. However, other forms of homework are also used. Thus, when the school participated in the Active Schools Programme, homework consisted of physical activity. Similarly, for the Junior Infant classes, this academic year the three infant teachers are doing 'teddy bear homework' where children take turns bringing home a teddy that they have to bring for a family activity, take photos of it and bring it back to school to recount the experience to their peers. Literature on homework supports the practice of giving real-life assignments, such as these (Bryan and Sullivan- Burstein, 1998 as cited in Rudman, 2014, p.22).

In terms of support, the school offers classes to parents to teach them how to support their children in doing homework in specific curricular areas, such as a 'Maths for Fun' programme. The school also runs a 'Reading for Pleasure' Programme, which involves sending books home for a week during certain periods throughout the school year. The books get sent home with a package of games and activities that can be used to extend the story, as well as guidance on how to do it.

The school also holds information evenings and workshops for infant class parents to discuss with them how homework works and what they can do at home to support their children's learning more generally. At the beginning of each school year, each class has an information meeting where the teacher goes through the work and homework planned for the class for the year. According to the HSCL Coordinator, it would be beneficial if these meetings were extended to twice a year. Literature on homework endorses this type of parent- school communication as a means to improve the quality of parental involvement in children's homework (Cunha, Rosário, Macedo, Nunes, Fuentes, Pinto, & Suárez,2015).

Cognisant of some parents' literacy difficulties, the school also makes resources available in simple and accessible language and always aims to communicate with parents in as many ways as possible. Thus while tip sheets may be sent home, the school finds it more beneficial to invite parents in for meetings, provide accessible information, presented simply, on their website, and communicate via phone and text messaging rather than brochures and leaflets.

School personnel's views.
According to the Principal, teachers give homework to reinforce the learning in school but are aware that this will have to be modified, or differentiated (Hong, 2000; Vatterot, 2017), according not only to the child's abilities but to his or her situation at home (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Trautwein et al, 2006). Thus according to the Principal,

Yes teachers give homework as I suppose to reinforce what is being done in the school. However, and the teachers would be very aware of it, we do take into account the background, the child's ability, whether or not the parents can support the child at home (Principal, School 1).

On two occasions, in informal conversation, the Principal however voiced her opinion against having any homework at all and wanted to get rid of homework entirely. There is literature to support this view (Cooper, 1989; Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). The teachers' views differed (Rudman, 2014), making a 'no homework' policy contested and difficult to implement, as the HSCL Coordinator observed:

I think the only thing is some teachers have very, very strong views on that so it would be good if it came from outside, from somewhere else, instead of the Principal saying this is a good idea, or even me. Because they will just think for God's sake [name identified] is always on the parents' side. If it was something that came from the department, you know, it would probably get those, and like I said many, many teachers would go along with it and agree with it.

Thus, despite the existence of a homework policy, it was the Principal's opinion that this policy may not be the most appropriate. Similarly, the HSCL coordinator suggested that teachers do not necessarily follow it and need to be reminded of it occasionally. The HSCL coordinator also suggested that homework is not necessarily something that is mentored or talked about with the beginner teachers, which may need more attention in order to bring everyone on board with the same homework approach.

Particularly important to the HSCL coordinator is not so much all the different types of homework and their completion but rather that parents take the time to read with their children to develop positive reading experiences. The Principal especially emphasised giving only very little homework and that it is important to emphasise with parents the need to make it fun (Van Voorhis, 2004) and leave it if it is found by the child to be too difficult.

According to the teachers, they would like to see parents involved in helping children with their homework and having conversations with children around their day in school. The teachers in particular mentioned the Parents' Room and how they would like to see parents using it with their children in infant classes to get homework done while waiting to collect older children but that this is not done by many parents – as one teacher commented, the mothers would rather *"go across to visit their mam"* than getting homework done in the Parents' Room.

Reflecting the Principal and HSCL coordinator's statements, the teachers do find homework important:

I think homework should reinforce whatever was done during the day. I don't think homework should be an extra challenge for the child at home unless they are able for it. I don't think it should be anything more than half an hour, tops, especially at infant level. So, it should just reinforce what you have done already that day. But for that reason it is important because there is a connection...

This teacher reiterates the notion of homework as reinforcing learning from school, rather than introducing new material (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008). The teacher's statement also hints at why tension exists with parents around homework. Half an hour's homework for infants, while in the opinion of this teacher is not a lot, it is a lot in comparison to practice in the other schools and what parents and children across the schools seem to find reasonable. This may help to explain why parents find homework overwhelming, even for infants. What all the teachers emphasise, however, is that homework is only beneficial when parents get involved in it (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008), when parents check in with the learning and offer the child any support needed.

In many cases, though, this seems not to be happening and the teachers are increasingly observing that parents sign their children's homework in advance, thus sending in signed but uncompleted homework. The teachers also

confided that often when they set homework that should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes, with instructions to stop after 15 minutes, even if the homework is still incomplete, it can still take children much longer to complete it. Parents reported that the 'stop homework after fifteen minutes' rule does not work because children generally insist on finishing their homework, not wanting to come into school with their work incomplete.

With regards to 'alternative' forms of homework, the teachers were more sceptical.

Thus, their reaction to the 'bring teddy home' homework, was that such homework cannot be measured and is therefore not as appropriate, although they did go on to reflect further on the benefit of such homework, seeing it as particularly appropriate because of some children's level of disadvantage.

What is interesting about the teachers' perspectives is that there does not seem to be the same recognition and understanding of the disadvantage and need experienced by many families that dominate the Principal's and HSCL Coordinator's understanding of homework. Thus, the following quote suggests a rather strong deficit approach:

And it is always the same kids who do it perfectly, always the same kids who don't have it done. And it is so hard because sometimes you are like, why is it not done... They are only four or five years old... And every parent knows a child gets homework from school, it is a thing about school, so I just don't know how it cannot be done every day, or half done and stuff.

When asked, the teachers confirmed that they were aware of the homework policy but that it did not really influence how they set homework. Rather, they suggested that the policy just guides them to be realistic and not give too much homework.

Parents' views.

Overall, parents in School 1 are not particularly happy about homework and find it a significant stressor in their lives (cf. Kralovec & Buell, 2000). When asked about the types of issues that parents would come to her with, the HSCL coordinator suggested that parents often complain about the amount of homework. This was also something that came up in the focus group with parents, with the children themselves, as well as in the final round of data collection when a new approach to homework was introduced. Many parents struggle with homework as they find it difficult to get their children to focus, and according to the HSCL coordinator,

several families also struggle with basic provision of a suitable environment, such as having a table with chairs and sharpened pencils. Parents also worry about homework in the senior school when especially Maths and Irish homework begin to feel too difficult for parents to be able to help their children. Thus, some of the phrases used by parents to describe homework include - "It is an absolute shambles" "There is murder in the house" "There are killings with me andD."

In the focus groups with parents, the parents themselves disagreed somewhat as to the benefit of homework. This is reflected in the literature on homework (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008). One parent saw the benefit of homework in reinforcing the learning from school at home and to prepare them for senior and secondary school but the other parents saw much less benefit in it and believed the children's day in school was long enough. The parents all expressed that they primarily take a role of supervision in their children's homework and that giving children too much input would be counterproductive to their learning (Cooper, Lyndsay & Nye, 2000). Thus, parents offer help only when children are stuck at particular questions or tasks. The parents, when asked, were not familiar with the school's homework policy although they did say that they didn't feel it was a problem if they did not manage the homework with their children or if there were difficulties. In such cases, they said they would just go to the teacher. However, it is evident from comments by the HSCL coordinator that not all parents feel comfortable in doing so.

With regards to the amount of homework, parents were clearly of the opinion that the homework could be stressful (cf. Kralovec & Buell, 2001) and that the amount is too much. One parent therefore suggested that rather than having some of each type of homework every night it should be divided out over the week so that only one type of homework was given each evening; e.g. Irish on Mondays, English on Tuesdays, Maths on Wednesday and so on.

This was brought up in both phases of data collection and was suggested by a parent who did find some amount of homework useful in order to assess her child's learning and progress but felt stressed by the amount.

Children's views.

Children themselves varied in their attitudes towards homework. In relation to the purpose of homework, not all the children saw the point of it. One child who actually liked homework did not really understand the purpose of it. As the child commented, they spend enough time learning in school and want to be out playing with friends when they

come home. Thus, although she/he did not mind having to do it, the child in question did feel it was somewhat pointless.

Some children like homework while others only like certain types of homework and yet others do not like it at all. For some children spellings are very difficult and therefore not liked, for other children the difficulty is with Irish or Maths. Like with their parents, some children expressed the view that they work hard and long enough in school and therefore find it too much also having to do school work at home. When asked what they would change about homework, it was generally the case that those who did not like homework would get rid of it, those who only liked certain types of homework would get rid of what they didn't like and those who liked homework would either change nothing or make it harder. In order words, children do not like bringing their difficulties from school home but do not mind if it is something they find easy. Indeed, those who find it easy seem to like the challenge of it. Such views were mirrored across the schools.

Children also suggested alternative types of homework they would prefer. Thus, they mentioned, like their parents, that dividing the different homework over the week would be a good idea. There was some consensus that they would prefer to do homework where they could do activities or do practical things, such as science experiments, baking and drawing. This is especially so for children who struggle with traditional homework in one or more curricular areas.

This is in line with the research literature, which suggests that homework needs to coincide with the child's interest (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Trautwein, Ludtke, Schnyder & Niggli, 2006). There was some consensus that they would prefer to do homework where they could do activities or do practical things, although those children who liked particular curricular areas, as stated, wanted to just change homework to more of that curricular area. As found across the schools, if children find homework difficult, they either asked their parents or an older sibling. Children primarily ask their mothers first and only if it is an area that their mother is not as good at would they ask their father or siblings. If their parents or siblings cannot help, their mothers will tell the teacher, according to the children themselves.

According to the children, homework is sometimes used to manage behaviour; when they behave really well in school they only get drawing for homework as a treat, but similarly a homework-free day could be taken from them if they were 'messing' in class. This notion of behaviourism

in homework is particularly interesting as it was only mentioned in the two DEIS schools and relates to findings presented in Q1 where similar behaviourist approaches were applied to play time and screen use. This corresponds to findings from the *Growing up in Ireland* longitudinal study that homework is used in many schools as a form of punishment (Williams et al.,2009).

As part of the methodology for the research, children were asked to draw themselves doing their homework as part of the focus groups held with children. Fewer drawings were received from School 1 than the other schools. All the drawings from School 1 show a child sitting alone at a desk doing his or her homework with no other rooms or parts of the house or family represented. The drawings are simple and do not contain the same level of detail as for example drawings collected from School 5 where no child had drawn themselves alone at a desk without also drawing the surrounding room and adding detail to give the drawings a sense of homeliness and enjoyment. This speaks to the finding that the majority of children in School 1 do not like homework.

Homework difficulties.

Some of the difficulties experienced in relation to homework in School 1 have already been alluded to. Significant is the role of socio-economic disadvantage. A key, dominant issue mentioned by school personnel is that many parents experience a lot of stress and often battle with substance abuse and severe poverty, all of which impacts on their ability to help children with homework and ensure attendance at school. As it will be recalled from Q1, parents in School 1 saw it as their primary role to ensure children attend school and complete their homework. However, it is evident from interviews with teachers and the HSCL coordinator that this role is very difficult for some parents to fulfil. Thus, she confided:

…those homes that I end up going back to and back to again and again and again, I would say unfortunately it is sit them in front of a device, you never see any books in the house… they are sitting in front of devices without a shadow of a doubt and they are the homes that I am continuously having to go back to again, and they are the homes where the homework isn't being done. Often we have issues with attendance there as well.

In addition to the general disadvantage experienced by parents in the school, a number of other difficulties are also

identified. One issue is in relation to children's particular learning difficulties or where a diagnosis with educational implications exists. Another issue is when the amount and difficulty of homework increases, such as is particularly experienced in the jump from Senior Infants to First Class. Neither of these issues is unique to School 1 but found across the schools. A key difference between School 1 and the other schools, however, is the more strained relationship between some parents and the school and thus a more general sense of fear in approaching the teachers with concrete issues. Thus while the parents quoted in Section 1 said they always find the school very approachable, the school personnel are aware that many parents do not find it easy to approach the school and go out of their way to try and appear more approachable. The HSCL coordinator recounted the following incident:

Yeah, well at the beginning of the year a class that was, you know there is a big jump from Senior Infants to 1st class, it is quite a jump for the kids, and from day one the children got homework and we had the meeting maybe three weeks' later and they were all sitting out here and I could hear the mutterings and the mumblings. I went out and said, 'is there a problem?' And they said, 'it is the homework.' …we can't handle this homework because they were going from a tiny amount to maybe an hour. So, I said, 'listen, this is your chance, the teacher is about to come down to the meeting. I mind the class, he is going to come down and this is your chance so please take it.' Because there is that fear to talk to the teacher. And you know, it was sorted, he didn't realise.

Where difficulties with individual children arise, parents are encouraged to speak to the class teacher and come to an arrangement. Often the teacher will set a time limit as to how long the homework should generally take and how long to allow for its completion. From both school personnel and parents, it is evident that homework often takes longer than expected by teachers and is experienced as challenging. It is therefore the opinion of the school personnel interviewed (especially the Principal and HSCL coordinator) that homework should be reduced across theschool.

In conclusion, homework in School 1 is a contentious issue causing some stress to parents, and some children, and leading to a somewhat deficit approach on behalf of the teachers in their discussions of parents' involvement in children's learning. The core of the tension appears to be the amount of homework. Across most of the schools the general opinion seemed to be that infant classes should have very limited homework; the teachers in School 1 agreed but differed extensively in what they considered 'limited'. Apart from the teachers interviewed, all other participants in School 1 held the view that homework should be entirely gotten rid of. This view was underpinned by a recognition that the stress associated with homework is deeply counterproductive to the intended purpose of homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2001).

School 2.

While also a DEIS school, School 2 does not share all the same difficulties in bringing the most disadvantaged parents on board, yet its DEIS status should not be forgotten. School 2 is a rather interesting case study to explore as it has recently, through consultation with parents, altered the way homework is done. Thus in the last year, the main form of homework has changed from traditional homework of reading, spellings and Maths, to project based homework from First Class upwards. Despite this happening in close consultation with parents, the new approach to homework has met with very mixed views by children and parents alike. Again, it appears that this new homework is very dependent on the individual teacher. Parents are thus rather divided in their preference for either conventional or project- based-homework.

What also emerges for School 2 is that children's individual personalities and learning dispositions affect how homework is perceived, and how it is experienced in the home.

Homework approach and supports.

The school has a homework policy and the parents know it exists but they are not familiar with the contents of it. Up until the last academic year, homework in School 2 looked rather traditional with the usual spellings, reading, sentences and sums. Some teachers set homework for each night while other teachers gave it all on Monday but let it be the children's choice when to do the homework (Cooper, Lindsay & Nye, 2000). As a number of parents had approached the Principal to enquire about homework and explore the possibilities of changing it or reducing it, the school decided to send out a survey asking parents their opinions on homework. The findings of the survey were, according to one of the teachers leading the consultation, very decisive and as a result of the survey, a new type of homework was introduced to replace the more traditional homework. The majority of homework now therefore constitutes project based homework. It varies somewhat amongst the classes how this project homework is carried out but generally speaking children will have a project every couple of weeks

for some classes and around three times a year for other classes. For the classes that have projects regularly, no traditional homework is set. For the classes that have projects every couple of months, more traditional homework is set in between the projects.

Junior and infant classes do not have project homework but rather more traditional homework of sounds and colouring. The projects are structured to include four things that have to be covered within the project to ensure that the curriculum is covered in each of the curricular areas. According to the Principal,

The project can be made in any form or fashion they want. It can be a load of things stuck to sugar paper as a poster or it could be a pod cast, it could be a video, it could just be an oral presentation. It could be – 'I couldn't be bothered doing it', and that is fine as well.

When introducing the new homework, the Principal invited parents to evaluate the initiative and while he will be gathering formal feedback at the end of the year, parents are also welcomed to provide feedback on an ongoing basis. The school has also introduced an initiative of 'Mindful Mondays', which consists of doing a mindfulness activity as a family instead of homework, such as going for a walk or doing other things together as a family. For the older classes, homework is primarily done online via Google Classroom. The older classes continue to get a variety of homework-types alongside the projects, including Irish homework via the website www.irishhomework.ie, which like the project homework is in a trial phase. Some classes also get Mathletics, which again is done online. Thus, while the Principal considers the school very light in homework and some children suggest they get no homework at all, some classes seem to get a considerable amount of homework.

In terms of homework supports, the school offers a variety of supports through workshops (cf. Cunha et al., 2015), including on new approaches to teach Mathematics, phonics, and mindfulness amongst others. There are no specific guidelines given on homework or how to support children with their homework. However, according to the parents, there was quite a level of detail around the benefits and disadvantages of homework in the survey the school distributed on the new approach to homework. Some parents alsostated that they do get some guidance on the new homework, the detail and level of which depends on the child's class. Despite this, parents suggested that there was not enough guidance given on the areas they struggled to

help their children with and they would welcome more support in such areas. Thus, guidance is mostly given on new initiatives while more traditional homework receivesless.

School personnel's views.

The response to homework is the same for the Principal in School 2 as it was in School 1 with the Principal in an informal conversation joking that he only wanted to read the final research report if it recommended that homework be gotten rid of entirely. When more formally asked his opinion on homework, the Principal stated:

I would scrap homework tomorrow if I could at primary level. It doesn't do anything good, it is an arbitrary list of nonsense just to please somebody else, I don't get it. I'm really a non- academic, I would love to have the research to back me to hand, I know it is there… I know the research is there but I am just not quoting it, I am just using very loose language with swear words [laughs]. I feel it is something that was good, perhaps, for people who were going to end up in industry, 20th century jobs, learn a load of stuff off and you will be grand. Where as 21st century learning just doesn't support the idea of traditional homework and I am using traditional homework rather than homework in general. I do think a role for homework is really the idea of connecting home and school. If homework is to be a thing I think its purpose is to connect home and school. So, I would be in favour if there was to be homework of getting children to do a little bit of research on things that are important to them and present them in school. The classroom model that seems to be a bit of a buzz word at the moment.I don't mind that too much but I just think that whole idea of giving children lists of things and pages in book just has to die, it has to go.

What is of particular interest here is his statement *"If homework is to be a thing I think its purpose is to connect home and school."* While this is commonly perceived as the key purpose for homework by a variety of stakeholders, the way in which homework is conventionally set often defeats this purpose. What the Principal in School 2 has therefore attempted to do is to redesign how the school sets homework in order to strengthen this link. Also due to his views on homework, the Principal has put in place an opt-out system for homework where, according to the Principal, *"parents can feel confident to opt their kids out of homework completely, which I am pleased about, and not feel bad about it."* Only a couple of parents spoke of their children opting out of homework, to be elaborated upon below, and when

the teachers were interviewed again in the second phase of data analysis they suggested that while there might be a system of opting out, this is not widely practised. The Principal was aware of this and believed that the fear of feeling left out may be a factor. Interestingly, the Principal mentioned that when his own son would be starting in the school he would immediately be opted out of homework, which the Principal hoped would set an example to other parents.

As with School 1, the Principal's biggest challenge in reducing or entirely getting rid of homework appeared to be teachers' favouring of homework. Thus, when asked how the school staff feel about homework, the Principal continued:

It would be 50-50 down the line. We have done a lot of research over the last three years, it is my big bee in my bonnet because for people will keep doing what they are doing, unless you challenge it, and I was, I suppose I would have loved to have said to everybody, full dictatorship here, I am banning homework. But I suppose I don't work that way. We have spent the last three years surveying parents, surveying staff, surveying pupils about their attitudes to homework, making a few changes. It is progressing, I would say is the best... When we started you just gave homework and that was it.

The Principal was somewhat sceptical of teachers' views, suggesting that teachers are too institutionalised to be worthwhile consulting on homework. Instead, he emphasised the role of consultation with parents in writing a new policy**.**

Some of the teachers had been involved in designing and introducing the new homework. According to one teacher, some of the parents' concerns derived from their belief that homework offered the only means of communication between school and home about the children's concrete learning. Parents were concerned that with the new type of homework, they would no longer be able to follow what children were learning in school. Thus, this teacher in her involvement in introducing the homework emphasised:

I think this year we started doing something different which was the project homework instead of traditional homework and one of the main things that came up from that was communication. The parents thought if we are not getting homework we are not going to know what is going on in the class. So, that made us look as well. I was one of the people involved in it and one of the things that came up, the feedback we got was that they didn't know... I don't

haveone of the older classes so it was basically from about 1st class up and what we were telling the teachers to say, while you are giving out the project you need to let them know, right this week I am after covering this, this and this. So, at least the parents knew in class we are covering this and if they wanted to do extra work or wanted to do some at home they could and they could see what difficulties might still be there.

The teachers differ in their views on the new project-based homework although no teacher seems to be against it as such. The teachers' concerns revolve around issues similar to those of parents, to be presented shortly. These concerns stem from a belief that some element of rote learning with regards to spellings and Maths is necessary and will not be covered if the focus is solely on project-based homework.

It seems to be mixed, a lot of teachers were apprehensive about it and because the part of me being running it and pushing it I had to go around and talk to teachers and some of the teachers were on board with it straight away and other teachers might have been apprehensive about it. But one of the teachers I was even a bit uncertain about, she came up to me and said, 'oh you should have seen what so and so did the other day, I was nearly crying when I saw so and so actually stand up, talk to the class.' This is a child who might be suffering from a bit of anxiety or something like that and was able to do that. People are starting to see that maybe there is pros to it, more pros than cons (Teacher 1, School2).

I suppose as a parent I would always have a reservation about changing something that has been there forever and children have done okay with so far and I suppose if somebody came home and said to me there is going to be no more spellings, no more tables and no more reading and it is going to be all project based, I would be concerned as a parent. I am only on the junior end, it is not affecting me at the moment, I don't have a whole lot of input into it. But I still do see the merits, and [the Principal] and I disagree on this, but I do see the merits in children learning spellings and learning tables and there is still, in my mind, an importance to children learning off tables and learning off those things, that they have those memory recall, like we all have them and they come in handy every now and again. I suppose that would be my concern that at times if we are very concentrated on maybe a project on the Titanic or whatever, you get great wonderful learning from it, you read, you do all the bits and bobs but sometimes maybe other areas might be

slightly neglected and that would be my concern. It is very hard as a teacher, I know we say we do it all in school, to get to every single child, to make sure that every single child has all of their spellings. It is a lot of responsibility and onus on a teacher to make sure that each child can... (Teacher 2, School2).

<u>Parents' views.</u>

Parents' views on homework were particularly diverse in School 2 where homework was a topic that many parents felt very strongly about, supporting Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) work drawing attention to the fact that parents are not a homogenous group. The recent consultation with parents around homework seemed to have stimulated considerable evaluation by parents of the merits, or not, of homework. Thus several parents reflected on the benefit of different types of or approaches to homework, and indeed the value of homework in the first place. In these rather nuanced views on homework, motivation for learning and studying, as well as the nature of parental involvement and ability to monitor children's work is at the core of parents' beliefs about the value of homework. Due to the nuance and detail available on parents' views from this school, all relevant quotes have been compiled in Table 5 and coded for reference, to facilitate a better flow of argument.

Table 5 : School 2 Parents' reactions to the new project-based home-

Parent code	Positive
P1	"It depends on the teacher, it does very much depend on the teacher. The principal's philosophy is very much homework light, he doesn't really place a whole pile of stock in it. There is an element of repetition with things like Maths and whatever, practice that do make it easier to do over time. But I suppose from our own school days it would have been doing hours and hours of homework all the time I do see that actually the other things that they do are also important, sitting down and deciding that they are going to write about their school day because they had a lovely day and nobody has prompted this. Rather than I have to do twentysentences.IsupposewewouldhaveaneyetotheireducationbroadlyspeakingandsoIwouldpreferforthemtobesittingdownwritin-gastory,drawinga picture, writing a card than doingtwentysentences."
P2	"It is an option. I think I was the first, I said, 'can I opt her out of homework?' And he said, 'I don't see why not.' So, okay I am going to opt her out of home-work...[...] Because the arguments about homework, I didn't see the value of sitting at home going, sit down and do your homework.' It was just too much stress around it and I thought really if it was me and I was at work all day long and I was asked to go home and do a little bit more I would probably baulk a bit myself and say, 'I don't really want to do that now.' And then I looked up different things about the value of homework at primary school and I thought let's just see. So we will do a little bit of an experiment, opt you out and see what happens. She started writing more and she started reading more, because it wasn't a chore anymore, she wanted to do it for herself. Now she has opted herself back into homework because it is project work so she wants to do that and that is fine. When she opted herself back in and decided she was going to do project work, and then there was one day where she was like, 'I don't re-ally feel like doing it, I will just tell [the teacher] I am not doing homework.' And I went, 'no you opted yourself, we had taken you out of homework and you decided you wanted to do homework so now you have to do it until the end of this year, you have to do homework because you decided you wanted to do homework."
P3	"I suppose a lot of parents would say, how do you know what they are doing? By what they are reading at home, what they are writing at home, what they are adding up, if they can weigh out stuff. There are lots of ways of finding out where their level is at...[...] Because it is left up to themselves about what way they want to present their project and everything else you probably wouldn't see say the Maths directly, though it is going in there but unless you were primed to look for it in different ways or to be aware of it in different ways you probably wouldn't... If you were a parent who was big into homework you probably would say that the project work isn't the Maths, the English, the Irish, the rigid homework that we would be used to, it has to be Maths, it has to be Irish. We put together the survey for the homework for the parents to see what did parents think about homework. Was homework English, Maths...? There was a few that said it had to be traditional homework, otherwise it wasn't homework and there was even one person who said they would take their children out of the school if there wasn't homework, which was a bit extreme. Yeah, they had to have homework, children had to do homework. I reckon if you were that way inclined that you were setting your child stuff to do anyway, if your mind-set is that your child has to do then they are going to be doing stuff any-way with their child. They are going to be getting Maths books or workbooks or whatever."

P5	"I think the project work that they have been doing for the past while is working well. They have been piloting having project homework from 1st class up so instead of having, they do have... spellings or a bit of reading to do in the evenings but they have a project and you can do it in any format you like. Sowhatever area they are strong at or have an interest in, they can use to present and research their project area. We have had different ones, we have had counties in Ireland, every child in the class gets a different county. And one on the Titanic. I think the one at the moment is about school through the generations, their experience of the school. And again it is up to the child how they research that, how they go about it, so sitting down talking to your grandparents about that. So you get history, timelines, my personal story and you get a whole piece about researching the background of it, presentation style...It is wonderful. So actually you are looking more broadly at not English, Irish, Maths, Religion homework in little silos but actually using all those skills across a project. So I think itisreallygood.Asaparentonapracticallevel myoneobjectiontoitisyougetaprojectand youhavetwoweeksto doitandawholelotmight-notgetdone in week one and then it is Tuesday of week two and you are like, oh damn this has to be in on Friday. So it is more about discipline and actually breaking it down." (Parent, School2)
P6	"I would have always thought the conventional way was great, your tables and your spellings and the whole lot but recently we have trialled this new project type and certainly for us Peter (name changed) is really responding very well to it, he is really enjoying it...Peter has been given by [the teacher] an A4 sheet every fortnight of his new title of the project that he has for the week and also what they are learning in school. I found that very useful and very helpful to draw Peter on it, so I know what he is doing, I know that this week they are doing about the hairdresser in Irish so I can pull in that and I can speak more through Irish with him. And doing it the other way I wouldn't have had that...A general breakdown, say Irish and English, certainly the core. And for me it has been a real help, because as I said to you I am a worrier and I like to know what he is doing and where he is at and weekly I know now what he is doing."

I supervise it and I work through it more with him but I suppose it is probably better, I know it is more for me but it makes me sit down with him where doing the conventional, okay Junior Infants, Senior Infants you are sitting with them, come 1st or 2nd you are trying to make them more independent that they will do it themselves. Where with this I am sitting and engaging with him and I am talking to him about it and I can give my opinion on what I think he is doing but yet give him the choice, if you like to do it this way what way would you like to do it? There is more interaction.

"Heissoexcitedaboutitbecausehefollowstheracesandheknowsalotofinformationalreadyabouthowmanyhorsesandwhohe woninCheltenhamwith and he is really excited about doing it. But I find too for me, I have to engage more. For me I suppose because I am a bit of a perfectionist too I like it to be right I suppose in my eyes but maybe that is wrong."

We try and do a little bit every night. There has been weeks where he hasn't and he has seen the other side of it, on the Thursday evening when it is due in on the Friday, the panic. And for me, one particular week this happened, about three weeks' ago and he said, 'mammy I am never doing this again, I am going to do a little bit every night.' And for me that is a huge learning for a child to come up with. |
| P7 | "Honestly I think in primary school if they haven't learned it in school then they shouldn't be sent home to learn it, and that is the truth. I think there is enough pressure on young people in secondary school, four or five hours at night on top of everything else. I really don't think homework should be sent home, I really don't. **Interviewer:** And I know that the school has made a change to their homework recently, they have introduced project based homework is my understanding. So what is your feeling on that and how has that been working for you as a family? **Interviewee:** Great, he goes off and Googles everything, copies and pastes it, emails it to me at work and I print it out." |

P8	"I think that is awful and I have voiced my opinion to the school. I think it is doing nothing. There are only a handful of children in the class who like projects, the rest of them don't. My two, I never see them doing homework anymore and every day I am like, have you got homework today? No, we are doing projects. But I don't see them doing any projects. And then they are doing it online and emailing it to the teacher and that is it…[…] This is what they tell me. I am doing it online. I have helped them do projects and print things out and try to guide them but there is no pressure on them. I don't know if pressure is the right word, but that pressure is going to start again in September and there is no preparation, the homework has gone. Well apparently they do [get feedback], I haven't seen it. Apparently they do, it is collected by a certain date. I know for a fact my daughter hasn't put a project in, at least one project, and it has been fine. So there are no consequences…[…] I think it depends on the teacher as well, but no, in fairness when they had homework they were told you do it for half an hour, if you are doing it for any more than half an hour stop. And that is the method I used at home because normally it would only take them 20 minutes. But my youngest, she would have taken a little bit longer, so I would give her 40 minutes and then I would say stop and just tell your teacher. And it was always fine, there was never any pressure, but it was checked, the homework was checked and then at least I could look at them when they came home and know where they are. I would do the homework with them, I would potter around with them, so I have no idea what they are doingnow."
P9	"I think it is not just about the homework you know, because homework is really important because actually I can see the feedback, I can follow my children much more, that is my problem actually, since we have these project things, project homework, but we can practice a few things, reading, writing, through the homework, through this project but I don't see how are my kids going with for example a few things on the Maths or English, or Irish. I don't speak Irish but I am delighted my kids speak Irish because Irish is unique and certainly not every Irish family speaks Irish. But I would be happy they would know some things. That is why I am happier with written homework than the online Mathematics or a few things. Maybe I am the only one…[…] I like to follow up. That is why I am saying when they had homework I try to make a free time for the homework so I can see where is my kids, what is the point where they need more practice or what they could, or a little bit wrong or maybe mistakes, that is my opinion."
P10	"I totally agree with homework…I think if they have homework they can have a bit more fun in school because if they don't get done what they were supposed to get done in school that day they can do it at home. I don't think they should have extra work just because there is homework but I think maybe they could have a little bit more less formal in school, learn a bit, and then okay put that away and have a bit of fun for a few minutes or whatever… […] Yeah a little bit more social interaction, all that type of stuff, even a bit of outsidework, going for a walk. They do a lot of that stuff here which is great, it is great, but then whatever work you don't get done, send it home. You are not going to be overwhelmed by doing it. I think the need to have something to do at home and even if they have half an hour or an hour break and then do their homework, that is what they are doing in secondary, that is life. They are totally outof the habit now and I can tell you every parent's nightmare going into 1st year will be hounding the children to do their homework. I do think it is a bit of discipline."
P11	Um, to guide her, I need to look up stuff at home, because the internet requires supervision and you can't take any information for granted where if it comes from a book, it usually refers to records and is checked by an editor. So anything that requires work on the net for young kids requires close parental involvement. One is that they're not wandering off into other sites. And two, that the information they choose isn't coming from some unit taken on top of their head that's in there. That it's an officially recognized website. Um, so that requires a lot more monitoring than just doing your Maths or workbook.

According to the Principal, about half of the parents like project-based homework while the other half do not; our data gives evidence to this estimation. The division in opinion is rather stark and demands further analysis to deepen our understanding of the role of homework in children's learning at home. One area of the new project homework where parents especially disagreed is what it requires in terms of monitoring and involvement by parents; another area regards the kinds of skills that the different types of homework instil in children.

For parents who feel positive about the new project homework, they value this approach for a variety of reasons, including the requirement for parental involvement, the development of different skillsets for children, the nature of the learning it promotes and its better fit with particular dispositions and learning styles. What parents particularly appreciated about the new homework was the different skillsets that it helped to develop in children, in particular basic research skills and time management (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2012). Parents also agreed that the new homework promotes more holistic learning by bringing together a variety of curricular areas such as reading, spelling, Maths, History andGeography.

The parents who felt strongly against the new homework also did so for a number of reasons: The new homework seemed 'less disciplined' and of lesser quantity and thereby was felt to not properly prepare children for secondary school, mentioned by a number of parents as a real concern. The differences in opinion will now be explored.

New, project-based homework.

For parents such as P1, P2 and P6 (see Table 5), traditional homework appeared as demotivating for their children, and prevents a love of learning, while different kinds of homework or no homework at all are perceived as encouraging a greater desire to engage with learning outside the school context.

P1 sees value in moving to a different type of homework that moves away from sitting down to write twenty sentences, as it would have been in her own school days, to more creative homework of writing stories and cards or drawing pictures. P2 through a similar process of reflection had come to the conclusion that homework may not be very beneficial and was therefore one of the first parents to opt her child out of homework. For P2's daughter, homework seemed to have put her off school and had made reading and writing feel like a burden. However, when the girl was 'opted out' of homework the love of learning returnedandwith theprospectof adifferent typeofhomework,-

shewashappytooptherself in again. Her parents supported her in this but also insisted that she take responsibility for her decision; once she had made a decision to re-embrace homework, she could not simply opt out on a week-by-week basis depending on her mood. Similarly, P6 emphasised that her son had really struggled with traditional homework, being *"allergic to reading,"* whereas in the project homework he reads without any problems at all and quite enjoys hishomework.

He is so excited about it because he follows the races and he knows a lot of information already about how many horses and who he won in Cheltenham with and he is really excited about doing it. But I find too for me, I have to engage more. For me I suppose because I am a bit of a perfectionist too I like it to be right I suppose in my eyes but maybe that is wrong.

The love of learning, thus, is facilitated where children do not feel under pressure to learn or perform well but where they can learn from their own emergent interests. According to these parents, project-based homework can create that link between curriculum in school and interests developing organically in the home learning environment.

Another benefit of the project-based homework, according to the parents who favour it, is the different learning and development of a variety of skillsets it encourages. P5 emphasises the vast variety of skills the new project-based homework encourages, including research skills and bringing together information and knowledge across different curricular areas, as well as more general presentation skills. Finally, P8 puts focus on the learning curve involved in shifting from very structured homework to a type of homework where children need to plan their work ahead and thus learn important skills of time management, project planning and self- discipline. While parents who valued traditional homework disagreed with its role in instilling discipline, the parents who favoured project-based homework believed that the projects were more effective in encouraging this discipline.

For the parents just quoted, the new homework involves considerably more parental involvement but is considered more interesting for the students to learn this way and therefore did not mention this in any negative way. This view stands in direct opposition to views voiced by other parents who felt that the project homework completely took parents out of the equation as children could complete it all online and parents therefore did not see their children do any homework.

Parents who favoured the project-based homework valued the decrease in the 'hassle' that surrounded homework. These parents believed there was much less stress associated with the new homework even though the new homework demanded that parents be involved in it. For some parents the absence of stress seemed to revolve around the fact that the new homework required a *different kind of involvement.* As an example, according to one mother (P5), her involvement with the new homework was more to do with sharing her own experiences, such as different countries she had lived in, and grandparents sharing life experiences by being interviewed. Other parents were more involved in the web-based learning and thus in promoting digital literacy and overall the parents who valued the new homework seemed to appreciate or at least find less stressful this different kind of parental involvement in homework. P6 also suggested that the new approach to homework and the sheets that are sent home by the teacher have really made a difference in aiding her as a parent to engage more with her child's learning, *"with the academic side of things".* For the parents then, the new project-based homework has really succeeded in improving the home- school link that the Principal sought and to put the child's interests at the centre of this link.

The different requirement for parental involvement, however, presented a significant point of contention and was one of the key concerns for parents who felt much less positive about, and indeed strongly against, the new homework.

Traditional homework.

Parents who felt positive about traditional homework expressed such opinions primarily through their criticism of the new project-based homework. This is especially evident in the quote by P9 who considers the new project homework "awful" and as doing nothing. Parents like P9 believed that more traditional homework was essential in instilling self-discipline and a work ethos in children, necessary for transition to secondary school, which will be examined in detail in the thematic analysis to follow. These parents gave their views on the new homework through the school survey sent out but perhaps did not feel particularly heard or did not feel that their opinions made a difference as they had not seen a change. It should be mentioned though, that the school survey had only been completed two weeks prior to the interviews conducted by this research team and any change would be unlikely in such a short period of time. Thus, P9 described,

I think that is awful and I have voiced my opinion to the school. I think it is doing nothing. There are only a handful of children in the class who like projects, the rest of them don't. My two, I never see them doing homework anymore and every day I am like, have you got homework today? No, we are doing projects. But I don't see them doing any projects. And then they are doing it online and emailing it to the teacher and that is it.

This quote contains a number of contradictions that suggest why this and other parents who feel similarly may be critical of the new type of homework. First, the parent says that the new homework does nothing and that her children never have any homework but then she goes on to say that they do all the homework online. Part of the definition of 'no homework' comes from her children who tell her that they have no homework but that they have projects. In the children's view, the new homework does not constitute homework. Yet it is still work from school and according to the mother, they are doing the work, she just does not see it herself.

On the one hand, she suggests that her children are not doing the projects but on the other hand, she says that they have done it. Thus, while having just said that she knows for a fact that her daughter has never done a project, she goes on to state:

A project is a project, they are only taking stuff off the internet and repeating it. I can guarantee you I could ask my daughter about any of her projects and she wouldn't remember any of them. I don't think they are learning anything from them to be honest.

A couple of points are necessary to examine here. In children's definitions of homework it is often juxtaposed to something fun. Thus, if something is deemed fun it is not considered homework. For example, when one of the researchers in the past asked children abouttheteddybearhomeworkdescribedinSchool1,theyansweredthatthisisnothomework because it sounds like fun. The children of the parent just quoted may have applied a similar definition to homework and therefore do not consider that project work is homework. Of course, it might also be like that with the parent herself, that it is such a different kind of homework that it is not really considered homework, perhaps because it is not of the conventional nature where children sit down and do something very concrete at the table.

What appears as a key issue in the mother's interpretation of the homework is that she does not see her children do any homework. In other words, they are not doing a type of work that she can monitor and she therefore cannot see

what the homework might contribute.

Unlike the other parents who value the new homework for the variety of skills and cross- curricular learning it encourages, this parent and others like her, seem to value the more traditional homework where it can be monitored and measured exactly what the children are doingandwhereparentalinvolvementisperhapsmorestraightforward.Themothergoesonto say that there is not enough pressure on the children to complete the projects (as indeed suggested by the Principal) but also saying that there was no pressure with the old, traditional homework. She then justifies her opinion of the new homework by returning to the fact of being able to monitor the old homework more. The more traditional homework gave her greater opportunity, in her opinion, to get a sense of what the children were doing and where they wereat.

P11 who is also critical of the new homework, shares similar values around traditional homework and its greater efficacy in furthering children's learning as well as parents' ability to monitor and support this learning. This is in direct opposition to the other parents' reasoning above. An element of the need to monitor children's homework is a belief by many parents that this is how they can judge where their children are at in terms of learning and be in a position to identify any difficulties they may have. This was raised by the mother above but also by other parents. However, as one parent quoted earlier suggests, where the new homework is valued, these difficulties can still be observed when parents engage with the projects and the kinds of learning opportunities they are designed to provide.

Another parent very explicitly responded to other parents' concerns:

I suppose a lot of parents would say, how do you know what they are doing? By what they are reading at home, what they are writing at home, what they are adding up,if they can weigh out stuff. There are lots of ways of finding out where their level is at…[…] Because it is left up to themselves about what way they want to present their project and everything else you probably wouldn't see say the Maths directly, though it is going in there but unless you were primed to look for it in different ways or to be aware of it in different ways you probably wouldn't… If you were a parent who was big into homework you probably would say that the project work isn't the Maths, the English, the Irish, the rigid homework that we would be used to, it has to be Maths, it has to be Irish. We put together the survey for the homework for the parents to see what did parents think about homework. Was homework English, Maths…? There

was a few that said it had to be traditional homework, otherwise it wasn't homework and there was even one person who said they would take their children out of the school if there wasn't homework, which was a bit extreme. Yeah, they had to have homework, children had to do homework. I reckon if you were that way inclined that you were setting your child stuff to do anyway, if your mind-set is that your child has to do then they are going to be doing stuff anyway with their child. They are going to be getting Maths books or workbooks or whatever.

What also seems to influence parents' reaction to the new homework is the value they attribute to traditional homework. Thus, the parents quoted above see a lot of value in homework whereas, in contrast, one mother who did not agree with homework in general felt very positively about the new homework:

Honestly I think in primary school if they haven't learned it in school then they shouldn't be sent home to learn it, and that is the truth. I think there is enough pressure on young people in secondary school, four or five hours at night on top of everything else. I really don't think homework should be sent home, I really don't.

What is interesting about the mother who feels so strongly against the new homework (and she was not the only one), is that rather than having serious work in school and more fun at home, she would prefer if a bit of the fun at home was brought into the school and some of the serious work brought home, perhaps speaking to the general fluidity between school and home found be to dominant in this school, as identified in Q1.

In summary, it appears that parents who value traditional homework do so because of the ease with which it can be monitored and used to assess children's learning by parents themselves and for these reasons such parents are rather critical of the new homework.

Parents who place less value on homework, either because they are sceptical of its educational value or because they associate it with a lot of stress for themselves and/or for their children, be it due to learning difficulties or struggles with homework or due to children's personality, in contrast appear to appreciate and value the new homework because it suits different learning styles and promotes more holistic learning and therefore a deeper and more rounded parental involvement that focuses on a combination of life skills and academic skills. What is particularly interesting is the deep emotions and strong passion with which par-

ents expressed their opinions around the new homework and what it indicates more generally for the school. As suggested by one of the quotes, parents who value traditional homework may just genuinely struggle to see how children learn from anything other than traditional homework.

The school has worked to resolve the strong division in opinion by offering the option of conventional homework in addition to project based homework for those interested. Giving choices around homework is lauded in some literature on homework, e.g. Rudman, (2014) and Vatterot, (2017). Thus, the Principal explained:

And parents are 50-50 on it; one thing that we learned is that there are still a number of people who still want lists of stuff to learn. So we have agreed that as well as the project homework, we would say this is what we are covering in the core subjects, go mad, go nuts, you decide, you can do what you want with them, you can do that with the kids at home if you want. But we also provide them with technology-based things like Mathletics.

In summary, the benefits of each of the approaches to or types of homework can be summed up as follows. Parents who favour the project-based homework identify its benefits as better promoting a love of learning and the opportunity to support children's emergent interests at home, developing a variety of different skillsets and cross-curricular learning, more meaningful parental involvement and greater home-school connection. In contrast, the parents who favour the more traditional homework do so because of their better ability to monitor their children's progress, because it instils discipline and prepares children for secondary school and because they value the act of repetition and some rote learning (spellings, tables, etc.). The views of the first group of parents are perhaps therefore more in line with the literature but that is not to say that the views of the second group of parents are not equally valid and need to be considered when making recommendations for homework and supporting children's home learning environments, as also recognised by the School 2's leadership team.

Children's views.

Children's views are as diverse as those of parents although less clearly divided. Interestingly, the children in School 2 did not mention the survey on the new homework despite having been consulted on it. According to the children in School 2, the purpose of homework is to practise learned material at home, to "see the difference between school and home" and so parents can see what children do in school.

Some children like homework, others like it sometimes and some do not like certain aspects of homework. Some children like colouring for homework, and when they get stickers for good homework, while others either according to themselves or their parents hate colouring to such an extent that it has put them off school in Junior Infants. One child held a rather nuanced view of homework and suggested that he likes it when s/he is done and has learned something new but finds it annoying while doing it.

Interestingly, while several children did state they like homework, the majority of children would get rid of it if they were given a magic wand and could do whatever they wanted with homework. Thus, when asked what they would do with the magic wand, children responded that they would either use it to complete their homework or destroy it because homework is 'boring', 'annoying' and 'wasting time' that the children thought would be better spent playing (a number of children in School 2 in particular enjoy playing with Lego).

A couple of children would like more choice with regards to homework. For example, in one focus group, one child wished for more control over homework so that he/she does not have to do too much of it and can do more of the homework he/she likes, such as Mindcraft, while another child would like the choice of doing homework or not from one week to the next.

About half of the children wanted no homework while the other half wanted either more difficult homework, simply wanted less homework or wanted it to be easier. Similarly, some children really like the new project homework while other children prefer the more traditional homework of spellings, sentences, Maths and reading. In one focus group, one child wanted more homework because he/she really wanted to learn to read, which he/she saw as the purpose of homework, while another child wanted less homework because he/she had already learned how to read and write, and thus appeared to suggest that these were the only two meaningful aims of homework.

When the older children were asked whether they prefer traditional homework or the project homework, the children who liked subjects such as Maths and Irish preferred the more traditional homework, as did those who did not like Geography and History as many of the projects revolved a lot around these two subjects. Those who particularly liked the homework were the children who did not like the subjects Irish or Maths, of which there was much less in the project homework. The children who like the project homework also do so because they consider it 'fun' and

because they like to learn about so many different things. One child also likes project homework because it is about learning "new" things as opposed to revising what they have already learned in school. Important to note is that nearly all children defined normal homework as revision of material learned in school. Thus, it seems, children who like the projects are less stimulated by revision as they seem to find this boring.

Children's sentiments around homework were also expressed in their drawings. Thus one child described their drawing as "my mum doing my homework because I won't like doing it, I only like the sounds" while another child had drawn themselves watching TV while doing homework. When asked whether this was how he/she normally did homework the child confided it was wishful thinking. Interestingly, when the children in one focus group with Junior Infants were asked to draw themselves doing their homework, one child said they would draw a 'useless' face, while another child said they would draw a serious face, indicating that homework is not necessarily associated withs omething children enjoy.

Children were asked who normally helps them with homework when/if it is too difficult, to which most children answered their mothers. A number of children also get help from older siblings and cousins. One child stated that "sometimes I ask for help but no one helps" to which the other children replied that this is "bad luck". This may be the same child who drew him/herself doing homework at a table with no-one else around. The most frequently occurring homework situation is of children doing it at the dinner table or kitchen counter while their mother is cooking, hence the reason why it is often the mother or older siblings helping when something is difficult. Children's experiences of homework therefore give testimony to many parents' perception that one of the key challenges around homework is finding the time and space in busy daily routines to complete homework, whether it is short and easy or difficult and lengthy.

Homework appears to require multitasking by parents and therefore attention is often divided or distracted, especially where there are several school-going children in the same family. Some mothers deliberately do it this way to avoid giving children too much input while others would like it to be less stressful, preferring not to have to multi-task. How children experience this, however, is that even if they do not necessarily need help, they still like to get help from their parents. Thus, when asked, almost all children said they wanted their parents to help them with their homework and to spend more time doing so.

In other words, regardless of whether they get input from their parents or not, children would like for their parents to sit down with them and do the homework. This may speak for types of homework that require parental involvement and that promote family bonding time.

The drawings from school 2 are perhaps the most diverse in terms of what children have depicted. Three drawings show a child sitting alone at a table asking either their parent or God for help. It is likely that these three boys sat next to each other while drawing. They are, however, still interesting drawings as they are drawn by children in a non-denominational school. Moreover, not only are the children in the drawings asking God for help, they also ask their father for help although the majority of children in this school said they would ask their mother for help. Another child has drawn herself, doing her homework at the table with her mother standing over her saying 'hurry up', while her speech bubble reads: "Why does the internet never give you a straight answer?" On the wall, the girl has drawn a photo frame with four lines of words, next to which she has written "Inspiring words". On the one hand, this drawing may suggest a rich and stimulating home learning environment, on the other hand she has depicted homework as a somewhat stressful experience. This is the only drawing from School 2 where an adult/parent is depicted. All the other drawings involve other siblings or class mates also doing their homework, primarily at home but also in the classroom in school (two drawings). Another child has drawn himself doing homework in one room while a parent or sibling is in another room on a different floor. On the back of the drawing, the boy has written Fortnite (a digital game with age rating of twelve years) in big letters. As the boy is only in 1st class, the fact that he may be allowed to play Fortnite is somewhat concerning and speaks to the general lack or limited number of rules regarding children's use of technology in this school. One child has depicted him/herself with a smiley face while another has drawn a rather frustrated or angry looking face, speaking to the diversity and divided nature of homework experiences in School 2.

Homework difficulties.

In School 2, the main difficulty arising from homework is when children might struggle in particular curricula areas such as Maths, Irish or with reading and spelling. With regards to Maths especially, the school provides a lot of support and, cognisant of the differentwayMathsistaughtnowcomparedtowhenparentswouldhavegonetoschool,holds workshops for parents on how Maths is taught and how parents can support this athome.

Parents tend to attend these workshops for their eldest child and do not seem to repeat workshops with younger children in the school. Parents who work full time and have busy jobs also suggest that it is too difficult to attend these workshops and would appreciate more support through resources shared online. For some, Irish, reading and spelling pose difficulties due to the parents' non-Irish background or because the child is dyslexic or simply struggles with some of the subjects. In such cases, parents seem to agree that the teachers are very approachable and easy to work with in addressing children's difficulties. Two main issues raised by parents are considerable absenteeism of teachers and sometimes difficult communication with the Principal. Thus, although manyparents find the Principal very approachable other parents find him very difficult to communicate with around the new homework or assessments of children's particular learning difficulties, such asdyslexia.

Compared to some of the other case study schools, the difficulty of time in relation to children's homework came up less for parents in School 2 yet, as discussed in Section 1, children in this school were the most likely to say they wanted more time with and more homework help from their parents.

School 3.

School 3 is perhaps the most 'conventional' in terms of homework and seems to experience some tension around it, in part due to relatively large amounts of homework in some classes and due to some children's learning difficulties. Interestingly, School 3 is the only school where the Principal is in favour of homework and values it highly. Also interestingly, School 3 is the most likely to use resources from the NCCA and NPC and often send these out with the weekly newsletters. Parents and children, however, are less positive about homework and while recognising its value, are critical of its amount, type and the communication around it. Like School 2, there is a diversity of opinions around homework. Without being stated explicitly from the perspective of the school personnel, parents' dissatisfaction with homework, either in general or for specific classes, seems to be an issue. From the interview with the Principal and the parents' focus group, it would appear that complaints around homework occur, somewhat frequently, but that parents and school personnel differ in their opinions of the efficacy of homework and cannot seem to have this conversation more openly in the school, leading to what is experienced as ongoing difficulties for some parents and perhaps a rather negative or deficit approach by school personnel to parental involvement.

Homework approach and supports.
Homework in School 3 consists of reading, sentences, spelling, Irish and Maths. For infant classes homework consists of Jolly Phonics through a mix of word bags/boxes, sound cards and colouring. According to the teachers, the routine homework is varied every so often and sometimes replaced or combined with physical activity outdoors or similar initiatives.

Due to the value placed on homework by school personnel, School 3 has put considerably more effort into structuring homework and also offers a significant amount of resources and guidance on homework. However, unlike most of the other schools, there seems less recognition of parents' views on homework. Or rather, School 3 seems very committed to structuring homework supports where difficulties often occur, such as Maths, which obviously happens in response to feedback from parents. However, there does seem to be less willingness to engage with parents' beliefs about homework. The school has a homework policy and there are clear steps to be followed if homework is experienced as being too difficult.

In terms of support for homework, the school hosts a workshop evening early in the school year around understanding the homework and why it is given. At the workshop, the teachers explain what they are doing and how the homework is connected to what the children are doing every day in the class. Despite the consensus on the value of homework within the school, how homework is set and how much of it is given varies according to the teacher. Some teachers set all the homework on Mondays and leave it up to the children when they want to do the homework. Others set specific homework for each day and check it the following day in the school. Similarly, some teachers set a lot of homework while others set a lot less.

The school emails out a newsletter every week, which includes notes on homework and comes with attachments of relevant resources from the NCCA, NPC and PDST. During 'stardardised testing season' for example, they emailed tips from the NCCA on what standardised testing is. The school is very focused on improving the teaching of the curriculum and supporting parents on how to support this as well.

School personnel's views.
As already suggested, the school personnel express considerable consensus in the value they attribute to homework. The teachers as well as the Principal value conventional homework and the role of repetition and revision in children's learning. Indeed, personnel in School 3 are consid-

erably more reflective on the role of homework and how it should it be set compared to personnel in the other schools. Thus, the school Principal described:

I would have a different opinion [to teachers who offer choice in when homework is done during the week] about the core stuff like tables, nightly reading, nightly sight words. There are certain things there... that is the consistent every day... makes a huge difference, that somebody needs to be checking on those little things every day, spellings, tables and reading even. I think they need to be checked every night. And I don't know why I think that, and it is not even every night but just that the parent is very much aware that the child is trying to learn these things and needs regular contact with them until they really have them and have committed them to memory and can call on them quickly. I think there has to be work put into that on a regular basis.

The junior infant teacher agreed when asked to define parents' role in their children's education,

Well they are the primary educator so there is a huge onus on them to take responsibility. Obviously we are the teachers but they have a role as well to play. I know people would say homework, we shouldn't be giving it, there are pros and cons of homework, but if homework is thought about and it is reinforcing the work that is done in school. You can easily give homework... and give them just something to do or finish their workbooks, but like the homework I would give definitely, I think anyway, reinforces what we do in school. So it is really trying to get the parents involved in the likes of knowing the sounds, knowing the sight words and seeing their child progress going from the sounds, going from the phonics to being able to read and write as a result of the effort we are putting in in school, and at home. I can see parents putting in a huge amount of work with kids and it is because... They might do the homework but then they are going and getting other books or other resources themselves or looking up things or videos. There are parents writing in the whole time going, is there any app I can get or anything else I can do?

This teacher sees homework as particularly important in the infant classes in order to reinforce learning and hear children in their reading because class sizes are too big for the teacher to hear everyone. Yet all the teachers agreed that homework was important and agreed on parents' role herein, namely that parents should ensure children complete the homework without doing it for them. One teacher

emphasised the belief held by many parents that homework is important as a way for the school to ensure that parents are involved in their children's education and know exactly what level the children are at. One teacher madean

interesting point that parents should focus on the process rather than the product of homework, in other words the process of learning rather than getting it completed. What this implies, according to the teacher, is that parents should extend their children's learning from the homework and build on it, rather than simply complete the homework. This teacher believed that where parents try to extend the learning, the children are considerably stronger academically than where parents simply focus on getting the homework completed. However, as the same teacher already sets around half an hour's homework for Junior Infants every day, extending this further may appear as too much for parents.

What is particularly interesting here is the emphasis on the parents' very active role in their children's academic education. Thus, another teacher suggested that education is a three- way relationship between the parent, teacher and the child. If one of these three roles is missing, the child will miss out. This would suggest that homework in School 3 is based on a partnership model of parental involvement. However, as also suggested in Section 1, parental involvement is not straightforwardly welcomed in School 3 and seems to only be appreciated when it happens according to the school's expectations and needs. There is an expected way of being involved and homework is designed to guide this involvement. According to the school personnel, parents show considerable interest in many aspects of children's learning, such as reading or the handwriting policy or technology where especially the Principal is cognisant of parents' appreciation of support. However, it also appears that the school often encounters parents who question them on homework and its usefulness; according to the Principal,

...and particularly around homework as well, it comes up in our parents' association meetings a lot about homework and I get quizzed on it and parents have different views. I would try to explain, like obviously there is certainly an element of kids having homework that is not necessary or not. of any great benefit but there are certain things that if they do consistently every day, particularly at home with their parents, around literacy and numeracy that would make a huge difference to their early education. So they get that.

This sentiment was repeated again when the Principal was asked about any disadvantages of parental involvement.

And at the end of the day parents still, it is very hard to remove yourself from the fact that you are somebody's parent, they are so attached to their own kids that even when they are discussing issues at a Parents' Association meeting or whatever, even if we are discussing it in a broad sense, which I would be and I have a helicopter view of the whole thing, they are still seeing it through the lens of their own child and their own child's experience. So that is very hard for them to remove themselves from that unless they are involved in education in other ways. Some people can but for other people obviously it can be very hard, and especially if their child is struggling. Whereas I could see that where if a parent who has a child who maybe has a diagnosis of dyslexia and is really, really struggling with homework and even differentiated homework it is still a huge challenge, they might then try to lead initiatives or bring up issues at Parents' Association meetings like getting rid of homework and stuff which would be very much suitable for their circumstances but isn't really what is right for the whole entire school.

The Principal, however, also sees it from the parent's perspective and understands the challenges of fitting in homework. However, while she on the one hand understands the pressure put on parents, on the other she also believes that infant teachers are right to give as much homework as they do, despite parents complaining over this amount. What is particularly interesting in this regard, is that she as a parent herself can find homework stressful and is relieved when her own children come home without homework, yet she continues to insist that around half an hour's homework is an acceptable amount for infant classes because they need it to bring on their reading and general literacy.

Perhaps due to the desire to structure homework and to maintain its role in facilitating parental involvement in children's learning, the Principal answered strongly in the positive when asked if she would welcome guidance and resources around homework:

Oh my God, I think absolutely, anything that makes life more practical and systematic and streamlined. I think a lot of teachers are unsure about homework and they go by whatever has been done traditionally. They are afraid not to give it but I don't know whether they really can assess for themselves if what they are giving, what impact it is making, in certain people or at certain levels maybe, or certain subjects. I am not sure. I mean I definitely feel at the junior end here the teachers really know what they are at and are confident about it. But I don't know, certainly as teachers

develop in their professions, that kind of support would be very useful. I always find input from the PDST incredibly practical and helpful.

One of the teachers, however, disagreed and did not believe teachers needed any further support in setting homework.

Parents' views.

Similar to the school personnel's views, parents expressed consensus with regards to the value and importance of homework, seeing it as very important in giving them a sense of where their children are at academically. Despite recognising its importance, parents made a number of critical observations on the particular nature of homework. Thus, the parents of Junior Infants' children agreed that the "amount of homework in Junior Infants is ridiculous", twice that of Senior Infants and that homework starts too early in the year for Junior Infants children compared to other schools. "I am shocked" stated one parent. A slight incongruence between the schools' and parents' expectations of the level of some of the classes in the school may thus exist.

Further in relation to the amount of homework, parents also agreed that there should be a time limit on it, as some of the parents' children were really struggling with homework and therefore spend nearly an hour and a half on it. All the parents agreed that this was much too long to spend on homework and that the parent in question should talk to the teacher. The parent explained that she had already done so and that she really struggled with this kind of communication with the school as she did not seem to feel listened to. The mother of the junior infant girl who struggled with the amount of homework also found the communication with the school around homework difficult. This will be examined further shortly.

With regards to the type of homework, again the parents of Junior Infants' children disagreed with colouring as homework, especially for the children who don't like colouring. While one of the parents recognises that it is important for their fine motor skills, the parent still disagreed with colouring as homework. One parent felt that the amount and inappropriateness of the homework was such that it had entirely put her daughter off school, had knocked her confidence and had made her not want to go to school. For a Junior Infant child to experience homework in this way is indeed rather problematic, especially if the school personnel strongly believe that the type and amount are appropriate. Other parents suggested that the children get very frustrated with the repetition of homework and that the

homework should be more "educational", by which it must be assumed that the parent who stated this, means challenging. At the same time however parents believe that children should know exactly what they are doing for homework as a number of the parents suggested that their children sometimes come home feeling confused and at a loss as to what they are meant to do for homework. Considering the focus on homework and amount of resources provided, this is somewhat surprising.

Children's views.

As in the other schools, children's views on homework are as diverse as that of their parents. The children in School 3 understand the purpose of homework to be to "learn new stuff" and so they do not have to stay in school for too long. When asked what homework they get, children listed reading with comprehension questions, Maths, Irish every second day (fill in blanks or crosswords or dictation) as well as homework given as part of the French for Life programme that the school is running. Some children like the homework, however the number of children who do not like it outnumber those who do. When asked what they would do with a magic wand, the majority of children would get rid of homework or have less of it. As in School 2, one child wanted more difficult homework. Children explained that they wanted to get rid of it because they find it hard to concentrate and because they also have to spend time on their house chores. As a consequence, they feel they have too little time to play. They also find it hard to have to bring out school work again at the end of theday.

When stating this, one child immediately wished for the summer to come quickly.

The majority of children seem to spend between half an hour and an hour on homework and those who spend this amount of time appear to find this too onerous and that the amount of homework is excessive. A couple of children only spend five to ten minutes on homework and thus unsurprisingly do not find homework onerous, difficult or time consuming. The children who find it too much stated that reading, writing, Irish, tables and reading with comprehension questions is too much and should be reduced to just reading and tables. Towards the summer, however, children did suggest that homework had started to reduce. Children seem to struggle primarily with Irish and spellings in English.

Similar to the children in School 2, children tend to do their homework in the kitchen while their mothers are cooking and will ask their mothers for help if they are stuck on something. According to the children, if their mothers can't help, their mother would either ring or go in and talk to the teacher in the school.

The majority of drawings from School 3 depict children sitting at a dinner table, doing their homework together as a sibling group. A number of the drawings depict the child at a table with no house or room surrounding him or her. A small number of drawings includes a mother cooking or sitting at the table with the child(ren).

Homework difficulties.

The general approach taken with children who experience difficulties with homework is firstly to put a time limit on it and then to discuss it with the teacher so homework can be differentiated and be made appropriate to the child. However, as suggested above, parents whose children were struggling with homework found such communication hard and felt as if they were not properly listened to. The Principal's comments above may suggest why the school was perhaps less than immediately welcoming towards parents with concerns of homework, primarily because some parents seemed to turn a personal difficulty with homework into a school wide campaign. A teacher's answer to a question on the policy for parents to communicate with the school around their child, further suggests why there might be somewhat of a communication barrier:

There was always the system there that you had to make an appointment to talk to your teacher but even at that we have really changed it that now you have to say what it is about before, so at least we have some sort of warning of what it is about and we can say this isn't what you said it was about so we can talk about this another time. Just to protect ourselves as well because we don't know what some of them are coming in with and you do need to be prepared...[...] it was a major sense of entitlement to come in and basically rip apart a teacher if they felt their child had suffered some sort of injustice by being told off or reprimanded for something. So that is really why...we have gotten locks on the doors and stuff, it went to that. And I know most schools have but we were literally like you could push open the door.

As some teachers had also received criticism and verbal abuse via social media online, it is perhaps understandable that communication between the school and parents at times appeared tense and somewhat barred. Overall, however, it must be emphasised that despite the difficulties seeming to simmer underneath with regards to communication around homework – due to the amount of homework primarily – parents and school personnel were very complimentary of each other, the school finding the majority

of parents supportive and parents finding the majority of teachers approachable. The ones who struggled were primarily Junior Infant children and those not in the Parents' Association.

School 4.

Due to its nature as a special educational school, in School 4 homework is individualized. As a general rule, the school in the main does not set homework although it does for some children where the parents or children themselves desire it and are able for it. The school does not have a homework policy per se but has a sentence on homework in the language and communication policy, which says homework is done in some classes. Despite the lack of homework, however, parents and teachers had interesting insights to offer on homework and contributed to a fuller understanding of the place of homework in children's education and families' lives moregenerally.

Homework approach andsupports.

In School 4, the starting point is that children do not receive homework. However, as with the other schools it depends on the teacher and the class. The majority of teachers in School 4 consult with parents regarding homework and let the decision be up to parents whether they want homework for their children. In some of the classes where the children's needs are of such a nature that the teacher deems homework too difficult or stressful for the child and his/her family to manage, teachers will not offer the choice of homework. Instead, across the school, teachers work with parents on their children's learning through individual education plans (IEPs) and daily communication around the areas that children need to focus on to strengthen their learning, such as communication through Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or I-pads more generally, speech and language therapy, vocabulary, fluency of speech or physiotherapy. For the majority of children such therapy constitutes their homework. Where it is given, homework focuses mainly on promoting independence through communication and other life skills. As explained by a teacher:

In our situation it is the practising, it is showing the parents a skill that they can do and the practising. If it is a skill the parents want them to learn we will break it down for them and say, right this week or this term we have been working on making a choice from two pictures so it is important in that way so that the child isn't confused. But in the traditional sense of practising homework sometimes it is more important for the parent than for us in that they like to

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The school offers a variety of supports to facilitate parents in helping their children, including the daily communication books already referred to in Section 1 and Lámh courses and workshops. In the case of School 4, it is difficult to distinguish between the views of school personnel and parents. A number of the teachers spoke as parents as much as teachers and a considerable number of parents spoke either as teachers in a mainstream school or as parents of children in mainstream schools. While children in School 4 were consulted on their experiences of school and in the home learning environment, it was not possible to consult their views on a more abstract notion such as homework and children's views are therefore not included in this Section.

School personnel's views.

Reflecting on the general recognition of parents' role in their children's education, and the considerable struggles many families go through to facilitate this, school personnel in School 4 are very sensitive to and understanding of different families' beliefs and experiences in relation to homework and go a long way to accommodate parents and children to facilitate individualised and differentiated learning (Vatterot, 2017) and parental involvement that suits each individual child's educational needs. Thus, importantly, teachers here emphasise that homework or support for children's learning is not always necessarily to do with practising or revising learned material or skills but to show parents what children do at school and facilitate bonding time around this educational communication. Regardless of the specific function of homework, in School 4 the key theme emerging in relation to homework is its individual character and thus its grounding in genuine partnership between the school, parents and children themselves.

The Principal explained her view in detail:

Principal: I think homework is very individual here. I think some parents would like their children to have homework and we would always agree with that, if that is what they would like we give them homework. Sometimes they don't do it. We have children who want homework and then can't do it, which is always interesting. I would be interested in your views on that actually because it is mainly higher. Sometimes the home is not the same as we think it should be with a middle class eye, I always think that. So we have a sentence on homework which the teachers probably don't know about in the language and communication policy which says homework is done in some classes. And that is literally the way it is. You could have a whole policy on it. But I do think for assessment and for seeing how you are getting on, if they genuinely do it themselves it is good. I have seen it causing trouble, even this year, where a parent was correcting a child's homework, making them rub it out and do it again and the child obviously had some kind of reaction to that and the parent sent in the homework undone so that the teacher would realise that the child wasn't doing the homework at home. And the teacher came to me and said, 'it is not that important, the homework.' I said, 'I think you need to ring them, I think they are trying to let you know.' So she rang and the child was having an absolutely strop at home about doing the homework and the teachers said it didn't matter, it is not that important. But they said 'we think it is, we think it is important that she does her homework and does it at home and not just in school.

Interviewer: Because the first word is home, therefore...

Principal: Exactly. So they are working on it and there is a reward system or whatever, but I thought the parents were clever, they didn't write a note or anything like that, they hoped the teacher would, and she did, she did pick up, she knew something wasn't right. So it is a very interesting one, I think it should be done if the child is able to do it independently, I think that is really important. Now reading shouldn't be called homework, shared reading, it should be a really important part. I genuinely did it every night for my own children and they loved it. It was fascinating watching how one child went off it and the other didn't and I do find, my son had dyslexia and I obviously was in the right place, I got the audio books and all the rest of it, but he still remembers. So I think reading is really important.

The Principal touches on a number of important themes that have also come up in relation to the other schools, namely that children need to be able to do the homework independently – even if they like the help of their parents – and that reading should be a part of this homework although not be phrased as homework. This is a particularly interesting and important point as it speaks to one of the main findings of the second part of this research around introducing a new form of homework. Another important point raised by the Principal is that teachers are not necessarily aware of the school's policy on homework, as also found in School 1, and that both parents and teachers need support and opportunities for communication and guidance in relation to setting and helping with homework. The view of homework as important in monitoring and responding to children's learning difficulties or strengths and weaknesses generally in relation to learning across the curricula areas also comes out stronglyhere.

A particularly significant point made by the Principal is parents' beliefs around homework and its importance. The incongruence between parental expectations and set homework is directly opposite to that expressed in School 3 where some parents did not believe their children were able for the homework and therefore wanted to get rid of it but where the school insisted on maintaining it. In School 4, in contrast, the school personnel would be in favour of getting rid of homework but in some cases, if only a few, parents insist on their children having homework regardless of their children's ability to complete it independently and without struggle. The fact that the Principal invites the interviewer's views on this and that the views held by the Principals and teachers in School 3 and 4 are directly opposite suggests that this is an area where school personnel require further support as they do not see it as immediately evident, which is in the best interest of the child. The teachers are similarly tuned into the struggles parents face in relation to children's learning in School4. One teacher emphasizes that parents help their children's learning in ways other than homework but where homework exists, it focuses on children's work in school.

Yes, I think especially in the special setting that we are in, I don't give homework and that is the parents' request, they think it would cause tension at home and that they are exhausted when they come in from such a long day at school. And the educational benefits, they don't show to be proven in this setting. So what a lot of them would do, they would use the app, the pictures on the app, they would sit down with their child and they think that is a really good bonding time, a really positive experience and they are able to go through the photos, this is what you were doing in school

today. And even modelling the language for them, you were looking at things that were heavy and things that were light. Can you look around? The table is very heavy. What are you sitting on? So then getting the photos and using them as a homework exercise and just bonding and saying there is a connection between home and school, like I am looking at what you are doing at school and I am telling teacher what you are doing at home. And just seeing that fluidity I suppose between home and school.

The teacher touches on the importance of fluidity of learning between home and school and the significant role of consultation and communication with parents in how to create and maintain this fluidity. In School 4, daily communication and technology facilitate this consultation as does the recognition by school personnel that parents are absolutely crucially important to children's learning and must as a consequence be supported appropriately. Another teacher elaborates in more detail:

Well in the setting I am in I don't give homework based on my opinions and the parents' opinions. I would have asked each parent individually at the beginning of the year and I said the only reason I would give homework is because it would be a bonding time for you to sit down with your child if you have got a lot of other children at home. So most of the parents declined and said they felt it would be very stressful trying to put the demand of sitting at a table, trying to put the demand of... And it hasn't been in the children's schedules up to now. My class have quite severe autism so they find it very difficult to sit for long periods of time. And looking at the staff ratio, most of the work goes on in the school and it would really only be reinforcing that at home which they are doing through the pictures and stuff. But I can see in a different setting how homework would be beneficial to see what is going on with your child's life at school. It is a very removed setting from mainstream school and I could see to extend their learning it could be a really valuable opportunity. It might be the only opportunity parents in a mainstream setting get to sit down with their child for 20 or 30 minutes. It is good, self-disciplinary skills to get your child sitting at home, it is preparation for later on.

This teacher also touches on a number of important themes emerging across the schools around the value of homework in encouraging a strong work ethic and self- disciplinary skills as preparation for secondary school, as well as homework as communication between parents and children – and the school – around children's learning strengths

and weaknesses, as a way of checking in with regards to school. However, as the teacher also expresses, these concerns are less important for a special educational school – except for the role of homework in creating that bonding time around children's education, which parents in School 4 are invited to do in a number of other ways than homework. The teacher elaborates:

And then things like when they start PECS or when they start their communication sessions, sending home examples of how to do it at home and that kind of stuff. So when you have done the face to face session with them that they get the follow on documents or follow on resources or guidelines. So I suppose there is no one set of guidelines that would work for homework, it would be a different guideline for every parent because each child is so different. But being mindful of don't take for granted that the parents have been exposed to this communication before or exposed to that way of interaction [...] be able to educate them on it..

The theme of homework as an important part of setting a healthy routine for children was mentioned by another teacher who saw the benefit of homework only for very particular children in the school:

Yes, but I think it is a boy thing, oh homework. But I don't think homework at this school... There are two classes I think giving it, some of the guys in one class are actually in share care so I don't know how much parental involvement there is with some of the guys. But I think it is a structure for a lot of them in the evenings if you have lads going into a shared house that it is homework time and it is a time where we do this bit of work and then we do whatever else. It is part of the routine and I think definitely two of those lads that are in that share care situation that are getting homework, routine is quite a big thing, it is the autism thing and if that routine is there, the structure is there.

As was the case with the Principal in School 3, teachers' views on homework become particularly interesting when they speak partly as teachers and partly as parents. Thus one teacher observed:

I do think it is important. I do see, especially with my own child at home, sometimes the hassle of having to sit down and do homework can be just, and it can set a bad atmosphere in the house afterwards because he is frustrated and whatever, academically he would be bright but his handwriting is atrocious, his level of care with his work would

be… There are attention issues as well so after a long day it can be… I read recently somewhere that you are better off turfing them outside with a bucket and spade and go and dig a hole. I read it somewhere, it wasn't just pub talk, it was actually research saying, get them outside, give them a ball, give them physical hands on stuff to do. They have enough time sitting down writing and that. And maybe there is…

As a teacher, this person values homework but as a parent she recognises that play may be more important, when seeing first hand in her house how stressful homework can be, and therefore seems torn between the importance of homework versus the importance of play.

The teacher certainly recognised that homework should only be given in small amounts and that it should not be stressful for parents. Thus, she continued in relation to her children's mainstream school:

I have a parent with kids in the school with my one and he wanted to talk to one of the teachers who is newly qualified and trying to make a name for herself and get inthe door and she was giving them loads of homework. And my quote from him was, he said going through the gate, 'they're are not going for their fucking degrees.' He is right, there was this ton of stuff coming home, it is just too much. An hour or an hour a bit for a senior infant. You are going no. So I think it is hassle for parents more than anything else.

The teacher raises a crucial point. If one of the key functions of homework is to involve parents in their children's learning, the fact that homework feels mostly stressful to parents does not warrant positive involvement in learning and may therefore not function as the best tool for parental involvement in children's education, at least not unless it is set in ways that parents can engage with it in more enjoyable and less stressful ways.

Parents' views.

Due to the lack of homework for most children, parents for good reason did not have a lot to say on homework except for situations where they discussed it for their children in mainstream school. One parent did describe the homework that was set for her child:

He used to get a lot more, sometimes he will get a block of it, he hasn't got any recently, but I will give him words but they give them to me at the beginning of the term, the sight words, and then we do squatting and we do the jumping and

I do all the activities that I would have done at home… And then he has to point them out to me, that is the sight words and stuff. And then we will do the reading, put your finger on…. And not only that, because he has this iPad app now […] where he is communicating through, so every night I sit down with him and we will talk about what we have done in the day so he makes sentences using the app. So he has to read it, he knows the symbols, but also he is learning the words as he goes and he can navigate through that really very well…. I think reading is important, that is my critical point, so I haven't been doing much Maths with him, because I [..] because he is going to be communicating on an iPad so he needs to learn to type, he needs to be able to spell, and that is so important.

As also suggested by the school personnel, the key focus of homework where given is on improving those of children's skills that will support their future independence through communication. In other words, homework has to have a very particular purpose and focus so it is of direct benefit to the child.

Another parent described having to use the respite she receives from the HSE to get homework completed for her other children in mainstream school, speaking of the stress and struggle that homework can cause for families of children with special educational needs even where the child themselves does not receive homework.

From the brief discussions on homework during interviews, it emerges that parents in School 4 are in general not greatly in favour of homework, whether it is for their child with special educational needs or their children in mainstream schools. For the few parents who see a value in homework they still believe that the amount of homework should be very little and absolutely no more than half an hour per day across all the subject areas. Those not in favour of homework do not seem to feel strongly against but similarly emphasise that it should only be in very small amounts and primarily focus on reading. Like a considerable number of parents in School 2 but interestingly very few parents in School 3, parents in School 4 value the role of play, outdoor activities and family time in lieu of homework as contributing to children's learning and well-being. When probed whether one parent does think homework should be changed to being play-based she confirmed in the positive. One parent recognises the value of homework but opines that it is not necessary in primary school but should be given in secondary school to encourage a good work ethic.

Homework difficulties.

Teachers in School 4 are particularly attuned to where homework is causing difficulties and are in such cases normally in favour of getting rid of it. However, they see where parents want the homework and try to set homework more appropriately in such cases. Generally, however, homework difficulties do not arise because teachers are aware of the stress and struggles that can be associated with homework for children with special educational needs and therefore pre-empt such difficulties through consultation and close observation of children's work and reactions to homework. Perhaps not surprisingly, school personnel are considerably more focused on discussing guidelines and whether they are of use in structuring homework accordingly. Currently, homework is summed up in one line as part of another policy to avoid having a full policy on it where guidelines and content have to be made very clear yet general and vague due to the very individual and unique needs of children. Thus, for this school, the guidelines required are perhaps less around the structuring of homework and more to do with the benefits of homework – where they exist – and how to ensure such benefits are achieved through appropriate consultation and partnership with parents and children. What has come up more so for School 4 than the other schools is that children's reaction to and perceptions of homework –where such perceptions are possible to interpret – are crucial to such consultation and partnership. This of course is the case for all the schools but as a theme that was deliberated on by participants this came up primarily for School 4. In the other schools, it came up more so in conversations around choice and individual learning styles, however not in any way that suggested the need for consultation or appropriately and properly including children in partnerships around children's learning.

School 5.

Homework does not pose any particular difficulties in School 5. Homework is relatively conventional although some new initiatives are brought in occasionally and seems by parents and children alike to be deemed as an appropriate amount. Interestingly, School 5 is the only school where children did not want to use a magic wand to get rid of homework although they did not all like homework. The Principal and teachers express consensus regarding the benefit of homework, although they all recognised that it should only be set in small amounts that fit in with the particularly busy lives that seem to dominate families in School 5. Parents do not feel strongly about homework. The majority see its benefit and think the amount is appropriate but express that time is a real issue in getting it done. Regardless of views on homework, there is no evidence of any contention over homework.

Homework approach and supports.

Homework has been decreasing in recent times in School 5 due to school personnel's recognition that families lead very busy lives and are struggling to find time to appropriately support children's homework. The main homework is reading in Irish but children also get the normal Maths and English homework. According to the teachers, physical activity outdoors is also often set as homework; however, only the older children were aware of this.

Magic Maths are also done but the children disagreed as to whether this constituted homework. Older classes get a lot of project-based homework where the research has to be completed at home but children get opportunities to put their projects together in class.

Homework is set from Junior Infants onwards and is primarily reading or building up to reading. From First Class onwards children get a homework diary that parents have to sign every night. In Junior Infants, homework is set every Wednesday night and notice is given to parents on a notice board. Similar to School 2, children get no homework for the month of June; homework starts to decrease as the weather gets warmer.

The school offers a variety of resources and assistance in relation to the Irish language and helping parents to support their children's Irish language learning although some school personnel think they may need to adjust the nature of such assistance or provide different resources or support. According to one teacher:

But we will tell them, don´t we, that in Junior & Senior Infants, that the spelling books are available on the website, say, for parents who don´t have Irish. It is mentioned, for sure, at the meeting for the new parents that they can, because at that age you are relying on the parent to do the homework with them, to do the reading with them, and if they don´t speak Irish…Sometimes I feel that we don´t give enough information to the parents. In the more elementary classes you are depending on the parents to do the work and a reading book goes home, that the parents are just meant to read to them, in Junior Infants, then in Senior Infants, you expect the child to maybe be doing a bit of reading, but you don´t expect them to know every word. But then we send word packages home as well, you know, Amharc Focla, and you want the child to read the words,

but I don´t think, a lot of parents think, they want the child to pronounce the word, you know, ´´bhfuil´´, they can´t say those words, and they don´t know the differences between the visual form of the words and the phonics, and I think that we don´t give the parents enough training – should we have a meeting with them at the start of the year to explain it, or should we maybe put something on the school website, because harm is definitely done to some children. They try to pronounce these words out that they can´t pronounce, and then some of them are learning the names of the letters too soon instead of the sound, so then I was working with children who are weak a couple of days ago, and trying to get them to say retro-sounds, you know, ´f´ and ´g´ and so on, and they were saying, you know, they had the word, ´´and that is ´f´, what sound does ´f´ have?´´ E, e, e, e. G, g,g,g,?? N, e, e, e, e. There wasn´t, so... the parents want to help the children but maybe they are not doing what we would like them to do and they are doing damage?

In the meeting held for new parents in Junior Infants, parents are also informed about homework and that they should come and talk to the school/teacher if there are any difficulties at all, encouraging parents to come before a problem develops or gets big.

Similarly, teachers will also talk informally to the parents before difficulties or issues get big, rather than waiting for parent-teacher meetings or end-of-year reports. More so than the other schools, teachers and parents mentioned parent-teacher meetings as important in discussing children's homework and strengths and weaknesses in school. In these meetings, teachers described that parents were often very eager or indeed anxious to know how their children are getting on, nervous that they might have particular weaknesses or that they are parents who are not able to support them sufficiently in Irish.

Yet, according to the Principal, parents do not tend to experience any particular difficulties other than time in supporting their children with homework. A small number of

parents may struggle with the reading in Irish when children are not yet reading themselves. In such cases, the school provides information on where to access the books in English. As suggested, in response to families' busy lives the school has started to reduce the amount of homework and has especially reduced the amount of written work sent home. There has been no direct communication to parents around this yet but the Principal plans to send out a survey to parents in the near future regarding homework. In terms of supports for parents regarding homework, the Principal observed:

Based on perhaps, participation in homework when we do not give the parents the proper instructions for parents, that this can be, in particular when you're talking about acquiring a second language - There are specific sounds in Irish and we go through them somewhat differently and when parents are doing their best, at the same time if we don't guide them properly, and that's something, say we discussed here, should we be putting very little videos together, providing them with a model so that they might have some reference, that they could follow. Now, we have discussed this among ourselves, but we have not made it available to parents. So it's not that it might be a disadvantage for the child learning, it's not because of any lack or any skills that the parents have but maybe they do not understand the sounds of Irish and such and you can't assume that they understand such ... So that's the only disadvantage in this regard is that there is any sort of conflict between what is happening in the school and what is happening at home and we have the obligation rather than the parent, as they want help, they want to be involved, we have the duty to do something about that. We have not done anything at present but it is probably recognised that there may be a gap and that maybe we can do something about it.

The small size of the school means that it is easy for teachers to communicate around homework and therefore there seems to be less diversity in how teachers set homework. In comparison to the other schools, homework seems relatively streamlined.

School personnel's views.

Like teachers and Principals in some of the other schools, the Principal identifies with the struggles and stress associated with homework from her own children at home:

But homework is a pressure for any family, whether in Irish or in English. But I didn't understand that myself either until I had my own children. And although I'm a trained teacher, and in charge of the school, say, and they are coming home and, oh I'm supposed to sit down and do this and I ask myself, what which I am supposed to be doing and I questioned myself, what am I supposed to be doing, but yet it would be natural for me, not to correct, but the nature of the teacher doing reading or doing something else like that but yet I was saying. Whoa are you doing that right, are you doing that. Someone who was educated, someone who was dealing with modern literature, someone...and my children did not have a problem so it was kind of, tick tick tick I'd say, there was no problem in the family but yet ... and at times I

had to look at myself and say for God's sake, if it's hard for our family and everything...and us having all the advantages, how it is in some other families. So that made me think and of course as a school and as a team we are drawing back on homework because I think ...

The Principal's experiences at home made her question the efficacy and benefit of homework, which has led to some engagement with existing research on homework in formulating a new approach to homework in the school. This issue of Principals' and teachers' experience of homework in their own house affecting their view on homework in the school is interesting and has come up in a number of the schools. Once they as parents have had to go through what they also see as the stress of homework, most of the teachers and Principals tend to decrease homework in the school. Also interesting in this regard, and which will be discussed in the thematic analysis below, is the age and experience of theteachers.

Thus, the Principal in addition to the above experience expressed that her views on homework had changed overtime; that she had tended to give too much homework as a newly qualified teacher, as was also observed in School 4 case study, but then realised how long it was taking families to get through it and therefore adjusted the amount. These two experiences made the Principal elaborate:

We are questioning its merit and international research is also going in the same direction and it is certainly a live conversation. Some parents would love to get rid of it, some other parents who do not agree with that and I think that is the big debate in many schools at the moment.

Consequent to the debate on and incongruence between parents' different attitudes on the benefit of homework, the Principal is somewhat wary of what a survey on homework may show and is cognisant that not everyone will be pleased.

At a staff meeting, And just looking at ... or I do not think we notified it officially. We intend to, say, maybe, do a survey of what exactly the parents of the school would like but you will not please everyone, so no matter what way we go, we will not please. But I suppose, if we make a decision based on the wishes of the majority of parents, the majority of teachers, and that is embedded in research I think we are doing the right educational decision. But it's a live question and we're only beginning but definitely if you would get such, a lot of the children, they'd come home with reading, independent reading, say and going outdoors. That is really

good. We have that a lot. Exercise, activity or going outside. We often have that as homework. Exercise or activity... They write that in their homework.

The teachers who are themselves parents agreed with the Principal's sentiments around homework and were nearly rejoicing in homework free evenings. As a consequence, some of the teachers had themselves decided to cut back on homework due to children's busy lives.

Nonetheless, teachers like the Principal seem to value homework to some extent, particularly with regards to creating positive habits and a good culture of reading and engaging with books. The teachers in the school highlighted that they see parental involvement in children's education as particularly important because it is important for parents to:

...know what the child is doing with the homework and let them do it themselves, that they know what is going on so that they can be helping them and supporting them. And if the child has difficulties with the homework it is good that you get that information as their teacher as well, that you will be able, you know, get around that with the child so that they won´t be under pressure at home.

According to the teacher, parents have a particularly important role in instilling the right attitude to homework. Thus, parents confirm the value and benefit of completing homework to children by showing an interest in the homework and signing the homework diary. Like some teachers in the other schools, the teachers in School 5 value the routine of homework and see the parents' role in setting this routine, and showing the value of homework through it, as a crucial aspect of parental involvement in children's education and in promoting children's attitude to school. Thus, one teacher explained:

A child sees from Mam or Dad that it is important. You know, they see early on at home if there is a set time for homework every day instead of leaving it to eight o´clock at night, or doing it in the car, you know, that there is a particular time for the homework.

Another teacher added that the parent also has an important role in creating the right environment around homework and children's learning. Interestingly, the Gaelscoil teachers were the only teachers to mention the important role of parents in building children's confidence in relation to education by praising their children's efforts and learning. The teachers saw a significant need for this because

the large ratios in the classroom means that teachers are not able to do so. The Principal also recognised the importance of some level of homework when ratios are so high as children will not be heard in their reading or sounds properly without having parents helping with this at home. The emphasis on confidence and praise in relation to ratio is however particularly interesting and raises important questions around the efficacy of homework. If part of its significance is to build children's confidence in and attitude towards homework it becomes particularly problematic that homework is so often experienced as stressful or as hassle by parents and children alike as such experience would work against the building of confidence and creation of positive habits and attitudes.

The teachers returned to the importance of habits and attitudes a number of times when reflecting on the importance of homework and parents' role therein. Thus, another teacher observed:

But also to have a system, that there is a kind of system like, not for it to be the same every day but that they know, you know: you go home, you eat a snack, or whatever, and every day we do homework before we do this, that we aren´t allowed to go out and play, that particular emphasisis placed on the time they come home.

For the school personnel in School 5, homework thus seemed less to revolve around repetition and revision but rather to instil positive and appropriate habits in children and to strengthen correct methods in subjects such as Maths. The need for routine was considered by teachers as important preparation for secondary school. This came up in other schools too.

When homework changed from conventional to project based, in School 2, teachers were concerned that a complete lack of homework would disadvantage children when moving on to secondary school. However, the same teachers were happy enough to reduce homework as a principle. Back in school 5, in the older classes, the teachers emphasised that project-based homework over a couple of weeks, like the approach in School 2, may be the most beneficial for children's learning and preparation for secondary school.

Parents' views.

The main theme that comes up for parents is to find the time to fit in a regular homework routine when their lives are busy with full time jobs and a large number of after- school and leisure activities for children. Parents are therefore appreciative of the fact that childrendo not getalotofhomework.The

issue of time is particularly a problem for parents of younger children who need more direct involvement in homework and who are too tired to do it in the evenings. The Irish language does not seem to cause any major difficulties for parents. Where parents are unsure they tend to ask older children who have been in the school for a number of years to help younger siblings but it also seems that parents feel they receive enough support from the school in supporting their children's homework. As already suggested, parents do not seem to feel strongly about homework and express considerable consensus that the amount is appropriate and that most children get through it quickly and without difficulties. Parents, like many parents across the other schools, value homework because it gives them a sense of what their children are doing. Parents also feel that they are properly supported by the school with regards to homework. Parents are also positive about the project-based homework.

The only point of criticism from parents is where homework in the past has not necessarily been well coordinated and children have ended up with too much of it. It does not appear from the parents, however, that this has been a significant problem. Only a couple of parents described homework as a potential source of conflict. However, again the key issue at the base of this appeared to be time and the fact that homework takes away from important family time and can therefore, as a consequence, cause tension. For example, one parent explained that she was not a big fan of homework because it took away from family time and she therefore encouraged her child to get the homework done as quickly as possible rather than to work on it more creatively and to focus on the process, which she suggested may be a better approach but one which she felt was difficult within the constraints of a busy family life. This parent as the only one also questioned the greater benefit of homework, which she did not see as contributing much value to children's learning. Another parent suggested that while she did see value in homework she did not see any need for it until around Third Class and then only for 15 minutes or so along with another 15 minutes of exercise. The same parent emphasised that if they could get children to focus sufficiently in school there would be very little need to bring home much homework. She recognized, however, that a small amount of homework might 'bring on' children in all the right areas. No parents, however, seemed to feel strongly enough about homework that they seemed to advocate to get rid of it, although the Principal was aware that some parents want to get rid of homework.

Children's views.

Children expressed relative consensus in their understanding of homework and in their account of what homework they receive. Children understand the purpose of homework to be to learn to read. One child also explained that homework teaches children to be responsible.

Homework consists of a mixture of conventional homework of reading, spelling and Maths but older children also mentioned physical activity while children in the school's middle classes mentioned the teddy bear picnic, also used in some of the other schools. A number of the children in First Class mentioned that homework was too hard and made children feel under pressure (although the focus group was conducted in Irish, children used the English term 'pressure') and some children confided that they sometimes feel nervous about getting homework wrong, which they find embarrassing. A child in sixth class also mentioned that homework can sometimes feel stressful. Interestingly, where neither parents nor teachers saw homework as an issue, a considerable number of children – the majority – do not really like homework. Also interestingly, however, is that no child suggested getting rid of homework when asked what they would do with a magic wand in relation to homework. Several children mentioned they would either make homework easier or reduce the amount. Some children would not change it at all while other children suggested that they should do homework in an afterschool homework club rather than at home because they find it easier to complete their homework in the school where there are no other temptations, such as screens or preparing snacks.

Children in the different focus groups varied in how long they spend on homework.

The majority of children spend around 20 minutes on homework, right up to sixth class, while a smaller number of children spend around half an hour to 45 minutes. The children agreed that they have been told by their teachers to stop after an hour and if they have difficulties with the homework they either ask their parents or their teacher for help. Interestingly, children in School 5 were the most likely to answer 'parents' as opposed to 'mum' to the question of who they ask for help. Fathers figured only very little in the three other mainstream schools in relation to homework but this appears not to be the case in School 5. The children also agreed that if they do not finish their work in class they have to do it at home.

Children's drawings indicate that about half of the children do their homework in the kitchen or living room, either while a parent is cooking, together with their parents or with the parents in a separate room. The other half of children have depicted themselves doing their homework in their rooms. A couple of children have drawn a television playing in the background while they do their homework. A number of children have drawn food or snacks on the table where they are doing their homework.

Homework difficulties.

Very few issues or difficulties seem to arise in connection with homework in School 5.

No parent mentioned a child's learning difficulties or struggles either in school or with homework and no parent mentioned wanting to get rid of it, although the Principal was aware of some such cases. Where difficulties arise the protocol is for parents to discuss it with the teacher as soon as difficulties are identified. Time limits are then applied. No parent however mentioned personal experiences of this.

One parent offered interesting insights on an approach to homework that is common across all schools with the exception of the special educational school, School 4. This is the tendency to ask children who have not had time to complete their work in school to bring it home as homework. However, as the parent suggested, if they are not able to complete it in the allocated time in school, it is more than likely that the child is experiencing a difficulty with that particular work and the struggle will only continue at home, which the parent argued would reinforce a negative spiral. It could be argued that in such cases, the homework should either be differentiated (Hong, 2000; Vatterot, 2017) or a note could be sent home to parents observing the difficulty and explaining how parents can support the child in addressing any particular difficulty or issue.

Innovative approaches and successful strategies.

Thematic analysis.

The question of homework is evidently a very important one, not only due to the influence it has on families' lives but due to its highly contested and emotive nature. Perhaps the most significant finding in relation to homework is the diversity of views on its efficacy in children's learning and the diversity of experiences that revolve around homework in children's homes. Parents and teachers hold particular values around homework that relate to their views not only on how children learn and what type of learning homework should help to develop but also how much of children's lives should be taken up by formal educational/academic activities, speaking to concerns of the 'colonisation of the home' by formal education. Consequently, contention and in some cases entirely contradictory views on homework dominate the five casestudies.

A thematic analysis of homework points to a series of important factors in opinions and experiences of homework. The dominant themes relate to the nature of homework, including type, amount and time limits; the purpose of homework, including the particular intentions for skills development and type of learning, in-home communication around children's learning and ability to monitor progress, as well as notions of bonding and encouraging specific values and routines; the role of the individual, including teacher views, training and expectations, parental values and children's personalities; the experience of homework and its related difficulties; specific approaches to and strategies for setting homework and supporting its completion in the home; and finally, the implications of the neglected status of children's views and opinions, including their role in consultation, teachers' and parents' recognition of children's experiences of homework and providing children with choice. The findings in each of these themes provide insights into how homework could be more efficiently used to promote children's learning and positive experiences of school.

The contention and challenges of homework.

When the INTO conducted research on homework, 78% of parents consulted reported that homework creates upset between parent and child. Similar research conducted by NPC also found that 74% of parents felt that homework causes significant stress for parents and 82% for children. Although we cannot present statistical information on stakeholders' perceptions, the prevalence of participants who associate homework with stress in the present research appears similar to that found in the INTO and NPC research.

Even for the school where parents were the most positive about the quantity and type of homework, words such as stress and pressure were still seen as always potentially lurking. With such a strong correlation between homework and stress within the home, it is evident that it is in the minority of cases that homework is experienced as the important educational bonding time that many teachers and parents expect it to be. Thus, while homework may be conceived as a tool for communication between school and home around children's learning, the prevalent stress levels suggest that it may not be the most appropriate tool, at least when enacted in ways that are experienced as stressful. The difficulty in this case is that what one family experiences as extremely stressful is another family's preferred homework routine. While this may call for differentiated homework, the present research does not straightforwardly lead to such conclusioneither.

Where specific homework difficulties arise schools take different approaches to dealing with such difficulties. Difficulties tend to arise where children have a particular difficulty with a certain area of learning, such as spellings or writing, or where they have poor concentration spans or are just not inclined towards homework, thus requiring considerable encouragement and coaching by parents. Difficulties also arise when parents have very specific expectations of their children's learning and study approach, which may at times cause stress for themselves and their children. Finally, difficulties arise where children simply get too much homework or get homework they find boring and repetitive.

A universal approach across the schools is time limits set by teachers. The theme of differentiated homework (Hong, 2000; Vatterot, 2017) came up in some shape or form across all the schools. For obvious reasons it was the dominant mode of setting homework in School 4 for the minority of children receiving homework here as children's needs are of such individual nature that homework can only be differentiated. In the other schools, differentiated homework (Hong, 2000; Vatterot, 2017) was also used to address particular children's difficulties or weaknesses and thus it appears that differentiation is perceived as a primary solution to specific learning difficulties or weaknesses, except for School 2 where it is more common to opt a child out of homework. It is a strong finding of this research that such limits are ineffective and that differentiation in other forms do not seem to reduce the stress felt by families. Thus, the following mother from School 2 observed

So at this moment in time I actually went in, the same thing you see, we don't have a big issue here, I went into my

daughter's, my son wouldn't care but my daughter, she was getting upset because I would say, 'forget about it, put it in your bag, you haven't time, it is too late, leave it.' 'No, no I have to do it, I have to do it.' So at the parent teacher meeting I went in and had a lovely chat with her teacher. I said, 'look she gets very anxious if the homework isn't done and I am not pushing her.' And she said, 'forget about it.

The number of parents who mentioned having arguments and fights with their children over homework, or experiencing tense and conflictual interaction over homework was astounding. Such arguments were particularly dominant in Schools 1 and 3, while parents in School 5 mentioned the potential of tension but did not mention arguments and parents in School 2 were the most likely to attempt to reduce such frustrations. Thus, according to one mother

Honestly, if he comes home and he has stuff that he doesn't understand I will go through it with him once or twice and after that I will email his teacher and say he came home, he doesn't understand it. Because I always feel that kids will act differently to their parents than they will to the school and the teachers because he will throw a strop, I can't do it, and it is all tension. And that is not what home life is supposed to be so I will sit down, I will try and explain it to him, if he doesn't get it then I will email the teacher and say can you please explain this to him. And that is it. I don't have fights with homework, if it doesn't get done that is it, end of story (Parent, School2).

Another parent in the same school observed:

Get rid of it, waste of time and energy and I just think no. At this age, waste of time. Let them go outside the back garden and play for a few hours. I think people have just lost the plot. Back to basics, let them play, let them socialise, if they are interested in football let them play football, if they are interested in hurling let them play hurling. Just give them freedom. They are after being sitting in a school from 8:50 in the morning, mine get home at 2:50, it is a long day and then to sit down…

The source of these difficulties will now be explained in detail, followed by a consideration of some of the approaches that have worked well, either in getting the type and amount of homework right or structuring homework supports in a way that parents feel more positive about it.

The nature of homework.

The particularities of the homework set matter greatly for how homework is perceived and experienced, in particular because this is where teachers and parents are likely to disagree.

Type of homework.

According to research carried out by the INTO on homework, it is not the act of the assignment of homework that is important but rather the type of homework that is assigned (Jackson & Harbison, 2014). This finding is reinforced by the present research. The types of homework given differ significantly across the five schools as do opinions of each of the different types. Appendix 10 comprises a table of each of the different types of homework, the schools in which it is used along with a summary statement on its reception in the schools. The greatest factor with regards to the type of homework is the distinction between 'traditional' homework and more novel approaches. Traditional homework involves repetition, revision and rote learning of content taught in school. This type of homework includes writing sentences, practising spellings, and sums in Maths. More novel types of academic homework involve cross-curricular homework that involves integration of learning and developing research skills, such as project -based homework but also includes homework such as magic Maths, Mathletics and other technology- based homework. A third type of homework involves less academic and more informal learning that encourages joint or shared learning experiences between children and parents or within families more generally. Such homework includes reading for leisure, 'bring a teddy home', spending time in theoutdoors, such as going to the park together, physical exercise/activity or initiatives such as 'Mindful Mondays'. This third type of homework revolves less around academic content and learning but rather promotes bonding time, informal learning opportunities, conversation and experiential learning through designated family time; at least such is the intention. According to one teacher what is really key is that the homework learning relates to what they are working in on school, to make it a 'real' and 'connected' experience:

Even activities in relation to supporting what they are learning as opposed to just, I think there is a lot of, and I am guilty of it myself, photocopy that sheet, send it out, it will be grand. As opposed to, no let's make it real and let's connect it to what we are doing in school.

Children, parents and school personnel had very specific

views on which type of homework they preferred. Some teachers struggle with the third, informal type of homework as they find it hard to measure and therefore to assess its efficacy. Other teachers value it because they feel that it addresses skills and experiences they deem to be in decline in children's lives, such as physical development and fitness, social and conversational skills. Many parents valued informal homework for its different type of involvement and its association with much less stress and hassle, greater opportunity for relaxed and enjoyable parental involvement. Yet many parents also seemed to believe that it moved too far away from academic contents and formal education.

Very few teachers were willing to move entirely away from the first, more conventional type of homework as most teachers found a certain level of repetition and revision crucial to children's academic learning and progress. Many parents also favoured the first, conventional type because it allowed for the greatest direct assessment of their children's learning and thus offered the most effective communication around children's education and academic progress. The main difficulty experienced with this type of homework is its tendency to feel difficult for less academic students and children with learning difficulties or short concentration spans and the tendency for teachers to set too much of it. The second type, the more innovative approaches to academic learning but with substantial informal learning as well, appeared the greatest source of contention as to its value when replacing traditional homework. This type of homework requires clear communication from the school personnel with regards to its process, methods and requirements for parental involvement. Where this is done well and appears streamlined and integrated with the school's other homework and parental involvement initiatives, such as in School 5, this type of homework seems to work well and be appreciated. Where this is done less well, opinions are more divided and it is primarily received positively by families where children struggle with traditional homework for whatever reason or where parents appreciate the different kind of parental involvement itrequires.

Importantly, reading was the *only* type of homework that was positively received by all stakeholders and was mentioned as an important element in each type of homework. Thus, in traditional homework it is given to improve fluency and proficiency, and sometimes comprehension; in innovative approaches, reading is crucial to the research projects and thus involves not only comprehension but potentially critical analysis and engagement; in more informal homework reading is set to encourage a love of reading through important bonding time over shared reading practices.

Reading, thus, seems a little contested type of homework, although the way it is set does seem to matter.

Amount of and time spent on homework.

In the INTO research, it was found that 100% of parents felt that the amount of homework their children received was very reasonable or somewhat reasonable. No one thought it was unreasonable. In Lynch's (2016) research, 61% of parents felt children got the right amount of homework. These findings stand in stark contrast to the findings of the present research where the biggest concern with homework across the case study schools is the amount of homework given by some teachers and consequently the amount of time children have to spend on homework every day. Teachers often give children an indication as to how long the homework should take but it is also recognised across many of the schools that many children still seem to spend more time than predicted/set by the teacher. This corresponds to findings from the Growing up in Ireland study (Williams et al., 2009).

Children spend anything between five minutes and an hour and a half. Unsurprisingly how long children spend on it directly determines their experiences of homework and thus the level of hassle and stress with which it may potentially be associated in the home. The children who spend the least amount of time on it have the most positive experiences, more than likely because they do not find academic work difficult, require little help and therefore can easily incorporate it into their daily routines without a sense of stress. The longerchildren spend on it the more difficult they find it as the length of time spent on homework seems determined either by the ease or difficulty with which children associate the work or their concentration span. Thus, if they spend considerable amounts of time on homework it tends to be either because they struggle with the work or with concentration. In such cases, the majority of teachers set time limits but it is clear from parents' and children's views across the case study schools that such time limits do not reduce the stress or difficulties associated with homework. Firstly, if a limit is set to half an hour or an hour, this is still half an hour or an hour of struggling with the work. Secondly, it implies a sense of failure or defeat in that a time limit appears equivalent to having to give up. Rather than supporting children in how it can be done, completed or achieved differently, it sets children up for poor confidence and a sense of being unable to complete work they know should only take a certaintime.

Unsurprisingly it therefore still gets associated with stress and hassle.

The time children spend on homework is not only determined by children's abilities but also by the amount of homework some teachers set. Thus for teachers in a couple of schools, mostly Schools 1 and 3 but possibly also other teachers, their expectations of the different kinds of activities and time spent on them led to rather large amounts of homework being set for some classes. Thus in School 1 and 3 teachers suggested that up to half an hour spent on homework daily is appropriate for Junior Infant children. As fifth and sixth class children see 20-30 minutes as appropriate at their level, the same amount for Junior Infants appears, indeed, as 'ridiculous', as quoted by one parent. If the academically strong or even average child needs up to half an hour to complete it, it is nearly guaranteed that academically weaker students will take longer.

But, as observed by a large number of parents, children in infant classes do not have the application for concentration and work for such a long period of time after a long day in school and possibly at afterschool too.

Despite all the schools having either a stand-alone policy on homework or a section on homework in other policies, there seems to be very little consensus amongst teachers as to the appropriate amount of homework for each class level. In School 3 there was considerable talk of streamlining and a structured and well-resourced approach to homework, however according to both parents and children, teachers varied extremely in the amounts they set so that the Junior Infants class had twice the amount of homework compared to the Senior Infants class and as much as the children in the senior end of the school. School 5 seemed to have the most streamlined approach to homework and to be giving homework in the most structured and measured way. In no school was it mentioned that the policy sets limits or recommendations on the amount of and time expected to be spent on homework.

Homework policies.

All of the schools had either a policy on homework or had included a sentence or paragraph on homework in other policy documents. However, the case study schools reflect the INTO research on homework described at length in the literature review on parental involvement, which found that parents do not feel adequately informed about homework policies and were not aware of the content of them. Not only were most parents consulted across the schools unsure of whether a policy existed, or if they were aware of the policy of what it contained, many teachers also expressed that they did not use or refer to the policy in their approach to homework and how they set it for children in their class.

Thus, it is worth repeating the following paragraph from Case Study School 1:

Despite the school having a policy on homework, it was the opinion of the Principal that this policy may not be the most appropriate. Similarly, the HSCL coordinator suggested that teachers do not necessarily follow it and need to be reminded of it occasionally. The HSCL coordinator also suggested that homework is not necessarily something that is mentored or talked about with the beginner teachers, which may need more attention in order to bring everyone on board with the same homework policy and approach.

The purpose of homework.

Cooper (1989) defines homework as tasks assigned by teachers to students to be completed outside class. Purposes include provision of an opportunity to the child to practice or review material already presented in class (Cooper, Robinson and Patall, 2006) and nurturing children's ability to manage their own learning and developing their learning dispositions (Cooper, 2007; Jackson and Harbison, 2014). Interestingly, despite the predominance of stress associated with homework reported in the research by INTO and

Lynch (2016), those consulted nonetheless saw value in homework and its role in supporting children's learning (63-70% of participants). Parents, teachers and children consulted as part of the present research were very divided on whether homework served a purpose, varying from perceptions of homework as 'wasting time' and being pointless to 'extremely important' and 'the only way to know what children are learning and where they are at'. As already discussed, some teachers, parents and children consider the purpose of homework to be revision and practice of content learned in school, such as tables, sums, spellings and reading. Homework is also seen by some as broader than this and is seen as important for parental involvement. Three other purposes have been identified, namely homework as communication around children's learning, homework as bonding time and homework as instilling important life skills andhabits.

Homework as communication and increasing Parental Involvement.

According to Rosario, Nunez, Vallejo, Cunha, Nunes, Mourão and Pinto (2015), "homework connects teachers, students and parents" and is thus seen as a key linkage in the meso-system (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Traditionally homework has been used as a point of contact about school between children and parents (e.g. Epstein and van Voorhis, 2012). The GUI study, as discussed, found a high level of

parental involvement in helping children with their homework at age nine (Smyth, 2017; Williams et al., 2009). Homework is thereby seen as a means for increasing involvement with and knowledge of school (Smyth, 2017). In the present study a large cohort of parents attribute immense importance to homework because it gives them insight to what their children are learning in school and what level they are at. What parents especially want to be able to monitor are any weaknesses or difficulties their children might experience in order that the parents can challenge and support the children in such areas.

According to a parent in School 5,

But I do think it is good because I can see where their weaknesses are or where they might need to improve. Because my daughter, we were doing the times tables with her and say she had to do 4 x tables, rather than saying what is 4 and 4 and what makes 8, because she has to think about it a bit more.

Another parent observed:

I love homework. If there wasn't the homework in front of me I wouldn't know what she is doing. Again I know I only have a junior infant, come back to me in about three years and I might change my opinion totally. As of now I didn't know she was able to write a sentence until her sentence copy came home the other week. So I have to say, just as a junior infant, I have only got her, I wouldn't have known, put three sentences in a copy, because she wouldn't tell me. So I agree with it as a junior infant, 100% because I can communicate with her, she knows her Jolly Phonics and stuff. She wouldn't tell me. (Parent, School3)

Homework, according to the parents who hold this view, provides important information and communication around their children's learning, especially in cases where children don't talk much about school at home. This is by far the most prevalent view on the purpose and value of homework and is adhered to by all the parents who did not receive the new project based homework positively in School 2. It was also a widely held view in the other schools, except for School 1, also amongst teachers.

Interestingly, however, the second parent quoted also experienced severe difficulties with homework and was spending at least half an hour to three quarters of an hour on homework with her daughter every day, a rather large amount for a junior infant child who was, according to the mother, already starting to hate school and did not want to

go in in the mornings. Interestingly, the parent is in School 3, which holds a detailed meeting at the beginning of the year, talking parents through what children will learn, the curriculum and how homework isdone. The school had very positive experiencesof doing thisfor 5[th]and 6th class and a possibility may be to have more of such meetings throughout the year. Another option would be to send home detailed plans of what the children are covering so parents can check in with their children around these plans occasionally, rather than having to do it for long periods every day. In other words, if the key purpose of homework is communication around and monitoring of children's learning, there are other ways of facilitating this other than homework that would not have to put such stress on families.

Homework as bonding.

The perception of homework as important bonding time over children's education was a view only explicitly deliberated upon by school personnel. While notions of bonding may have been implicit in parents' perception of the value of homework as communication and monitoring, this was not immediately obvious. The only time that such notions were somewhat visible was in the case of Peter's (not his real name) mother in School 2 when she spoke of the new found enjoyment in sitting down and doing homework with Peter because the new type of homework had facilitated his enjoyment of learning. One of the reasons why parents did not emphasise homework as bonding time should be obvious by now; while a lot of them found it important and considered themselves to have an important role in homework, it was also another job to be done and is therefore, despite all the best of intentions, often something that gets rushed. The Principal in School 2 had a good understanding of this:

"I think it is nice for a parent to sit with a child if they get homework, to sit down and support them, but there is the fine line of that and the sitting down or standing over or whatever."

When homework has to be fitted into busy schedules in between demanding jobs with long hours, after-school activities and several siblings in the same house, the findings in this research suggests that the rushed scenario is often the case. For parents and children to experience that educational bonding time, several things have to be in place, including sufficient, indeed abundant time, clear communication and shared value systems between parents and the school, sufficient support for parents in understanding their role in homework and children's positive predisposition towards

homework, which can only be facilitated through choice and influence. These will be discussed in the recommendations section of the report.

Homework as instilling life skills and habits.

Finally, a significant amount of parents saw the purpose of homework as instilling particular skills, dispositions and habits in children. Parents adapted their involvement in homework according to such beliefs. Some parents believed that homework should be an important part of children's routine in order to develop lifelong work ethic and study skills, in other words self-discipline and a disposition of working hard. Such parents tend to put a lot of emphasis on the value of homework and expect their children to complete it, either with or without parental involvement. Other parents appreciate more innovative or non-conventional approaches to homework because they encourage very different life skills and learning habits, namely children's management of their own work and learning, the management of time, research skills and enquiry into their own academic interests. Such parents evidently feel

positive about project-based homework and/or allowing children choice with regards to homework. An important part of such beliefs around the purposes of homework, for some parents, is the need to prepare for secondary school and adult life, more generally. Parents whovaluedhomeworkasroutineandhabittendedtoalsobelieveinthecommunicativeand monitoring value of homework. Thus, a parent in School 5 observed,

So really I take a view that the homework, I mean this isn't terribly onerous and I think it is a good habit for them to get into and it gets more time consuming as they get older. But I think it is good training for them if they want to do well in exams later on and go on to third level, just do a little bit and get into that habit of learning outside the school environment.

Parents in School 1 especially emphasised that they did not give children input on homework unless they were stuck because they thought this would be counterproductive for children's learning. Such parents valued the process of learning, even if they did not agree with homework being set. Thus, they saw their own role as ensuring homework is completed but not as giving extensive input. Parents in School 1 did not, however, emphasise the role of routine and important study skills. While giving positive reasons as to why they approached homework this way – to encourage children's own learning – the lesser involvement of parents

in homework in School 1 compared to other schools is in line with existing Irish literature, which has found that parents of lower socio-economic status tend to be less involved in their children's homework (Smyth, 2017).

In line with the second aspect of children's more independent management of learning, a parent in School 2 observed,

But I do find sometimes it has been a learning curve for them because they are really eager-to-please kind of children and they have had to struggle to work out what they had to do in a project. They are only just getting what they have to do now. So there was a few things in it that they were getting really stressed because they weren't sure if they had put enough in or if they had done enough of this or enough of that. So it was interesting, it was almost like watching, I have a secondary child as well, and it was almost like watching my secondary school child doing her work because it was a different level of maturity to just filling in sheets. Because now they had to put their own plan in action as opposed to just being given something to do. So that was interesting but they seem to have managed that now. But they are ten, I wonder how the younger classes are getting on, I just wonder because at ten you have a different level of maturity. You can plan your work better and I wonder if the younger years have got to that stage yet. I would be interested.

A key finding is also that some parents and teachers see homework in primary school as important in developing the right study skills and habits in children so they are better able for secondary school. Thus several parents made comments along the lines of this parent's statement:

And they are only up until eleven, they are learning in the classroom what they need to know I think. My husband is a secondary school teacher, his concern with the lack of homework or the change in homework is that they won't be prepared going to secondary school, it is going to be a big land. Because then they are dealing with seven or eight different teachers who are all going to be giving homework. So that was his only concern. Like there were readers and stuff before the homework was taken away and there were readers last year and his teachers said, 'just let him read what he wants to read, I know he is reading. Once he is reading, I know he is reading, I don't care about whether he has read that specific book or not.' Because then they are reading things that they mightn't necessarily be interested in and it is just a bit of a... (Parent, School 2)

Some parents recognised the need for preparation for secondary school but still did not agree with homework, as expressed by the following parent, also in School 2:

I still don't agree with homework at this stage, even after that experience, because she got the hang of it two months later, three months later and she is flying and she is fine. The only thing I will say that I do like about homework is that if a child is struggling with something you can see it at home. So my children are really good at Maths, the twins, but they couldn't get their head around fractions and they came home and they tried to do their Maths sheet and they got stressed and I thought this is unusual, Maths is good for them. And I remember we ended up getting a pizza and cutting it up and we ended up going to find other things around the house and then it just clicked. And not that I want them to do homework but I liked that I was able to recognise that they needed a bit of one-on-one. So if you do get rid of homework completely, which I do agree with because I think they should be out in the fresh air and enjoying their own led work, I think that maybe parents meetings should be twice a year.

Person-related factors.
Role of the teacher.
A particularly interesting aspect of the dynamics around homework is the teacher-as- parent and parent-as-teacher. As parents, homework is often experienced as hassle and stressful, a nuisance in busy family lives. As teachers, homework continues to be valued although it appears that the more difficult teachers/Principals find it to fit in homework in their own family lives, the more they start to value the role of play in children's lives and education.

The role of the teacher in experiences of homework has come up in a number of the schools. A key finding with implications for initial teacher education, the structuring of supports at national level and for policy is that teachers receive very little training and support in setting homework and for this reason vary extensively in the way they set homework.

Thus, the diversity of views on homework is mirrored by a diversity of approaches by teachers to set homework. What appears to influence teachers in how they set homework is their level of experience and whether they have experienced homework in the home from the perspective of a parent of school-going children. Thus, according to several teachers and Principals, younger teachers tend to give more homework than older, more experienced teachers. They do so, it appears, for two main reasons. Firstly, as newly qualified they are keen to impress and have all the best of intentions

behind the homework. Thus, according to the Principal in School 3:

Yeah, you see I would play devil's advocate quite a bit at a meeting, I would throw in the perspective of the parent and I see it, younger teachers are so committed to their craft and their profession in the first couple of years trying to get on top of it and they are putting in a huge amount of hours. They are the first ones here and the last ones to leave in the evening and they get very caught up in their own practice. Oftentimes they just don't understand how challenging it is for the parents to fit in everything. They could be giving too much homework, lookit, teaching is such a personal job, everybody puts their heart and soul into it and then if there is any kind of an issue or any kind of a [unclear 00:26:48] it could be the end of the world."

Secondly, they have not yet built up experience of how homework impacts on families. As already mentioned, what is particularly interesting here is the experience of the teacher-as- parent and parent-as-teacher. Teachers who are also parents and parents who are teachers do tend to value homework in principle and for its role in reinforcing children's learning and involving parents more directly in same, yet they also seem to be attracted by more play-based learning, allowing for more free playtime in the home and reducing the amount of homework. Their first-hand experience of the stress that homework can cause in the home is partly an instigator of the change in attitude but the potential for confusion and lack of proper communication to parents around the particular methods and benefits of specific homework also instigates this attitude change. What is interesting is that the change in values from formal educational tasks to play-based learning represents a paradigm shift in that it approaches children's learning from different perspectives yet what instigates the change is less a change in values but rather pragmatic concerns. To some extent, this shows how easily views on homework can change and can appear as deeply principled and value- based but in reality are pragmatic concerns around healthy and positive home environments.

Role of the parent.
The role of the parent in experiences of homework relates predominantly to their expectations of what and how children should learn, how much of their lives should be taken up by formal education and what parents' own roles are in this educational landscape.

According to school personnel, the role of parents is

paramount to children's academic, as well as informal, learning from homework while in children's views, parents' involvement is crucial to the experience of homework. Parents themselves vary in their opinions. Some parents believe their role is to ensure that their children complete their homework and develop self- disciplinary skills through it, while other parents believe they should help children complete the homework and extend their learning following on from the homework. Thus, some parents simply make sure they are available as children complete their homework, while other parents sit down with children during homework and make sure they complete it correctly and have learned what they are meant to learn from it. Teachers similarly vary in their opinions on the parental role; some teachers want for parents simply to ensure that the routine is set for homework every day at a time when children are alert and able to concentrate and to ensure that the homework is completed independently and without extensive parental input. Other teachers think parents should use the homework to expand on and extend the learning through family activities and further research by the parents athome.

A recurring theme around which these opinions revolve is the distinction between process and product where some parents and teachers emphasise the process of homework – how it is completed and how children learn from it – while others emphasise the endproduct

– the exact and correction completion of tasks and rote learning of material. Where process is the emphasis, there is a much greater need for parental involvement in that parents should be on hand to coach and guide and to build on learning methods rather than simply check or even give the contents. Interestingly, however, while it could be assumed that those who emphasise process over product are also in favour of project homework or more innovative approaches, this is not necessarily the case. Some teachers who favour conventional homework, and a lot of it, such as in School 3, were particularly strong in their views on the necessity for parents to focus on the process over the end product and indeed, as already discussed, suggested a direct link between parents' understanding of the process and children's academic ability. As the opportunities to focus on the process are more abundant in project-based homework it is interesting that one particular teacher was so strong in her views on conventional homework.

Normally a focus on process allows for greater creativity and learning through own interests and strengths, however this particular teacher gives a lot of very prescribed homework and gives detailed directions for parents on how to support children's learning through homework.

Finally, it must be remembered from Section 1 that children desire more time with their parents and often want the help of their parents in homework even when they do not find it difficult. This speaks to some teachers' view that homework should be a time for bonding over children's learning and is recognised by some parents; however the majority of parents seem to be of the opinion that homework is something that should simply be completed and although some parents take a very active role in their children's learning and find it an important opportunity to learn about what their children are learning, very few parents spoke of homework as a bonding opportunity. Interestingly, children spoke of the wish to have homework as bonding time but did not seem to find this a prevalent experience.

In this regard, it is interesting to consider the research by the INTO, which found that 65% of parents said that they did not feel fully equipped to support their children with their homework. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001) found that one of the strongest predictors of parents' involvement with their children's homework was whether parents believed that such involvement would make a positive difference. Parents who report reasonable confidence in their ability to help with homework are more likely to be involved with it (Ames, 1993; Hoover- Dempsey et al., 1992), and those who help their children with their homework are more likely to believe that their help has a positive influence on their child's outcomes (Stevenson, Chen and Uttal, 1990).

According to Patall, Cooper and Robinson (2008), training parents to be involved in their child's homework results in higher rates of homework completion, fewer homework problems and possibly improved academic performance among elementary school children. Training is perhaps not the most appropriate term and could beneficially be replaced by empowerment models of engagement (Kim and Bryan, 2017).

Role of the child.
The most important factor in homework experiences is of course the children themselves. One key factor is children's academic abilities. Thus, the children who love homework tend to be those who find it easy and get through it quickly while those who do not like it tend to struggle and find it difficult, or struggle to concentrate. Children's particular learning dispositions and styles are thus a crucial aspect of homework experiences. Another point mentioned by many parents is children's personality and its influence on their approach to homework. Thus, for children who are very methodical, hard-working and proactive, or just very disciplined, homework appears as very stress-free and requiring

very littleinput from parents.

Other children, on the other hand, need much more encouragement and reminding to complete their homework and to keep them focused.

The attitude to homework of my two children is very different. One of them was a real doer and the bag was open the minute he got home and he would get it done and get it over with and then enjoy the rest of his day. And the other one was more of a procrastinator. One memorable afternoon he lay across his chair with his head on his school bag rather than take the books out and start the homework. (Parent, School 5)

No, she is brilliant in school but the minute she comes home she just switches off and doesn't want to know nothing about school, nothing about homework. There is murder between me and her, there is fighting every single day over homework. The other girl just does her homework, not a bother out of her, like, 'are you all right?' 'Yeah, grand ma.' But there are killings with me and D. So, I don't think there should be such things as homework. (Parent, School1)

This parent's comments were reflected in many parents' discussions on homework. Strikingly, children's individual learning styles and dispositions are not greatly factored into considerations around homework. Of course, this may be factored in where differentiation of homework is really tailored to each individual child's particular difficulty but often differentiation seems to be either a time limit set on homework or certain aspects of homework reduced or removed, while others may be increased. Children's individual learning dispositions are however not taken into account when deciding on which types of homework to set. This leads onto the next, perhaps most important theme, namely that of children's views, their role in consultation and partnerships and whether and how children areoffered choice in and influence on their own homework.

Children's views.

A most striking observation across the schools is that there appears to be very little concern with children's opinions. Thus, despite parents and teachers discussing homework as experienced as stressful by some children, no parents, teachers or Principals spoke of consulting children on their views on homework. The only evidence of children having influence is in School 2 where children can write to the Principal each June asking to have a month free of homework. The lack of children's voice is particularly striking as a key theme that emerged across the schools and in both phases of data collection is the benefit and importance of children having choice for their enjoyment of homework. Choice thus seems understood in a very narrow sense of providing children 'thin agency', or in other words a narrow selection of options predetermined by teachers. Thus children may be able to choose when they do their homework, or which book to read, but 'choice' does not extend to giving children a genuine voice in or influence on their homework. Due to a more subtle finding that partnership must be employed to appropriately differentiate homework or target it at children's preferred learning styles, this complete lack of recognition of children as important to such partnerships is worrying and contradicts another key finding, namely that homework plays an important role in teaching children to take responsibility for their ownlearning.

The findings of the present research are interesting to relate to Lynch's (2016) research on homework. Lynch (2016) found that 53% of children worry about completing their homework at least some of the time, 83% need help from parents, and while 'only' 15% of Junior Infants found it hard, this figure increases to 34% in 5th and 6th class. 74% enjoyed it in Junior Infants but only 51% did so in fifth and sixth class. She also found that 66% believe it contributes to their learning. While the present study did not investigate prevalence of views quantitatively, it seems to reflect relatively accurately on this percentage breakdown, except perhaps for the high percentage of Junior Infants children who like it. In no focus group with children was there such a high percentage of children who genuinely liked homework. Words used included 'useless' and 'serious' faces, boring, annoying work, pressure, stressful and a 'waste of time'. In most focus groups only around half of children enjoyed homework and in some focus groups much fewer than half. In comparison to the many negative words used in relation to homework, very few positive ones were used. What is particularly important to make explicit here is that in the schools where parents were the most positive about homework, the children were the least positive (although not advocating to get rid of it), while in the schools where homework caused the greatest stress for parents, this was not necessarily reflected in children's opinions, with the only exception being School 1 where no one but the teachers seemed to be in favour of homework. The influence of social desirability in children's and adults' answers may be a factor herein but is beyond the scope of this report to sufficiently evaluate. The most interesting comparison however is where children 'need' help from their parents. Not a lot of children mentioned the need for help, however a large majority of children liked to get

help from their parents regardless of whether they needed it or not. This reflects children's concerns that they do not feel they have sufficient time with their parents. What is also interesting to reflect on is that fathers only seemed to have an equal role in their children's education to that of mothers in School 5. For all other schools, children's mothers were asked for help before their fathers, even where fathers may be involved in dropping and collecting children to and fromschool.

Choice.

Children having a choice in homework is a key finding of the second part of this research, however it also came up in Part 1. Choice is offered in relation to homework in a couple of different ways across the schools. School 1 is the only school not to mention choice in Part 1 of the research. In School 2, children have a number of choices and some parents spoke at length about the importance of choice. In School 3, some teachers offer choice as to when to complete set homework. In School 4, the choice is both the parents' and the child's depending on the child's ability to express opinions in this regard. In School 5, children spoke of the importance of choice and it must be assumed that the current practice of some project – based homework in the older classes offers choice.

In School 2, children have the option to entirely opt out of homework (very few children took up this option), they are offered considerable choice with regards to the projects, what to focus on and include, and there also seems to be some choice as to whether they also want traditional homework.

Thus the examples of Peter and Aisling were given in relation to opting out of homework and the benefits of project-based homework in School 2. What really helped Peter and Aisling in School 2 to rediscover a love of learning and complete homework without stress or difficulty was the provision of choice in homework. Thus, Aisling's mother described:

Yeah, she is not as stressed around it. If she can pick a topic she is really interested in, if it is a topic they are told you have to do this she will go and look and everything else but she probably won't give it as much as if it was something she was really interested in. And you can see the difference. There was a project she did on Greece and then she did one on the Aztecs and they were kind of half-hearted and then she did one on David Attenborough and she did a really good project on that because she was really interested and she found out loads of stuff and she handwrote it all. Where-

as the other ones she was doing a bit on Mindcraft, an Aztec building on Mindcraft, and it was all over the place. She had great ideas but it was all procrastination rather than sitting down and doing it, it was more problematic, doing it the day before it was in... they don't really change, honestly, their personalities, what they are now... So if they spend forever doing their homework, - that is what they are going to be like. I have two of them go through all this, they are the same from babies, they will sleep the same as they did when they were babies, it doesn't change.

When both Peter and Aisling were offered choice in relation to their homework they very quickly overcame their aversion to school and school work at home and became much more motivated to study and learn outside the school context. That is a phenomenal change from simply being offered choice.

The Principal in School 3 also commented on the benefits of choice although she later went on to disagree with such an approach (as discussed in the case study earlier). Thus, the Principal observed:

Yeah, I know some teachers here give it all out for the week on the Monday and then the kids have a choice, do they want to get stuff done on the Monday and Tuesday evening and then have less to do over the course of the week. And they love that, they love having those kind of options. Anything that allows people a bit more ownership or freedom, particularly around written tasks

Some parents also struggled in giving ownership to children. Thus, the following parent confided:

And we would absolutely be involved in his homework and that but I think this new project work that they have taken on this year we are kind of distracted a bit. But I think the policy behind it was to give the kids ownership of their own project, which is really difficult for us because we see things that we want to... But we let him at it and if he has any questions we will obviously help him out but we try to...

Other parents felt much more positive about allowing children choice, primarily the parents who also valued play over homework. Thus a parent from School 2 observed,

"I am similar but a little bit different. I try not to educate them at home. I think my job at home is to listen to them and play with them and they can learn themselves through their own led kind of learning. So I wouldn't do Maths at home or

English at home or Science at home except when you are doing it as part of an activity. I loved the project because it is child-led and I am big into child-led so I loved the way they picked a topic and it meant something to them and it was important."

As discussed earlier, while recognising the benefits of choice, the Principal believed that in relation to certain types of homework, children should not have choice, namely in relation to tables, nightly reading and sight words, which she sees as core to children's academic achievements. These aspects of homework, with the exception perhaps of reading, are however also the ones where children and parents alike particularly recognize the need for choice as it is often the repetition and 'boredom' of such repetition that frustrates children.

Choice seems to better address some of the immense difficulties experienced in some children's homework and actually seems to increase children's willingness to learn and study, thus alleviating fears that choice would lead to the avoidance of difficult content and thus to reduced learning. Choice, rather, seems to motivate children to learn in ways that simply suit them better, which according to several parents at least empowers them to approach learning with more dedication and confidence. As some teachers in particular mentioned homework as a means to building children's confidence in learning, offering choice seems particularly appropriate. Moreover, as many teachers emphasise homework as bonding time and parents as communication around children's learning, giving children choice would reduce the stress that prevents such bonding and effective communication. Indeed by giving them choice, parents may improve the role of homework in such communication as the provision of choice can facilitate a process of negotiation or shared thinking around a topic or type of homework that invites creative parental involvement with more scope for the 'extension of learning' that some teachers want homework to facilitate.

Conclusion.
Colonisation of the home.
Edwards and Warrin (1999) write of the colonisation by formal education of the home. Peter Gray (2015) sees this as a key factor in the decline in children's play, in the opportunities children are provided for free, unsupervised play time, which he links through compelling research evidence, to an increase in children and young people's poor mental health. Similarly, Kralovec and Buell (2000) write of the strain on

family life sometimes caused by homework. The research findings presented in the five case studies give testimony to such views on homework and its role in 'colonising' family life. Homework appears in many cases to constitute a significant stress factor in parents' lives and is felt by many children to deprive them of much loved opportunities to play with their friends. This speaks further to observations in existing research literature that "children can be left with no time to explore their own interests or to be involved in undirected activities that may help them to discover lifetime interests" (Marzano and Pickering, 2007, as cited in Jackson and Harbison 2014).

At the core of the underlying tension in relation to the 'colonisation of the home' seems to be somewhat differing views of how homework should happen within the home. Thus, a number of teachers across the case study schools held perhaps somewhat idealistic views that homework is an important bonding time between parents and children. While some parents may agree with this view of homework and may be able to facilitate it, the majority of parents regardless of whether they recognise the benefit of homework, see it as interfering with family time.

Children and parents alike agree that there should be less homework to allow for more free play time for children. This is supported by Irish and international research. Harris, Doyle and Green, (2011) state that children in the 9-year old cohort in the GUI study suggested that by reducing the amount of homework in school this would contribute to improving their quality oflife.

The directly contradictory views on the requirements for parental involvement in the newly introduced project-based homework in School 2 and the possibility of monitoring children's learning in this new homework points to a very significant finding when it comes to homework; opinions and experiences of homework are incredibly diverse and depend on a combination of parental values and personalities as well as children's particular learning styles, temperaments and personality. This, perhaps, is one of the most important findings of this research. While existing research questions the value of differentiated homework, due to its inefficacy and the increased workload for the teacher, the findings from this research suggests that homework needs to suit the different learning styles of children and need to fit with parental values and household dynamics. Differentiated homework as it currently exists in most schools does not appear to achieve this. One possible solution to this appears to be offering children choice not only with regards to the timing of homework but with regards to the methods of and approach to homework. Thus, project homework suits

some children's learning dispositions and styles, while more traditional homework suits other children. These findings around differentiation and choice are strengthened by the research for the final part of this project, when new homework was introduced to the case study schools. If differentiated homework proves inefficient, this research suggests that children benefit from having choice and that parents need to be supported appropriately in order to facilitate and strengthen their children's learning through a variety of different methods.

Innovative approaches and successful initiatives.

School 2 is in the process of experimenting with homework and are trialling a variety of new approaches including project-based homework, 'Mindful Mondays' and a new type of Irish homework available on www.irishhomework.ie. When these initiatives are introduced, it happens to some extent in consultation with parents and children and are often supported with workshops. Opinions as to the efficacy and appropriateness of such initiatives vary, and are indeed divided. Project homework seems appropriate and effective when done occasionally and in combination with other types of homework. Project-based homework seems particularly suited to children who struggle with conventional homework and may therefore offer a possible alternative to homework differentiation, which appears as ineffective and unable to reduce the stress of homework. With regards to workshops provided for parents to offer support, these were well received and found to be beneficial but are difficult to access for working parents, suggesting that such workshops must be followed up with online resources and may need to be repeated in evening workshops for working parents.

With regards to the other initiatives of Mindful Mondays and the new Irish homework given in some classes much less discussion emerged on these in interviews and focus groups. No opinions were offered on the Irish homework, other than stating that it is done. With regard to Mindful Mondays, little opinion was offered although the Principal offered his view without further elaboration, however:

"We kind of have a thing we don't do traditional homework on a Monday, we do this mindful Monday thing. I don't think that is going to last. I am not convinced it is working very well."

School 2 is progressive in its determination to consult with parents and to experiment with innovative approaches to homework. A number of challenges are experienced in this process. Firstly, when parents are extensively consulted it appears that they also expect the school to comply with their opinions and implement any change they suggest. Thus parents expressed negative sentiments when nothing had changed with regards to homework only a few weeks after they had expressed their opinion. Rather than recognising the process of democratic decision-making processes, some parents appeared to expect that consultation meant compliance with parental opinions. Secondly, with a number of initiatives ongoing simultaneously it is hard to assess the efficacy of any one of them and the multitude of activities and projects engaged with may also lead to confusion or inability to keep up with what is going on. Thus, some parents had not fully understood the Principal's message of combining projects with conventional homework or that either type of homework could be engaged with to the extent desired by the child and family. Consequently, while the school works incredibly hard to communicate effectively with parents, there may simply be too much going on or parents may have certain expectations that affect their ability to take on messages from the school.

Innovative approaches and successful strategies

According to the School 3's Principal, the introductory workshop is always very well attended and parents enjoy it and give very positive feedback on it. Due to a changeover of staff in fifth and sixth class, the academic year this research was conducted, the school also introduced a workshop for these classes, also in part to give the parents an opportunity to get to meet the new teachers. Again according to the Principal, the feedback from that meeting was that the parents had little idea of what their children were actually learning in the 5th and 6th class curriculum and therefore appreciated the workshop. What surprised the school personnel was that the parents were more interested in the actual content of the curriculum and how the school was teaching it, as opposed to just having a meeting to talk about, or just to meet the teachers. The school is therefore now planning to introduce these workshops across all the classes. According to the Principal, the way teachers teach within the classroom affects the type of homework they set, at least in some curricula areas.

Yes we have done a good bit of work around structuring homework, absolutely, but that is not to say there is not still loads to do. I definitely think we could do more with Maths. Maths is an area where we have a development plan for

Maths and we are trying to streamline the approach to the teaching of Maths, which is quite difficult to do because every teacher still approaches the teaching of Maths in a way that is most familiar to them. And I see different approaches all the time in different classrooms. We have some teachers who got trained in the PDST, the manual, PDST developed these amazing manuals for Maths and it is based on the whole idea that you move from a concrete level up to a pictorial level, you teach kids how to represent their work pictorially. And then eventually you move to an abstract level of Maths. I would notice that the homework that those teachers set is very, very manageable for children because they have to present their work, use diagrams, by the end of it they would have less work to do but at the end of it they can explain what they did and why they did it, that kind of way. As opposed to other kids getting reams of sums just to do at home and they have done twenty abstract sums but couldn't really explain why they did them or what they were doing.

Therefore improving in one area (teaching methods) may lead to improvements in the other (homework).

Question 4: How do schools support, learn from and build on the home learning environment?

All of the schools in the study approached supporting and building on the Home Learning Environment (HLE) in very different ways, with only Schools 1, 2 and 4 focusing specifically on the various types of learning happening within the home. Schools 3 and 5 do support the home learning environment but strictly in terms of supporting parents to support the work being done in school. In both of these cases, the flow of information and learning is in one direction only, from school to home and mostly relates to the completion of homework and new approaches to teaching things such as Maths.

All of the schools provide either workshops or support materials to help parents support their children's learning at home. The support materials tended to be around the curriculum and academic issues. This was particularly the case for younger classes, where schools often provided support around reading with children or helping them to gain numeracy skills.

Workshops were provided across a number of areas in the five schools. These included parenting courses, Aistear[4] workshops, workshops outlining the school approach to

spelling, handwriting etc. In the case of the School 4 (the special educational school), more specialised courses in communication and behaviour management were provided for parents, in order to ensure that the same methods were in use both at home and in school.

As there is some overlap between this question and previous questions already addressed, some material will only be discussed briefly and reference will be made back to the relevant sections. For that same reason, the answer presented here is somewhat shorter than the previous three questions. More focus will be put on the two schools that make an explicit attempt at building on the home learning environment.

[4] Aistear is the National Curriculum Framework for early childhood education (NCCA, 2009) and is used n a variety of ways in many primary schools

School 1 – Supporting parents self-efficacy.

School 1, it must be remembered, is a DEIS Band 1 school and as such benefits from the services of a HSCL coordinator, which means that the school can assist parents directly in the HLE. The school's HSCL coordinator is very clear that part of her role involves supporting parents in their role as the primary educators of the child, stating:

My job as home school liaison I think is to promote the parents' belief in their own ability to be the main educators of their children because I think working in a DEIS school, sometimes you can come across feelings from teachers, children turning up without their homework done every day, children missing lots of time, that maybe those parents don't care. But I don't believe that at all.

Part of the HSCL co-ordinator's role, appears to be combating the potential bias predominantly middle-class teachers can show towards marginalised groups (Reay, 1998; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). As Robinson and Harris (2014) contend teachers often have a deficit view of poor families, viewing them as disinterested in their children's education. It is therefore, unsurprising that, as identified in Question 1, parents in School 1 show significantly lower self-efficacy beliefs than parents in the other schools. The school leadership is aware of this and attempts to improve parents' self-efficacy in a number of ways, including home visits, mediating information about children's learning for parents with liter-

acy difficulties, lending families school resources to be used at home and provision of workshops, courses and materials to help parents develop skills and understanding necessary to support their children's learning at home, all of which will be discussed here. As suggested in Question 3, the school also sets 'teddy bear homework' in order to put more emphasis on children's learning within the home environment in ways that are led by the child's and family's interests.

Home visits.

One of the tasks carried out by the HSCL Coordinator is to engage in home visits to all new families to provide support in the HLE. Some families will only receive a visit when their child enters Junior Infants but others will receive repeated home visits from the HSCL Coordinator.

I try to visit all the junior infant parents if at all possible and I suppose those parents who are already engaged, they definitely are reading to their children, they are playing with them and they are doing all those extra activities that are crucial to children's attainment and education.

The parents who receive repeated visit are those who require additional support in assisting their child with his/her learning. Parents receiving home visits are encouraged by the school to return the visit and see what their child is doing in school or how the school teaches various subjects. The Principal highlighted the importance of this,

"my position and the teachers, and HSCL Coordinator in particular because of her position in the school, we all try as much as possible to say to parents, come on in, we will show you what we are doing."

This approach sees the school taking responsibility for being proactive in building relationships with working class parents (Hornby and Lafele, 2011).

Mediating information about children's learning for parents with literacy difficulties.

The school principal highlighted that in terms of promoting the parents self-efficacy and the children's learning in the HLE, the school needed to be cognisant of and active in compensating for literacy difficulties amongst the parents. This is particularly the case when sending home tip sheets or notes, as the parents will often claim they did not receive them as a way of covering up the fact that they could not read them. As the Principal points out, *"we constantly get phone calls after we send out a note, Johnny got*

a note, what time is it at? Whereas they can't actually read the note." The school overcomes this difficulty by phoning parents, in order to be sure that they are receiving the information they need about their child. As the Principal is aware though, this requires a great deal of openness on behalf of the parent.

I was talking about literacy issues with the parents and things like that, some parents are great at covering that up and we really find if parents open up and just say it to you it actually is great, it benefits everybody. Because then we will phone them and say this is happening rather than sending out a note (Principal, School 1).

This practice also extends to printed resource materials which might be distributed to families. Aware of the possible literacy difficulties and the level of education of some of the parents, the school will adapt material to suit its own context. The Principal notes, "So, usually what we do is we adapt things that are on the websites ...we make them bullet points and very clear and very short." She is also very clear that the lexicon used in such support/resource materials needs to be simplified.

And I suppose the type of language as well, to use language that people can understand. Not to be going around about too much about the oral language, the jargon, because people sometimes don't understand it. So, I suppose to use the simple language (Principal,School1).

Lending families school resources to be used at home.

The staff at School 1 were very aware of the challenges experienced by many of their marginalised families and how this might hamper them from fully engaging in learning at home. The school's way of supporting this learning at home is to allow parents to borrow various school resources for a set period of time. This benefits the children in that they are engaging with education at home and the parents as it allows them to check in with the child's learning in a structured manner.

Again it would be mainly in the infant sector but we would lend out games and things to families so if they think a child has an issue in a particular area maybe colours or numbers or whatever they will lend a game to the parent and say, 'so why don't you take that home, do it with them at home for a couple of weeks or a week and bring it back.' So, we try and foster that (Principal, School 1).

This also works to build a strong community between the parents, children, and the school, working together to support learning. Through lending resources to children's families, trust is shown in parents, which can also help to improve their self-efficacy beliefs. In a sense, the teddy bear homework set in the infant classes serves a similar purpose even if that is not the intention behind this homework. This speaks to the findings discussed in Question 2 with regards to the importance of relationships to encourage and ground parental involvement in children's education and learning. Through such relationships, the school can also better explore and learn from children's home learning environments.

Provision of workshops, classes, courses and support material to help parents develop skills and understanding necessary to support their children's learning at home.

School 1 offers a range of workshops, courses and support material to parents. These range from a parenting course to teacher-designed tip sheets for junior infant parents. The parenting course posed an interesting dilemma for the school principal, in terms of the language used to describe it.

It is a positive parenting course. Now we don't call it a parenting course because as soon as you mention parenting course they don't want to do it, they think you are implying there is something wrong with the way they are raising their children so we call them discussion groups and there are various themes in it for building resilience in your children, trouble with going to bed. It is very good, but we have to kind of get them around to it (Principal, School1).

These courses can prove to be very positive in terms of the HLE, as parents may be validated in terms of their own parenting abilities or may learn how to deal with issues they are experiencing with their child. Overall, they can only have a good effect on parent self- efficacy. The Principal is aware though that, *"But again maybe the ones who (we) want to get don't show up for things like that."*

The school also provides support for the HLE by offering guidance to parents during the initial intake meeting for Junior Infants. The Principal outlines the guidance given,

I know in the Junior Infant meetings, when the teachers have that class meeting, they would give the parents tips like learning number and learning colours and I suppose colouring in and jigsaws to get their fine motor skills going. So, there are all those little tips they would give to parents.

And when you are out in the supermarket ask the child to get you three bananas or what colour is this or can you read what does that say there. So, using it in your environment, a lot of that, and that would be around the infant stuff.

This is supported by further material given out by the HSCL Coordinator during her home visits, "I like to put little tip sheets of things in for Junior Infants, a story book and colouring books and whatever so maybe nice tip sheets for parents."

Overall, as already discussed at length in previous questions, School 1 has a creative and flexible response to supporting, learning from and building on the HLE that children experience. One thing to note, however, is that while the school leadership placed great emphasis on the children's HLEs and put effort into building on this within the school, teachers showed more deficit thinking in their understanding of children's HLEs, as discussed in Question 1, and further struggled to see the educational benefit of approaches such as the teddy bear homework.

Overall, however, the school went to great lengths to build on children's HLE and ensure greater connection between the two distinct learning environments children daily transition between.

School 2 – The importance of relationships.

Because of School 2's identity as an Educate Together school, it is because of this ethos very open to parental input in the school and also enjoys a level of openness from parents that may be greater than that enjoyed by other schools. It was noteworthy that the majority of the parents interviewed described the school as 'open' or 'lacking barrier'. The Principal when questioned about how the school supports parents and the HLE highlighted the role of relationships, *"ultimately, again, sorry I keep coming back to relationships but that is what it is for me."*

This attitude is apparent in some of the ways in which the school supports children's learning in the HLE. School 2 strongly encourages parental consultation and feedback on new initiatives and especially seeks to create policy and routines around homework that respect family dynamics and the particularities of children's HLEs.

Respecting the home learning environment through new approaches to homework.

As discussed in Question 3, School 2 recently underwent a long consultation period to overhaul their approach to homework, which at the time consisted primarily of conventional types of homework. Parents' and children's voices were sought in the consultative phase, which led to new approaches to homework, including replacing the majority of conventional homework with project based and digitally based homework. The school also implemented a policy of allowing families to opt their children out of homework in order to focus on other activities at home. This is a policy, which allows parents and children a degree of freedom to engage in extracurricular activities without the spectre of homework looming every evening.

For some families, the project-based homework has added to their ability to spend quality family time together in evenings and engage in valuable home learning activities, and indeed in some instances as evidenced in Question 3, strengthened children's home learning environments by allowing more space for learning based on children's interests and the development of a greater variety of skills and learning opportunities. The Principal outlines the importance of freeing up time for such learning opportunities.

Taking time to spend a bit of time together, for me, going out in the garden, if they have one, even sitting down at dinner together. For me they are big learning opportunities. Having a chat. They are not big things, for me they are just things where you are speaking to each other and having the closeness to each other. I think they are massive learning opportunities because I think schools, while we are getting better at that sort of stuff, ultimately we also have to do the academic end of things. (Principal, School2)

Opening the school up for workshops and joint activities.

The school holds regular events, which encourage parents and the wider school community to come into the school, either to share their home culture or to learn about how to support the learning happening in school when the children come home. Amongst the events mentioned by the teachers in the focus group were multi-cultural days, which are held several times a year and allow parents and children to share aspects of their home culture and home learning environments. The teachers in the focus group highlighted the pride this brings about in the families: *"Throughout the year we have multicultural days, so we have a day where the children come in and the parents bring in, and they are really*

proud to do that." Such activities go a long way towards combating the 'clash of cultures' parents often experience when engaging with school systems (O'Toole,2016).

The school has also supported parents through workshops, which help them to understand what is going on in school. As the Principal wisely pointed out, a major issue for parents can be the difference between the education they received themselves and that which their children are receiving.

Where needs be there is always the clichéd situations about how do you teach subtraction nowadays and stuff like that. We provide workshops for those areas. Junior Infant teachers always do a couple of workshops at the start of the year around this is what homework looks like in Junior Infants so this is what you are getting, this is the folder, this is what is going to be in it, this is what you do... [...] It is not like when you were in school kind of thing. So in a way it is nearly convincing kind of thing but it is supportive. This is why we do what we do nowadays, talking about Aistear, talking about all that kind of stuff. When your child comes home and you say, 'what did you do today?' 'I played.' That is good." (Principal, School 2)

In School 2, parents' voices are encouraged and listened to, and children's agency encouraged more so than the other schools and extensive use is made of parents' expertise by bringing them into the school to contribute to the classroom and children's formal education within the school walls. Further, as discussed in Question 1, School 2 experiences a greater fluidity between the home and the school than the other schools, which seems to effect more holistic learning for children. By virtue of such, the school necessarily learns from and builds on children's HLEs in a rather unique manner compared to the other schools, which is partly facilitated by its identity as an Educate Together school and partly by the particular inclinations of the school leadership and the types of parents drawn to the school.

School 3 - A traditional approach.

School 3 has the most traditional approach to supporting the home learning environment. The school largely steers clear of making suggestions about the HLE. The school is located in an affluent area where the levels of parental education are high and where extra support is often paid for privately by parents. The school does take a role in organising events, which help parents to better understand the curriculum and what and how their children should be learning.

The school newsletter is distributed weekly and often has tip sheets and other support material such as those created by NPC and NCCA distributed with it.

Similar to School 1 but for very different reasons, school leadership and the teachers take a somewhat different approach to parents' role in children's learning and thus in their perception of HLEs and the connection between such and the formal school setting. Teachers in School 3 expressed the view that they consider parents to be focused on the wrong areas of learning within the HLE and in their engagement in the school. Thus the teachers would like to see parents doing more to help their children develop empathy and encouraging more physical activity and for parents themselves to behave more appropriately in relation to the school. Such views suggest, like some teachers in School 1, a somewhat deficit approach to parents' educational role in their children's lives. As the only school to really value the benefit of homework and its continued importance in children's lives, School 3's work to build on or learn from children's HLEs revolve primarily around appropriately structuring homework and homework supports, and allowing for a more flexible approach to homework for older students.

Tip sheets and workshops to help parents support their children's' learning at home.

When asked about any support material or workshops they had received from the school, the parents in the focus group mentioned that they had received support around homework in both Junior and Senior Infants. This is in line with what Epstein (2009) calls Type 4 parental involvement - learning at home. The focus on supporting academic learning at home, is very much the traditional form of parental involvement espoused by many Irish schools. In Senior Infants this took the form of a 'homework night' where the parents where provided with information on the various schemes in use by the school and the approach taken to homework, reading, handwriting etc. This is supported by the Principal,

we do a meeting with the Junior and Senior Infant parents, we do a workshop every September/October, we do a workshop in the evening time around understanding the homework and why we give it and all that sort of stuff.

As previously mentioned, the Principal also noted that in this school year the school has introduced a similar meeting for the parents of children in 5th and 6th class, to assist them with understanding the content of the curriculum and the way in which things are taught in the school.

The feedback from that meeting was that the parents had actually no notion of what the kids were actually learning in 5th and 6th class curriculum. We went through the functional writing scheme that we do and the comprehension, building bridges, and the ways in which we try to teach them practical skills that they will be able to transfer over to 2nd level. And the feedback from that meeting was really positive. (Principal, School 3)

Flexible approach to homework for older students.

While the school policy very firmly requires homework to be given in every class, the staff have some flexibility in the way in which they give homework. Some of the teachers support the children's ability to take part in extra-curricular activities and other learning opportunities by giving the week's homework on Monday and allowing the children the flexibility to do it when they like.

I know some teachers here give it all out for the week on the Monday and then the kids have a choice, do they want to get stuff done on the Monday and Tuesday evening and then have less to do over the course of the week. And they love that, they love having those kind of options. Anything that allows people a bit more ownership or freedom, particularly around written tasks (Principal, School 3).

Much as in School 2, for many families this has added to their ability to spend quality family time together in evenings and engage in valuable home learning activities.

School 4 – Blurring the lines between school work and home work.

School 4 is a special educational school and as such has a greater level of interaction with families on a more regular basis then most schools do. As discussed at length already, partnerships between the school and home are crucial to children's care and learning, and the emphasis placed on nurturing pedagogy (Hayes, 2004) in the school necessarily encourages the school to build on and learn from the children's HLEs. Throughout the data, communication and the need for strong links between home and school were repeatedly mentioned by all stakeholders and approaches such as a daily book, the use of a variety of apps, Individual Education Plan meetings, and networking opportunities for parents to share tips and ideas were prevalent and considered very successful. This focus on real two –way communication seems to keep at bay any 'conflict between parents and teachers' (Seligman, 2000).

Home/School Communication.

Due to the nature of the needs of many of the children in the school, all of the adults involved were very clear on the need for daily communication between home and school and what happens in one environment can have a direct implication for how things play out in the other. As one of the teachers noted in her interview,

I have kids who can't talk for themselves so I need to able to get in touch with parents and they need to be telling me what is happening at home. It can affect behaviours in school, it can affect all of that, so if anything changes at home we need to know about it.

Another teacher supported this notion but also mentioned the importance of information also coming in the opposite direction:

So you need to have that open dialogue with parents, that you can transfer something from here to home so that if their needs are being met here in one way, then they might get more frustrated at home, they might have more behaviours at home. Or vice versa, parents have told me this is working at home and then we might try and transfer it into the class.

As mentioned, the school uses a system of home/school communication books to support this process of ensuring that everyone is up to speed with things, which may be impacting on the child. The teachers stressed the usefulness of this on a number of levels:

The communication book is the daily thing, it is every single day. Anything significant, it is like a little news story for their parents, it is something that they can talk to their child about. They have missed half their day. Oh this is what you did, this is wonderful. It is something for them to even talk to their child, have that interaction and opening a dialogue for them to have something to talk to their child about. (Teacher 1, School 4)

During the previous school year, the school had also introduced an app for communication purposes. Although none of the parents interviewed spoke about the app, on one of our visits to the school, the members of the research team witnessed it in use. Using the app the mother of one of the children in class was able to take part in a class literacy activity, by selecting and reading a picture book. She was at her desk in her office at the time and was interacting with the children via a two-way video link. Her child was clearly excited to have Mum reading to the class. The staff in the classroom, supported the activity by dramatizing some of the story and providing sensory input where relevant. The teachers interviewed all mentioned the app and it use in the school, with Teacher 2 saying:

And then we set up an app, X, I am sure the other teachers have talked about it, but that really helped my parents so they were commenting on pictures, they were really delighted with it. They were commenting on videos and I was able to comment back and I felt like they opened up more to me so then when I did go into multidisciplinary big team meetings with them they felt they had that connection with me that we all had the best interest for their child.

The IEP process.

As a special school, school 4 engages in the IEP process for all of its pupils and this leads to the school having a valuable opportunity to support the Home Learning Environment by focusing some of the work being done in school on improving the pupils life skills. This focus can enable the children to engage on a more meaningful level with activities and events in the home. The school principal mentioned that IEPs are an important link between the two learning environments.

We would very often develop IEPs where school and home would be working on the same things. We do always ask parents what would you really like your child to learn. It can be things like learn to be toilet trained, learning to sign their name, learn to cook.

Teacher 3 pointed out that the IEP process is crucial for highlighting to both parents and staff the child's strengths and weaknesses in the other learning environment. Providing very important information from which further goals can be set and learning can be built upon.

Absolutely, that is what the IEP is the start, we always send home, before we do our IEPs we send home our perceived strengths/needs for the students so we send those home in advance of the meeting. We ask the parent to add anything to it, but they are also brilliant at cleaning their teeth or helping around the house. So they have a chance to do that. And at the meeting we also always try and involve the parents in the plans that we are setting, in the goals that we are setting.

The interlinked nature of the home and school learning environments and the importance of same for all children

is highlighted by the practices of School 4. The school is so committed to this philosophy that they have in the past utilised the school bus to collect parents who cannot drive and bring them to the school for meetings at the beginning of the school year. The Principal highlighted that this also helped to bring the parental community together:

And we sent the school bus and the school bus driver out to collect parents who didn't drive, and that went down really well. And we have never had to do it again because parents started to give each other lifts when they realised that was an issue.

Supporting parents in communicating with their non-verbal children.

A large proportion of the pupil cohort in this school are non or pre-verbal, as a result there are multiple different communication methods in use. Among the more common communication systems in use are Lámh and PECS as well as assistive technology. Both systems require training for use and the school is very engaged in offering this training and guidance to parents. It is seen as key in order for them to communicate effectively with their children at home. Several of the parents interviewed noted that the school was active in supporting them in communicating with their children and that they in turn were practising at home with the children and this was enhancing the home learning environment.

He has this iPad app now […] where he is communicating through, so every night I sit down with him and we will talk about what we have done in the day so he makes sentences using the app. So he has to read it, he knows the symbols, but also he is learning the words as he goes and he can navigate through that really very well. (Parent, School3)

Parents and teachers were in agreement that the staff were very open in sharing their expertise in these methods with families. Parent 4 compliment her child's teacher, "She is giving, the teacher in the classroom, stuff to do with him and I have PECs at home and I learn Lámh and I use that at home with him." Teacher 1 felt that the school provided workshops and support on communication as it was part of the schools remit as a special school. Because of the nature of the pupils the teachers work with they cannot focus on the academics and the school environment in isolation.

Well we have all our communication throughout the school that I have mentioned, Seesaw, communication

books. *We often run workshops for Lámh training, we have run workshops on intensive interaction. We have done PECS workshops, we have done all of these things, especially communication things or behaviour things that will help parents at home. An awful lot of parents will trust us with a lot of things and will come to us if they have a fear or this is happening, they know we are here and they know we are open to helping them out* (Teacher 1, School4).

School 5 – Relationships in the bilingual context.

School 5 is the only Gaelscoil in the study and thus has some unique issues in supporting the home learning environment. The area in which the school is located is not a Gaeltacht area. However, the school is long established and many of the children have one or both parents who are past pupils. So there is a mix of home language amongst the pupils, with many of the children speaking Irish at home as well as in school. The school however, is conscious of the need to provide support for those families for whom Irish is not the language of the home.

Supporting parents with the bilingual aspect of their child's education.

In order to ensure that all parents are kept informed about their children's learning and how they might support it, the school sends all correspondence out in a bilingual format, either a translation from Irish is provided or the notes are half in Irish and half in English. As the teachers in the focus group point out, "notes sent home are bilingual." The teachers also noted that resources are provided on the school website to support non-Irish speaking parents and that attention is drawn to these from an early stage.

But we will tell them, don´t we, that in Junior & Senior Infants, that the spelling books are available on the website, say, for parents who don´t have Irish. It is mentioned, for sure, at the meeting for the new parents that they can, because at that age you are relying on the parent to do the homework with them, to do the reading with them, and if they don´t speak Irish… (Teacher, School 5)

The school are also conscious to that although they prefer to use Irish as the main language of communication in school, if a parent does not have Irish or cannot understand a conversation with a staff member, they will switch to English, which ensures that the parents are kept informed. The teachers noted in the focus group that they generally know

if a parent has Irish or not but if it's an unfamiliar parent they would be flexible:

And if you don´t know the parent, you ask would you like me to do this in Irish or in English? You know, maybe you would start in Irish but it would be clear when the parent would say: ´I don´t understand. Would you mind if I speak English? And then we switch to English. So whatever the parent is comfortable with (Teacher, School5).

Workshops / support materials.

Just as in the majority of the other schools in the study, School 5, provides workshops to familiarise parents with ways to support their children's learning at home. Parent 5 found these very useful:

we had one last year that went through how they approach the whole spelling and reading, because it is very different from what we were doing in school and I found that very beneficial but only a very small proportion of the parents really were at it.

Parent 6 was similarly enthused:

We had a lovely friend's one that was very nice about how to become more emotionally aware, so yeah, we got a little notification about stuff, we have had lots of them, our children bringing home different homework and this is what is involved. I am sure one of them even said this is what we need you to do, to talk about feelings more with your child and stuff. So yes we have had those, and they are much appreciated, they are really great.

The school principal highlighted the use of the school newsletter to support parents around the use of Irish in particular:

Gaeloideas sent out very good content regarding learning, or for parents learning, parents in all-Gaeilge school and the small idioms and phrases. And I put a few links in the newsletter. So that is to say that the newsletter is great because there is a link for it and its more likely that people will go on to it.

Overall, the school focuses its support for the HLE on supporting parents with improving and using their Irish more.

Summary.

Whilst some of the schools in the study make a serious and concerted effort to learn from and support the HLE, it is also true to say that some only pay lip service to this idea. A great deal could be learned from the work done is schools 1 and 4 in particular. It is interesting that because of the difficulties faced by the children and families in these schools, either educational disadvantage or special educational needs, both schools have realised the importance of HLE and just how much the two learning environments can support and benefit for eachother.

Schools that are successful in learning from and supporting the HLE are those which have established a fluidity and synthesis between the two most important learning environments for children and the 'educators' within both.

Question 5: What strategies do schools find most effective in enhancing partnerships with parents; especially parents of children who may need extra support in primary school - children with Special Educational Needs, children from disadvantaged communities, children with English as an Additional Language, children from ethnic minorities?

The literature has identified difficulties for schools and parents in negotiating their relationships in specific circumstances, including when children have special educational needs (O'Toole et al., 2013), when children come from disadvantaged communities (Mulkerrins, 2007; Reay, 1998; Robinson and Harris, 2013); and when the language of the home is not the language of instruction at school or when children come from ethnic minorities (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). These potential difficulties were explored with our participants and here we identify the key issues they raised along with the effective strategies they identified.

Children with special educational needs (SEN).

A significant contribution of the current research is the engagement with experiences of parents whose children have disabilities or SEN, especially through the inclusion of School 4, the special education school, but also through discussions with parents in other schools whose children have SEN. Such parents have been under-represented in the literature on parental involvement to date (Goldman and Burke, 2017). Since the experiences of children, parents

and teachers in School 4 have been extensively discussed in relation to Questions 1 and 2, we here provide a brief review of the key issues related to the strategies that were seen to be most effective in working with these parents.

Having a child with special needs was acknowledged as increasing the challenges parents faced in being involved in the school and their child's education. Such challenges were illustrated by one parent:

I have four children and two have disabilities and I am driving them everywhere in the afternoons, trying to cook dinner, I don't have much time. So yeah, I don't have the time to put into his education really. I still do reading with him every night and I am using the iPad every night with him for his communication.

Recognition of these challenges by the school and its staff was fundamental to supporting parents, and this was articulated by the Principal and staff in school 4, as elucidated in Question 2. Rather than deficit models assuming that uninvolved parents are disinterested, this school's approach speaks to the literature (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) in identifying the importance of empathetic engagement with parents, recognising the challenges faced rather than making judgments. The importance of ensuring added supports for parents and ensuring the school placed as little demands upon them as possible was key.

The starting point, as with the other schools, was the importance of the ethos of the school, of the attitudes and values contained. The data show that the ethos of the school is crucial in determining parents' engagement, supporting existing literature (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016). Again approachability, openness and trust were spoken of, and these were facilitated through activities and communication modes. As discussed in Question 2, parents in the school spoke very positively of feeling supported by staff and the importance of relational quality.

This was not just the case in School 4. The importance of feeling supported by the school for parents of children with additional needs was picked up on by a parent in a mainstream school (School 3). She spoke of the school's response to her query of having a space to do homework with her child in the gap between collecting her younger and older child. As elucidated in Question 2, the school, she felt, dismissed her request and she spoke of how this added to the stress and demands on her as a parent who has two other children with disabilities. Though these children were not attending School 3, the lack of support as she perceived it with that school had consequences for her ability to par-

ent several children in school including two with SEN.

Parents throughout the research spoke of frustrations of the difficulty in accessing or receiving adequate supports for their children with SEN. This centred around supports such as therapies or accessing assessments. The former was a touchpoint for parents in School 4 who spoke of not enough access to therapy and of ratios that rendered such access nigh impossible. All parents vented frustration with the lack of therapies, identifying ratios as barriers – for example the speech and language therapist in the region was in an impossible situation, with responsibility for over 200 children. This meant that SLT services simply could not be provided in School 4 at the levels children required. One parent expressed frustration indicating that *"because he is so clever and he is so with it that I know that if he got more therapy and more assistance that it would bring him on in leaps and bounds".*

Parents in mainstream schools spoke of similar difficulties in accessing educational assessments due to waiting list times and the impact this had on their child, adding stress on them as parents. Parents' frustration was not directed toward the school or teachers but toward structures beyond the school that were seen as not meeting the needs of children. At the core of this frustration was a lack of supports and concern that children with SEN needed to be fully supported in their education. Under current conditions some parents did not feel that children were receiving this support, which caused stress amongst parents. Of course no country-wide conclusions can be drawn based on the experiences of parents in five schools, but based on this data it may be the case that not much has changed since Hegarty wrote about similar dynamics in 1993.

Strategies or initiatives that alleviate demands on parents, or at least do not increase them, are key. Teachers noted that this was particularly the case when a child was newly diagnosed or when a parent was still working on accepting a child's needs. Teachers saw their role as supporting parents with this process

Yeah, they don't see it, they only see their child in their own little setting, they don't see them in the wider setting. They can only see their child in a small group setting, she is fine, she gets on, she talks fine with her sisters and her brothers and her cousins. But they may not see them in a wider, like in a bigger group, they might not see that she has a social difficulty. You would be treading carefully, not to offend them, but yet you want them to see that there is a problem and the sooner the better that we get something sorted for them. I think that is the hardest part. It is very hard

for a parent to acknowledge that there is something not right with their child, do you know what I mean?

Involvement in schools and children's learning is not in and of itself a 'demand' for many parents per se, it is more the supports that act to facilitate the involvement that decide whether involvement for parents is seen positively or negatively. In School 4, simple actions of using the school bus to collect parents to attend a meeting in the school reduced seeing the meeting as a demand or stressor. Another strategy is to make meetings multi-functional in order to reduce the need for parents to come in often, recognising that for some parents, frequent meetings is not necessarily desirable. Due to the nature of School 4, as described in Question 2, it has a multi-agency approach that facilitated other professional (occupational and speech therapists, counsellors) to work with the children in the school, reducing the need for the children to travel to appointments and thus reduced potential stress for parents.

Strategies that allow for aligned professionals involved in supporting children with SEN to visit the child rather than the reverse would be beneficial. The school has a role in facilitating this alignment of services on site for children, supporting the literature that highlights the need for flexibility in school systems to support parental involvement (O'Toole, 2016).

Ensuring parents saw the school as open and welcoming, and allowing for opportunities for parents who wished to be involved to be so, was seen as key by parents. In School 4, the Action Team Partnership (ATP) proved a powerful strategy in promoting parental involvement. In working alongside the Parents' Association and Board of Management, its focus on improving the children's school day and aesthetics of the school appealed to parents. Its creation was one of partnership, including members of the community, teachers, children and parents. It provides a blueprint for partnership, grounded in a deep sense of community, as recommended by Epstein and Sheldon (2016). The Parents' Association, ATP and school staff were involved in initiatives and activities to foster parents' involvement in the school. Since some of the school's students were non-verbal, they provided evening classes in Lámh which were very popular with parents. This highlights the importance of strategies that support parents to support their children, and these should be guided towards the particular needs and dispositions of that child.

Another activity and one that could be replicated in mainstream schools was supporting the children and parents when transitioning into the school. This is important since research has shown that students with SEN are often more alienated academically and socially at times of transition than their peers (Maunsell, Barrett and Candon, 2007). Before starting in School 4, parents, their child (and siblings or other family members) were invited into the school to get more familiar with it. If moving from another school, the child would come into the school and spend some time getting to know the staff. Finally, coffee mornings were hosted to allow for social opportunities for parents, identified as important particularly when a child had additional needs, as a support mechanism. This again highlights strategies that offer parents mechanisms of support, and notes the importance of times of transition as a crucial opportunity to establish relationships with parents (Dockett et al., 2012).

Communication is a particularly important strategy for supporting all parents (Epstein, 2009), but it may be that this is particularly the case when children have additional needs (O'Toole, 2016). The children in School 4 had moderate and severe disabilities and many had complex medical conditions. It was essential for parents to be kept informed, and keep the school informed. As described for Questions 1 and 2, this was done through constant communications with a daily communication book that was sent home with the child containing daily updates and information. The parent reciprocated, highlighting the bi- directional but also symbiotic relationship at the heart of supporting parental involvement and children's learning. WhatsApp between parents facilitated communications. As touched on earlier, school 4 had to manage multi-agency co-operation in supporting the child within the school. The school was involved in this through making the school available for such visits and attending meeting for individual education plans with parents and professionals. Given the complexity of this ongoing communication, the counsellor was responsible for managing these appointments in consultation with the school who managed educational ones. While perhaps not transferable to mainstream schools who support children with additional needs, lessons can be learned regarding the importance of communication to parents with children with additional needs and for these communications to be clear, transparent and accessible.

As repeatedly noted throughout the current research and elsewhere (O'Toole, 2016), regardless of specific strategies implemented what is fundamental in doing so is that parents of children with additional needs must be consulted and included, and strategies that work are underpinned by

conscious and proactive relationship building. What works so well in School 4 is the sense of a symbiotic relationship between parent, teacher and child. This is central and necessary to supporting parents and children, and to working with parents. As one teacher stated:

And I suppose be very respectful of the parents' knowledge, especially in this setting. Day to day to run your class and to develop relationships and to cater for each child's needs you must involve the parents because you won't know what their mood is without that parent's involvement. So our parents would seek a lot of help around behavioural needs, around occupational therapy needs so around sensory needs of a child if he is eating leaves in the garden at home is there anything they can do at home to support educating him in trying to diminish that behaviour.

Children from disadvantaged communities.

The current research makes a significant contribution to the literature on the impact of disadvantageon parental involvement, through the inclusion of School 1, and to a lesser extent School 2. Of course disadvantage is not confined to schools with DEIS designation, but poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage did not emerge as significant themes in the otherschools.

Again, detailed analysis of this factor has already been included in response to Questions 1 and 2, and so a short review of key issues is included here.

Due to the stress and disadvantage experienced by many parents and children in School 1, approaches that bring parents into the school in an informal manner have been found to be particularly beneficial by school personnel. Thus with regard to the reading programme, the HSCL coordinator observed:

Because we start it in Junior Infants and we call the Junior Infant parents in at the end of September, beginning of October, and we do a little talk with them about how to read with their children and just the importance of it. And this year, for the first time, I really felt like I got through to them. This is my fourth year now in the role. And I believe part of it was it was more intimate, we had a smaller number of parents, we were sitting out here in the parents' room as opposed to in the past it has always been in the hall, and it is always more difficult for me and it is more difficult for the parents. It was really intimate, really nice and we had a nice chat about it at the end. And the reason I know it worked this time was because there was a lot of feedback to the

teachers. The parents genuinely got involved, the read the book every single night.

Similarly, the HSCL cordinator emphasised moving class meetings into the Parents' Room as it is less formal. Again, the ethos of the school is the starting point when considering strategies to support parental involvement for disadvantaged families. It is the 'atmosphere', the values and attitudes that form the bedrock from which initiatives and activities spring that solidify partnerships (O'Toole, 2016). Leadership by the Principal is central (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016) and was identified by all participants as so. The Principal was seen as heavily involved in School 1, fully participating in activities occurring in the school. Both Principals in the DEIS schools (School 1 and 2) saw their role as supporting partnership. This included facilitating opportunities for such partnerships and supporting teachers in developing them. Crucial here was also the approachability of the Principal and the wider school personnel. Such approaches were highly valued by the majority of parents in the schools.

In both of the DEIS schools, going to the Principal's office was characterised as something positive with both schools using the Golden Ticket approach to motivate students to want to go. This influenced the parents' own perceptions, shifting possible negative perceptions from their own early educational experiences and strengthening a more positive outlook (see Räty, 2010). Through experiences, attitudes are formed and impact behaviour. Parents from socially and economically disadvantaged communities are more likely to have less positive educational experiences and lower levels of education themselves (Mulkerrins, 2007; Räty, 2010). It was recognised in School 1 as imperative to counter negative experiences, through ensuring their children's positive experiences, given the transmission of attitudes, in this case from child to parent. Attitudes are key in strategising supports and fostering parental partnerships (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Transmission of attitudes can be bi-directional between parent and child. Parents are powerful mediators on the development and maintenance of attitudes in their children, including toward school (Räty, 2010).

In both DEIS schools, there was an emphasis on facilitating parents' presence in the class room. As noted by the Principal of School 1, *"...like we are lucky with our home school liaison teacher here who runs a lot of different courses and things and parents come in and volunteer and all that".* The HSCL coordinator is central to the DEIS programme and is recognised as crucial to forming positive relationships with

parents (DES, 2006). Both schools' personnel spoke of parents helping in the classroom and being supported by staff (mainly the HSCL coordinator) to do so. This contrasted with non-DEIS schools. In School 1, Junior Infants do a lot of group work, and this was facilitated by parents volunteering in the classroom, although significant work on parents' self-efficacy beliefs was required to support this (cf. Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). In School 2, the HSCL coordinator gave classes to parents on Science to build capacity and support these parents to help the children in the school (cf. DES, 2006). The importance of facilitating this involvement in the classroom, and giving parents the knowledge and skills to be involved, was central in promoting parents' confidence to volunteer. Such capacity building must be sensitively handled to avoid any sense of a deficit narrative around the existing skills of parents living in poverty, and to ensure that schools draw on families' funds of knowledge (O'Toole et al., 2019).

The Parents' Room in both DEIS schools was identified as a hub and seen as a positive strategy to encourage parents into the school. It was also used to run workshops and activities (cf. DES, 2016). It allowed for a social space to support parents building connections with each other, fostering a sense of community that supported parent partnerships. Parents identified the Parents' Room in School 1 as an 'invitation'. In using the Parents' Room as a strategy, it should be cautioned how the space is used and in maintaining boundaries as not all parents are necessarily welcoming of having physical presence in the school as seen in Question 2 in School 2. Nonetheless, overall having parents in the school is a powerful strategy in promoting partnerships with parents (O'Toole, 2016).

Both schools encouraged parents' involvement within and outside of the school through different initiatives and activities. In addition to parent-teacher meetings, both DEIS schools emphasised informal approaches; parents saw teachers and the Principal as approachable and opportunities for quick chats with teachers where available. Breaking down rigid boundaries between parents and school staff were important and activities allowed for those opportunities. School 1 mentioned a more social activity, using the popular television programme *Operation Transformation,* as a platform for parents and teachers to go walking

in the park each week. This allowed for parents to see teachers not just as teachers —"just walking around the park on a first name basis, talking about our children, and they don't see us then as that teacher. It is really important" (HSCL coordinator, School 1).

Other initiatives included weekly coffee mornings (in the parents' room) actively supported by School 2. Reading for Pleasure, Maths for Fun and a range of events such as sports, science and multicultural days were held along with more traditional events around Christmas and Easter. The constant engagement by the school through initiatives and activities was used as a channel to forge links with parents and highlight the school's openness and approachability. In School 1 parents are lent school resources to support them in the children's learning. Homework or after school clubs were valued by parents in these schools, with a wish to see them run in School 1. This points to a strategy worth developing as it was one rated highly by parents in communities of social and economic disadvantage, and indeed in more affluent areas.

The HSCL scheme provided through DEIS was repeatedly highlighted as supportive to the engagement of parents from disadvantaged communities (DES, 2006; Mulkerrins, 2007). HSCL was identified by the Principal in School 1 as central to supporting parents' partnership. The HSCL coordinator there saw her primary role as one of fostering relationships with parents. In addition to organising activities, a key feature needed in encouraging connections with parents were related to staff attitudes. Judgmental attitudes could negatively impact on the school parent relationships, and the importance of being genuine and non-judgmental (see Rogers, 1995), of recognising that parents wanted the best for their children, was highlighted.

These key qualities in personnel working 'side-by-side' with parents (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016), especially parents with additional challenges in their lives, are fundamental in establishing and maintaining partnerships. This is reminiscent of Carl Rogers conceptualisation of characteristics that foster therapeutic relationships and whose ideas have extended into other fields inspiring both person and child centred approaches (Rogers, 1973;1995). This approach appears vital for supporting parents and children who face additional challenges. Within that conceptualisation, respect is key and both schools spoke of seeing the parent as the main educator of their child and knowing their child best. Respect is particularly important when working alongside parents from diverse backgrounds.

All these strategies as discussed here and touched on throughout the research were all situated in, and emanated from, an ethos in the schools of openness, approachability and respect. These were transmitted through different modes of communication (formal and informal), activities and initiatives and core to fostering parental involvement in schools and supporting parents' involvement.

English as an additional language.

In the current research, difficulties around language did not come up as a significant challenge other than in School 2, with the majority of schools having experienced only a handful of parents from other countries or where English is not their first language. Interestingly, in some of the schools (School 3, 4 and 5), the issue of language came up mainly when parents were asked to give *potential* (as opposed to actual) reasons for where difficulties in communication may arise between the home and school. The majority of parents mentioned two key factors, namely where children may experience particular difficulties or have special educational needs, and where parents do not have sufficient English. However, even for the few parents who participated in this research whose first language was not English, this was not a significant factor influencing communication or involvement with the school. There are however some insightful findings that are worth reflecting on here.

The challenge of language was seen across all schools as potentially challenging but not insurmountable. All were very positive about welcoming a diversity of languages and cultures to their schools, and many of them seem to have strategies in place or have strategies they can make use of when such challenges may occur. This reinforces the work of Hornby and Blackwell (2018), which showed positive changes in home-school relationships in recent years, taking diversity into account. The inspector who contributed to this research insightfully observed:

There can be significant challenges. For example, we now in Dublin in the heart of the city can have classrooms where there are 26 different languages. That can bring huge challenges to the school. It is not insurmountable because like I have seen in the heart of Dublin where very clever Principals would be using their parents from Poland who have built up relationships with the school to support other parents who are new to the school. Do you know what I am saying? Schools are clever in how they build up their networks.

School 1.

School 1 has only experienced a small number of parents not from Ireland and where English is not the first language. However, they have not experienced this as particularly challenging as normally parents have learned English very quickly. Thus, as observed by the Principal:

With regards to children from other countries and other languages, we don't have a lot of that. In the past two or

two and a half years we are getting a few more of them all right. To be honest they just integrate into the system fairly well. We do give them a little bit of extra support with the language and that but...*

Where they have had a parent who does not speak English, reflecting existing literature outlining the creative approaches to overcoming linguistic barriers (O'Toole, 2016), the School 1 has relied on four common strategies:

1. The use of a community member as translator: Due to its close connection with the surrounding community, School 1 has where needed been proactive in identifying appropriate members of the community to help with translation for parents for whom English is a difficulty. The Principalexplained:

   It is not a huge issue. Usually if we have aparent who really can't speak English or can't understand us we would try and get somebody from their community or a family member to become involved to translate for us.

2. Offering English classes to parents for whom English is a challenge: Like other schools in the county (O'Toole, 2016;2017; Smyth et al, 2009), School 1 has found it beneficial to offer English classes to parents for whom English is not their first language. The school is well set up to do so as they provide a variety of other classes for parents where needs are identified and is accustomed to offering different resources to draw parents in and facilitate their meaningful involvement. One teacher said, *"I have to say the parents are fab and any courses that I have run they come along because theywant to learn English".* Of course it should be noted that the literature recommends that asking parents to speak the language of the school rather than their own first language should be treated with caution due to the potential for damage to cultural identity and language loss (Burck, 2005).

3. Use of resource teacher: The school relies on the use of their resource teacher to give children additional support with English where needed. According to thePrincipal:

   We don't [have dual language resources] because we don't have enough. But we do give resource hours to teachers, resource teachers would take them if it is needed and in some cases it isn't. We have a guy came to us a couple of weeks ago actu-

ally from Egypt, and like that dad has excellent English, mum has no English, and they speak Arabic at home, and he has no English but he is settling in.

4. Relying on the child as a mediator: School 1 has also relied on the children themselves as mediators and translators as they have not experienced difficulties with children's English abilities. Thus, the Principal hasobserved:

Historically, I don't know if you remember the Vietnamese Boat People. This would have been there area that they were settled in so when I started here in the school we would have had a lot of Vietnamese families and the children learned English so quickly and we used to use them to interpret for their families and translate for their families. Again we still havea few Vietnamese families but in general they would have English.

The willingness of non-Irish parents to contribute to the current research project suggests that the combination of these strategies has been successful in involving parents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). It seems in School 1 to be a rather smooth process that does not differ considerably from the strategies the school relies upon to ensure involvement of parents who experience disadvantage, including challenges of illiteracy, which is the greater challenge felt by School 1. School 1 also ensures to always communicate with parents in a number of different ways as they are attuned to some parents' difficulties with complex written text. The school personnel thus simplify and adapt any information that goes out to parents and sends it in a variety of ways, including text messages, via the website, paper documents/leaflets going home in children's school bags, as well as phone calls where appropriate. This combination of methods will make it easier for parents who are not proficient in English to have an increased chance of understanding the message. In particular, short text messages and clear leaflets with simple language will make it easier forparents.

When such methods are matched with provision of English lessons, the school can also ensure that the language needed for parental involvement is emphasised in such lessons. The school does not provide their resources in different languages as, according to the school, they have not had enough families for this to be necessary. One aspect of ethnicity that School 1 does have a lot of experience with is that one third of children and families associated with the school are Travellers, which will be explored later.

School 2.
School 2 was the only school to encounter challenges around language. According to the Principal:

We are a DEIS school so we have several layers of barriers to involvement. Just going back to the linguistic thing, 30% of the children who come here come from non- English speaking family homes and we attempt to do things that include parents who don't necessarily need to speak English when they come here.

Like School 1, School 2 relies on a variety of strategies and activities to involve parents whose first language is not English. In this school, the emphasis is on providing an equitable system where everyone feels included and feels they have a say. Thus, the democratic ethos of the school is crucial. In addition to the ethos, the school offers a variety of activities to involve parents, including inter-cultural days, offering English lessons and involving parents with little English in activities that require little language. However, the language courses have not been found to be particularly beneficial in School 2. In turn, the variety of activities and workshops where parents are invited either to participate or run the workshop have been more beneficial, as observed by the Principal:

So the food-based things are usually an easy way. The art end of things is run by a person whose first language isn't English and I suppose there is a role model straight away for parents to go, oh there is such and such a person, wow, that is great. And they don't really have to speak that much, two words of English is enough because they are following something that is quite visual. So there are ways in. The teddy bear's picnic, you don't have to speak at all, you just show up. So, you try and find ways to equalise, to have an equitable system. There are some, and you like to hope that builds confidence, a parent might come in and think I will bring a friend maybe the next time. You just build that up over time. We have tried running English language classes within the school for parents, they tend not to take off because again most people are working and that is the problem in a way so we would have to do it in the evenings if they were to actually happen.

Such dynamics can be somewhat explained by discussions in the literature around deficit models versus strengths-based approaches and genuine respect for cultural difference. According to Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000), approaches to parental involvement that work, like

the successful ones in School 2, actively engage with the cultural and linguistic 'norms' of parents (like food) because they are central to the identities of children, families and communities.

Intercultural days on the other hand can be seen as tokenistic (Murray and O'Doherty, 2001). It seems little wonder that the approaches where parents are empowered to take the lead are more effective.

Like School 1, School 2 has also relied on children themselves, or siblings, to translate or mediate but teachers especially raise concern with this approach:

I have parents in my class where the parents would bring in an older sibling so the older sibling would sometimes translate for the parent. I have had parent teacher meetings with an older sibling present where you obviously have to be a bit more mindful that this is a sibling but yeah I have had siblings explaining.

Parents also noted this strategy, without raising any concerns however: "Some subjects it is okay but some are a little bit difficult because English is not our first language and sometimes my kids help me out".

According to the teachers in the school, while people are from very diverse backgrounds and many do not have English as their first language, it is often perceived as a greater problem than it actually is. Thus, according to oneteacher:

Language, because we have thirty three or thirty four nationalities, it could be more now, but when we did a survey on it, it was thirty three or four, so language for a lot of people would be a barrier. Their English, or they feel their English isn't good but quite often it is fine.

As this quote suggests, challenges around language may be more to do with confidence as opposed to actual language barriers. In order to overcome this perceived challenge, teachers are aware of the need to break down barriers by constantly encouraging parents to get involved regardless of their language abilities, reinforcing the work of researchers like Hornby and Lafaele (2011) and O'Toole (2016). Teachers find that if they just keep trying to involve parents many do eventually build up sufficient confidence – and courage – to get more involved. Thus, one teacher described:

And even that woman that was here this morning,this was her first day helping out, I have been trying to get that woman to come into the school for years and finally she has come in. So it was her first time... I had always talked to her, 'why don't you come in for a cup of coffee, just come in on Fridays and meet other people.' She is from Turkey and she would be learning, she wouldn't be very good [at English] so she would have been somebody who would be quite nervous about coming in. She would have come in for some things in recent years but in the beginning it was no, she wouldn't come in. And today was the first day she had actually gone upstairs, she had never seen the library or...

In this particular case, the school could have easily left it and not tried to involve the mother as her husband had very good English and would not face difficulties in involvement with the school. However, as the school considered her involvement important, they persisted in their attempt at including her in activities, and eventually it worked. Thus, a combination of school ethos and personal qualities of school personnel worked to involve a parent who in the beginning was reluctant to get involved. This supports the emphasis in the literature on schools' proactivity in supporting parents at risk of marginalisation to engage (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba and Henderson, 2013; Mapp, 2003).

Another parent also recognised the difficulty of confidence in relation to English, reflecting similar concerns in existing literature with parental confidence and its impact on involvement in children's education (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Johnson et al., 2016) "[...] some of the stuff, the surprise reader or secret reader and that sort of stuff, would probably be the ones who would be very confident about the English.".

Thus, parents themselves recognise that elements of school work or parental involvement can be challenging if English is not their first language. However, like teachers, in the main parents did not perceive it as an insurmountable challenge. Thus, an Eastern European mother believed that parents from her region did not experience in particular difficulties as their English was generally sufficient for involvement in the school. Where they might find an aspect or element difficult they find that they can often rely on their older children to explain something or work out a particular problem. One parent identified that the English can at times be difficult and appreciates when information is sent home via email or leaflets so it can be read in detail and translation resources can be used, such as google translate or dictionaries, rather than being given face-to-face where parents may struggle to understand all details, again speaking to the need for a combination of different modes of communication (O'Toole, 2016). The other difficulty this couple identified is in the younger classes when homework involves read-

ing aloud to children as they worried they would teach their child the wrong pronunciation. When asked if the school offers dual language books, the parents were not aware of this but did admit to being relatively new to the school. Overall, School 2 was portrayed by participants as one of diversity and inclusion, where potential barriers provided by linguistic differences were overcome through parents, school and children working together respectfully.

School 3.

School 3 has had very little exposure to parents of other ethnic backgrounds or where English is not the first language and therefore teachers did not offer any advice on or experience of strategies that worked well, other than *"trying one's best"*, using Google translate to offer information in the parents' first language and using the child as a mediator or translator, until the parents' English improves sufficiently for direct communication, as also suggested by the other schools. Like School 1, a teacher in School 3 observed that parents whose English is poor really try hard to learn, to understand and to engage wherever possible. Thus, while identified as a potential barrier or challenge, again it is not considered a particularly insurmountable one. As one teacher described:

Well the language barrier would be. We haven't many foreign nationals here, well we have had one or two, and yes the language would be a big barrier all right. But you do your best to try and explain as best you can what you are trying to say. We came across a translation thing on Google one time to translate English into Polish or whatever it was, and that helped because the parents were only after moving to Ireland at the time and they had very little English. So it was very difficult for them but they did their best, they tried their best. The child got the language very quickly and they were able to tell the parents what we said.

No parents or children for whom English was not their first language or who came from any culture other than white, settled Irish, took part in the research from School 3.

School 4.

School 4 currently does not have a large number of parents whose first language is not English. Interestingly, the teachers identified language as a potential barrier, and a difficult one when it arises. Like in School 1, school personnel suggested that the strategies they have to use to involve parents with literacy difficulties or with negative personal experiences of school are equally efficient when working to involve parents whose first language is not English, including an open, approachable attitude and ethos of inclusion and valuing other cultures. These approaches are supported by the literature (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). An added difficulty for School 4 is that the language of special educational needs is often quite difficult without additional language barriers, and this has been identified by parents in a number of the schools. A teacher in School 4 observed the complex interactions between language, religion and special educational needs, in a manner very consistent with a bioecological perspective on parental involvement (O'Toole, 2016):

We would have a child who for them English would not have been their first language. Now with a child with special needs it is hard enough to have one language and to communicate in a second language makes it difficult. We would have tried to certainly learn some important words so that the child felt comfortable in the environment. But a lot of our children would be non-verbal as well so we would use sign language. Most of them would come without sign language in their own language or culture so they would be learning the signs which would allow them to communicate in school if you like. And we are a school that is open, although we are a Catholic school by name, we are open to every and none, you know, of all religions and none. So we make an effort to allow that. If we have children who are... We have some children in the school at the minute who are Jehovah's Witnesses and therefore they don't attend any of the religious ceremonies but they are involved in... once the religious part of anything is done, they then come in and get involved. At Christmas we have something else for them. So we try to as much as possible.

Interestingly, sign language is identified both as an additional challenge but also a solution to that challenge, namely that where parents need to learn sign language for their children anyway, they will be learning that as a mode of communication with the school. We are not aware of any literature to date that has explored this dynamic. Again, it is beneficial that the school already has to be very proactive in their involvement with parents and be sensitive to parents' difficulties with communication (such as hearing about children's particular needs and difficulties), which also helps with tuning into parents' language barriers and responding appropriately. Again, the emphasis on an open, inclusive ethos is prominent.

Similar to the other schools, School 4 does not provide books and other resources in dual languages. However, ac-

cording to a teacher:

We don't have actually but we would have if we needed them. We did have when we had children from Poland, we had certainly specific books with Polish language in. We also make Christmas cards every year and we make those and we use the language of all the children in the school. So there might be two or three different ways of saying Merry Christmas on our Christmas cards. But a lot of our children who have come here from other places, they wouldn't be at the book stage, so books, not really.

Thus, the school is very sensitive to providing additional resources where necessary and do so as required but does not have a general stock of dual language resources as this has not arisen as a need. Also similar to the other schools, School 4 has found that where parents struggle with English, parents themselves are very active in trying to overcome this barrier: *"I suppose parents culturally who find language difficult, they meet with us a lot more frequently and basically try and slow down thelanguage."*

All participants in School 4 also noted as beneficial the daily use of communication books, which again reduces the need to rely only on spoken language and gives parents a greater opportunity to engage with the language and use translation resources. According to one teacher,

I have one boy at the moment and his mum speaks English as an additional language and that is very difficult sometimes, particularly on the phone. She may not always grasp the concept of what I am trying to get across. […] I suppose what works well, the communication books work well with most parents however there are some who don't seem to put a whole pile of stock or faith into them. Cultural stuff comes into it there a little bit with some parents. But I suppose if there is important information to be relayed you have it there, you can back it up with a phone call if you need to, that works well.

Another teacher also emphasised the difficulty of phone calls, speaking to the need already mentioned for a combination of communication methods (O'Toole, 2016).

I suppose we have a lot of students where English mightn't be the first language spoken in the home, not as many as we used to have, but it is still a thing where you have to be careful about even making phone calls to people and trying to explain to them what has happened can get lost a

bit in translation. But that is it really.

The greatest learning from School 4 is similar to that of School 1, namely that the efforts the school has to make in relation to parental involvement in its very particular and unique context – here that of being a special school - reduces the challenges associated with language. Thus, according to a teacher,

Language is a barrier. We have had children from all over but I think special schools are well placed to deal with language. We use visual supports all the time so we do try that, to use that. We will speak on the telephone, it helps.

Thus, all the hard work the school does to ensure parental involvement generally also benefits parents who have English as an additional language because it brings them to the stage where they feel comfortable sitting in front of the teacher and agreeing to a course of action. Thus, a teacher in School 4 observed:

And you say don't worry about those words and we will just focus on exactly what you need to do. I find those parents, one in particular, giving them a list nearly, of four things or three things that are priority for now and they only have to worry about the language on that list.

The work is in getting the parent to come to the meeting, the strategy for which appears the same regardless of why the parent may struggle to come to the meeting, as opposed to the actual communication taking place in the meeting.

A number of the quotes above suggest that language barriers revolve as much around cultural differences as around the ability to communicate effectively through the English language, supporting the work of authors such as Llamas and Watt (2010) in identifying the link between language and identity. A number of other quotes that move immediately from identifying the barrier of language to provide a description of cultural difference as opposed to language differences could also have been provided. This 'barrier' of culture will be discussed in the next subsection of this question.

School 5 – Gaelscoil.

Although School 5 is a rather monocultural school with few parents for whom English is an additional language, there are some particularly interesting insights from the school in terms of strategies that work well with regards to EAL.

Indeed, the issue of language barriers was deliberated much more extensively in School 5 than in any other school despite its monocultural nature. This is reflected in literature suggesting that parents in Gaelscoileanna report a sense of intimidation and low self-efficacy beliefs with regards to their ability to support their children's education through Irish (Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013). One parent had a particularly nuanced understanding of the issue of language:

I would say the language would be a little bit of a barrier maybe for some parents. Obviously we are making the choice to send them to a Gaelscoil and we would have reasonable Irish but not fluent so that would make it more of a little bit of a challenge on some of the homework and things like that. And I suppose if English wasn't your first language that would be a barrier in the wider school system definitely because I know myself going in, especially in the early days, I would have been conscious of trying to prepare my… … beforehand, not that they would… They would be very happy to switch to English I know but I would be trying to make an effort, but if that wasn't a choice thing I could see that as being a big problem..

As it is a Gaelscoil, a number of parents spoke of the slight intimidation they feel when they go into the school to collect or drop their children. Thus, parents spoke of pracitising their Irish and rehearsing key sentences before having to go in to the school and a few parents spoke of feeling slightly nervous about not being able to speak beyond the rehearsed sentences or understanding the reply and further conversation. According, to one parent:

We try and speak a bit of Irish at home, not fluently or anything like it, but we do try and speak little bits. I don't feel it is a barrier, like the school have made it clear from early days that they really do like people speaking Irish around the school but it is always your best effort at Irish, you don't have to be fluent or anything. But I do think it can intimidate parents a little bit I have to be honest.[…] Well if you see the Principal coming you feel a bit like… The first few times I spoke to her I felt a bit like I was going back to school myself, whereas the more you get to know someone it is as much in our heads. But I do think just because it is a Gaelscoil it can be a little bit of a barrier.

Similar to observations in the other schools, however, this nervousness and perception of language as a barrier is primarily felt by the parent and is not really as big of a challenge as perceived. Thus, the following conversation ensued with the parent above in the interview:

Interviewer: *So would you feel you have to sort of rev yourself up to say your few words?*

Interviewee: *I would have at the start.*

Interviewer: *And would you feel, if you had to say something to the Principal would you kind of try and start in Irish and then break into English and then how would you feel about that?*

Interviewee: *Yes and she'd be absolutely relaxed. They would like you to make an effort in Irish, she would much rather an effort at bad Irish than all English. If you have to do it in all English it is no problem, it is not like but she would endeavour to have people speaking in Irish.*

While parents may perceive their language inabilities or difficulties to be a barrier, the school personnel are very understanding and supportive and are happy to switch to English whenever needed. What is identified as the key issue is the parents' confidence in relation to language. Thus, it is often this confidence that is the barrier rather than the language itself. Thus, one parent described how the school sometimes assumes that her Irish is better than it is because her husband has really good Irish and therefore assume her standard of Irish is as good as her husband's. The mother however emphasised that any reticence or any lack of confidence she feels about Irish is all down to herself, that the school does not do anything to discourage her in any way. It is perhaps more than anything else for this reason that the school ethos and teachers' personal qualities are so important – and that the strategies that work to include disadvantaged parents, parents with illiteracy and parents of children with special educational needs also work for parents with English as an additional language. Once a school can establish inclusiveness, that ethos can act as inclusion of the variety of difficulties associated with parental involvement, following the principle of universal design.

In the case of School 5, the benefit of course is that all communication is bilingual or can be made available easily as many people in the school are bilingual. It nonetheless offers important insight into the perception of language as a barrier that emerged across the schools but which is less of a barrier than perceived. The availability of resources in both languages is an obvious benefit but parents also described the previous availability of Irish classes as useful and would like to see these continue as they have not been provided for a while. In School 1, language classes were also seen as beneficial whereas in School 2 the issue of time had prevented such from being of particular benefit. As time

has come up as a considerable issue in School 5 it may be that this is why the Irish classes were stopped. This parent confirms such concerns:

But, then, I know that [the Irish language] would be a bit of a barrier for me and that would probably be one of the things for me. Also time, I have three young kids and trying to get minders as well if things were taking place after school hours or maybe around 3:00 or 4:00 I couldn't possibly go until my other half gets home for work so that would be another barrier for me because I wouldn't have a sitter.

What works for parents, in addition potentially to Irish classes, is the class Whatsapp where any language difficulties can be addressed.

But having said that it is handy because a lot of the time we have a WhatsApp group for parents so if I was unsure about something I would maybe send one of the other mums or dads a text message. Or if I was wondering what was going on or some child said we had to do such and such for the obairbhaile and then it turns out my child got it wrong. That is a very handy medium as well to go and ask other parents, or parents who had kids in the school before.

Again, this shows the recurring yet under-researched theme of inter-parent relationships in the context of children's school lives.

Also similar to the other schools is that older children in the school may be called upon to help. Thus older siblings in the school are often consulted in relation to particular vocabulary in relation to homework. In addition to consulting with older siblings, written communication is again emphasised as beneficial because it allows for use of translation resources. The school also offers a variety of language resources to assist with Irish homework, as discussed in relation to Question 3. Finally, the school also has two different parents' councils to address language barriers. One committee conducts its work through Gaeilge and works primarily to promote the Irish language and Irish language education.

Another Parents' Council was then formed to establish a link with the National Parents' Council and to offer a bilingual medium for parental involvement for parents who were no confident in working exclusively through Irish.

Due to the bilingual yet monocultural nature of the school, language barriers is for good reason not associated with cultural barriers in School 5.

Well I suppose, our approach here is that we do every-

thing in Irish or English. So Irish would be the first and we translate to English. Well we don't translate word for word but we go one way or half Irish, half English. But there would be no cultural obstacles. We'd like to encourage the parents to use more Irish around the school. But with regard to the communication and getting messages out everything, every newsletter is sent out, and because of the type of demography in the school, no one has any obstacles. Everyone here is able to understand either Irish or English.

In School 5 the key language barrier is parents' own confidence, which has been addressed through the provision in the past of language classes and currently through the bilingual nature of most events. Similar to the other schools, the ethos is also emphasised as important in addressing the issue of confidence. In the words of the Principal:

And if you don´t know the parent, you ask would you like me to do this in Irish or in English? You know, maybe you would start in Irish but it would be clear when the parent would say: ´I don´t understand. Would you mind if I speak English? And then we switch to English. So whatever the parent is comfortable with.

Because School 5 is a bilingual school in that teaching is done through Irish but all communication with parents is bilingual, the school has put a lot of resources, thought and effort into supporting parents to feel more confident in Irish and to not feel that language is a barrier. The evidence provided suggests that language continues to be perceived as a barrier but that in actual fact it is not a barrier because the school has ensured an understanding, open and inclusive ethos. The different strategies, activities and resources used by the school can therefore stand as a key learning opportunity for other schools in addressing language barriers where such barriers are to due primarily with language and not with culture as was identified particularly in School 4.

Ethnic minorities.

O'Toole (2016) has identified a 'clash of cultures' that parents and children can sometimes experience in engaging with school systems. Extensive research suggests that cultural diversity can impact negatively on parental involvement, or at least provide considerable obstacles to meaningful involvement by parents from different cultural backgrounds. The findings presented here suggest that while some challenges existed, these challenges were mentioned primarily by teachers but less so by parents who had very positive experiences of the Irish school system com-

pared to formal education in their home countries. Where parents mentioned difficulties to do with cultural differences, it was in relation to homework only, as was discussed in Question 3 and in the findings on the new homework introduced by the research team. Thus, in School 2 parents spoke of their different experiences of homework in other jurisdictions where there had been much less of it. Such parents therefore felt overwhelmed by the amount their children received in Ireland. In School 5 it was somewhat challenging for parents whose first language was neither Irish nor English to maintain their mother tongue and transmit this to their children.

The schools vary in their cultural and ethnic composition with only three of the schools experiencing any noticeable ethnic or cultural diversity. Schools 3 and 5 are primarily mono- cultural and therefore do not offer any particular insight on strategies to enhance partnerships with parents from ethnic minorities. The other three schools, School 1, 2 and 4 have different experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity and provide useful insights on strategies that work for their own unique contexts but from which important lessons can also be extracted.

Inclusion of Traveller families.

School 1 is not diverse in the sense of having a multitude of families from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. However, the inclusive ethos and recognition and respect for Traveller culture has given the school a reputation of being welcoming of Travellers and therefore now has one of the largest proportion of Traveller families in the country with one third of the families in the school being Travellers. As the home school community liaison coordinator described,

Yes and I mean we have had Travellers here for years and they call it themselves The Traveller School so they are really relaxed coming in here. None of them would have a problem whereas I think they would in other schools just simply because..

In establishing and fostering strong relationships with these parents, the importance of respecting culture was identified as key:

And we would have generations going through, like I would have taught grannies and then their grandchildren coming in. So, they would be... They know the school, they trust us in that they know we are going to treat them equally and the same way and yet we know they want to keep their own culture.

This was evident in the school's partnership with Traveller parents and the Traveller community through involvement with an advocacy organisation working to overcome any marginalisation of Travellers in Irish society. Some Traveller parents also acted in a consultative role to seek out or supply information needed by the HSCL coordinator.

I am involved with [name given], a Traveller association just around the corner there, so I would visit them regularly and we have meetings maybe once every three months. And if I need to visit the Traveller site, because it is impossible to get around or to find anything, I will go over and ask one of the women and they will go with me which is really important. Any questions that I might have about Travellers, they will help out with and they are Travellers themselves.

Within the conceptualisation of ethos, the importance of respect for culture and cultural identity was paramount. Thus, parents were encouraged to come into the school and give talks about what school was like for them when they were young. They also make adjustments within the classrooms to be more inclusive of Traveller culture and backgrounds. Part of the respect evident among teachers in School 1 for cultural diversity was the approach they took, recognising that different parents would have different views, regardless of coming from similar cultural backgrounds:

But as to what we are doing for them, it is funny, they have different views themselves, some Travellers do not want it to be said to their children at all that they are a Traveller, not to be treated differently in any way. Whereas others, it is the opposite, they are really proud of the culture and want it to be talked about. So, it is kind of difficult. I remember in my classroom myself, if we were doing houses and homes you would always include the trailer.

Thus teachers make clear efforts to draw on the 'funds of knowledge' that children and families draw from their own cultures and ways of learning (Brooker, 2015; Hayes et al., 2017). It is also evident that school personnel approach their inclusion of Travellers with significant criticality and self-reflection, especially with regard to appropriateness of fit for individual families, thus suggesting very meaningful and respectful engagement.

The strategies that the school relies upon for all parents are equally beneficial for the inclusion of parents who have English as an additional language or who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The core element of this strat-

egy is the ethos of the school as being approachable and friendly, adapting modes of communication and language to suit the audience (parents), as well as through the HSCL coordinator actively engaging parents in the school. This shows how relational (process) factors can be more influential than person factors such as potential linguistic barriers (Hayes et al., 2017). This success derives especially from an emphasis on proactively working to involve parents as much as possible and the recognition that parents within the school's particular socio-economic context may need additional supports and persistent encouragement in order to facilitate inclusion.

The school personnel understand the importance of respecting each family's wishes and boundaries and are accommodating of parents. Due to the socio- economic disadvantage experienced by many families in School 1, the school is very careful not to be discouraging of parents and put immense effort into breaking down barriers so that parents do not feel intimidated coming into the school, as argued extensively throughout the report. This recognition of the need for persistence and a warm, welcoming environment, with facilities for parents and positive experiences of involvement, proves equally beneficial for families from the Travelling community and from different culturalbackgrounds.

Inclusion of other ethnicities.

School personnel, and some parents, spoke at length of the challenges and successful strategies surrounding cultural and ethnic diversity within their schools. School 2 is the most culturally diverse of all the case study schools. In relation to School 2, it was observed:

We are a weird DEIS school, it is more a mix of cultures than [a socioeconomic issue]. So it is kind of a strange one. A lot of the Europeans who come in all come in with very high education, they have reached a very high level. I have worked with home school liaisonpeople before and a lot of it would be bringing people in and try and improve their own literacy skills to help their children. But you don't really have that, it is very different.

School 4 also appears to have extensive experience of working with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. As discussed previously where language barriers were identified in these schools, such barriers were as much to do with cultural differences as with difficulties of communicating effectively. The most important difficulty experienced in relation to cultural differences revolves around parents' un-

derstanding of what goes on in the school, how children are treated and taught, as well as with regards to understanding the particularities of children's special educational needs. A teacher from School 2 described:

We have been in touch, both of us, with a parent who has come from a different country and had a huge challenge in accepting the way things were done differently here. [...] There was a series of those very, very minor things, making children sit on the floor for story time wasn't the thing that her culture would have accepted. But we found ways around that. And it did become quite a difficult situation when every single aspect of your teaching is questioned, at times you could find that difficult. And every day after school having to explain away different things. And it kind of got to the stage where we nearly had to discourage a bit of involvement and say, it is how it is, your child is definitely well minded. And a couple of teachers got involved in that process as well to explain that same thing to that parent. But as a result, it was a Junior Infant child, as a result over time it has alleviated..

The teacher identifies a number of the difficulties associated with cultural differences.

Firstly, the parent evidently struggled to understand and accept the ways of the Irish school system and how teaching – and mealtimes – take place within this system. Secondly, perhaps due to extensive parental involvement (and some would say, over-involvement), the parent also seemed to struggle to understand that the teachers could not simply change routines due to this family's different cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, it became arduous and an uncomfortable experience for the teachers who felt that they were being questioned on every aspect of their teaching and that the parent did not trust them sufficiently in taking care of and teaching his/her child. It is also evident, however, that the teachers took their time in helping the parent to understand the Irish school system, respected the different point of view yet also found it important to persist in doing things the same way and eventually brought the parent with them. This is a process that takes time and which also requires a nuanced understanding or balancing act of when it is appropriate to accede to a parent's wish and when to insist on the school's own ways. Both School 2 and 4 manage this fine balancing act by insisting on certain ways when it comes to methods of teaching and behaving towards children, on the one hand, but also respecting people's different points of views and cultural understandings on the other. Thus a teacher from School 4 explained:

And also his dad, they would come from a developing country and his dad wouldn't have the same respect for women in his country, they are an inferior race and that is the way he was raised and you have to kind of respect that but also when we have a team meeting, I have a male SNA in my class and he would kind of talk over me. It is hard I suppose to deal with that but you kind of have to see it is his culture but it does make it more difficult and it does make that child's progress particularly more difficult. The child is seeing this and it is not reflected in how he behaves yet, but I presume, as he gets older he may mimic. I think it might help a little bit with the cultural boundaries.

While this teacher speaks of cultural boundaries she also recognises the need for cultural relativity, the need to respect other cultures and ways of approaching the raising of children.

When to act and accept the limits of cultural relativity becomes a dilemma in this regard but one that teachers seem attuned to. Thus, according to the same teacher,

It is something that we have to, we never condone it and we just try to encourage the parents to use positive behaviour approaches and stuff like that. So anything really bad we treat it like a child protection issue and follow the normal route.

Difficulties posed by cultural differences also came up in relation to communication around children's special educational or medical needs. Thus, according to a teacher from School 4:

I would have one child from a different cultural background and they wouldn't be as open at discussing things or letting you know but the relationship has developed over the year and even last year, I had the child last year as well, so they have really opened up to me. But at the start they were quite private and they, not struggled but maybe their culture wouldn't have been as open at accepting their child's medical needs, it wouldn't be something they would be advertising. But they have really come to learn that this has really benefitted our child and they have really become open but it wouldn't be a huge issue I don't think, not in my class anyway.

The difficulties identified by this teacher are however not necessarily unique to parents from different cultural backgrounds and other teachers highlighted similar issues for Irish parents with regards to understanding their children's medical or special educational needs or coming to terms with the child's place in a special school. Due to the balancing act of this acceptance and process, the school has developed a very sensitive way of communicating with parents and have found a number of successful strategies in helping parents come to such understanding. Encouraging parents to get involved in the Parents' Association is one important strategy, as is persistent and consistent communication through the communication books, private meetings and telephone calls (where language is not a barrier). Thus, again, following the principle of universal design, where strategies are developed to promote trust, respect and a welcoming ethos with regards to parental involvement, this facilitates involvement of parents from a variety of vulnerable backgrounds or different, potentially difficult social contexts, such as those covered in the different subsections under this question.

Parents had different views on the cultural differences they experienced between their home culture and that experienced in the school. Thus, in relation to the special school, a parent from Australasia explained that she did not think teachers in Ireland have sufficient training in special needs. She therefore felt that Ireland is behind special education in certain other countries. Thus, according to this parent in School 4:

It [the training] needs to be specific because there are always special needs kids in every class, it needs to be specific and it needs to be more helpful for the teachers because I know the teachers here, everyone that I met is absolutely brilliant and they need to be given more resources and support and they are not given it over here. And I can tell you now I think it is a disgrace because every single teacher that I have met in this school is a lovely person and I am very happy with the school.

Another parent, in School 2, found the Irish system much better in relation to understanding and responding to children's particular needs:

Actually in Hungary it is more task orientated school… My son was a little bit, he had a behaviour issue but when he came to Ireland he was nearly the best student in the secondary school, seriously. I was so happy to go to the parent teacher meeting in Ireland because he was so polite, he was so […] coming back to me. Oh my God my son has totally changed, totally, totally changed.

When the interviewer asked if the parent attributed this to the Irish school system, the parent answered in the affirmative:

100% because this system in Ireland, I am pretty sure not just in here, like everywhere else, the junior and Senior Infants, they have time to learn for everything and they are just in small groups and I am the best student, I am good at this, they try to encourage them and that means a lot to kids. I think it means a lot, oh I was the best student this week or any kind of thing, that is so, so different. That is why I said to you I am so happy my kids are studying here because it is more child orientated schools in Ireland.

This parent was obviously very appreciative of the Irish education system. The parent had immediately prior to this comment discussed what it felt like to be a parent with English as an additional language in the school and had not identified this as an issue. Cultural differences therefore are not always experienced as a difficult experience but are in some cases experienced as a liberation and as an improvement on previous experiences of school and formal education systems.

What is striking across the schools is that parents of different cultural backgrounds appear to feel equally included compared to other parents in the school and feel welcomed within the Irish school system. This reflects research conducted by O'Toole (2016) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018), which found that many schools make every effort to embrace vibrant, linguistically and culturally diverse communities. This speaks against most prevalent research, which indicates that parents have found it difficult to engage with their children's education due to not understanding the educational system or more simply due to cultural differences (Brooker, 2008; Daniel, 2015; Harris and Robinson, 2016; Jonson et al., 2016; Robinson and Harris, 2014). Parents from different cultural backgrounds did not speak of such difficulties and rather felt included in and appreciative of the education system, valuing its difference from their home countries' educational systems or immediately recognising the differences, without evaluating the pros or cons of each of the systems.

In addition to promoting an inclusive and welcoming ethos, in line with existing Irish research (Symth et al, 2009), schools also engage in a variety of activities that promote cultural acceptance and a sense of integration and inclusion. All teachers appear as sensitive to adapting school activities and environments to different cultural backgrounds, much like School 1 identified in the case of Traveller families. Thus, a teacher from School 4 described:

We have a very diverse school in that we have various different religions and we have guys who can't get involved in certain activities, birthdays, Christmas, that kind of stuff, you have to be careful of decorating things or involvement in school plays. Sensitivity to it is the thing because you have to respect all kinds of... But I think the Christmas thing kind of took me back a little bit because you are kind of going, oh don't decorate that class because it might offend and you just have to be careful I suppose.

In addition to modifying content taught and different religious events in the school, the schools also make sure to invite parents from different cultural backgrounds into the school to host or participate in different events or give talks related to their particular cultures and/or backgrounds. Thus, the Principal in School 1 described:

We did have, that just reminds me, at one point we did have a group of parents come in and talk about where they came from and what school was like when they were growing up and that was lovely. We would have had a Traveller parent, some Nigerian children at the time, we had an Indian family at the time and they came in and they spoke about what school was like in their country when they were growing up. But we don't have many.

Similar initiatives are used in School 2 as are bigger events that explicitly aim to celebrate the school's ethnic and cultural diversity:

In October we always do this thing called Autumn Fest where we pluck all together any of the festivals, harvest festivals, that are around and we celebrate them all together. We invite parents to anything we possibly can. We do a food based day where parents bring in food and we just share food together, that is usually around February. At the minute it is called multicultural day. I don't like that. I feel it others people a bit, let's look at this person who is from Nigeria, look at her, wow, kind of day. I think it should be a bit more natural than that. That is my belief, but it is not shared by anybody else in the community, they love it so I have to stand back from my liberal hippy nonsense and just go with things sometimes.

While the Principal does not necessarily agree with this approach, reflecting literature that sees approaches such Intercultural Days as tokenistic and as 'tourist' interculturalism (Murray and O'Doherty, 2001), he recognises its significance for parents and sees it as an important element of making everyone feel welcome and feel part of the school through the sharing of each other's cultures. Interestingly,

a small number of children (from Schools 1 and 2) felt uncomfortable speaking one of their parents' languages (for example Arabic) because this made them feel different from the other children, reflecting existing concerns of such approaches in increasing a sense of difference and otherness (Eriksson, 2013). Yet according to the parents in the school, such events and initiatives to bring people from different cultures into the school is highly appreciated and builds on parents' own 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1997):

Because we can learn so many things from the book but from the person is the best way to learn. I work with different countries, for example India, we have a good few nurses from India, and I just love to talk to them because they can share their experience, I learned so many things about India. Because sometimes you can read one thing, they just pick one thing, but if you speak to the person who came from a different country, maybe they just open more doors, not only one thing.

Similarly, another parents described:

We do a multicultural day which invites all the parents who come from different nationalities and they all bring food from their various countries and that gets people to come in and talk. That has brought in loads of people over the last few years. Because it is such a mix of nationalities, I don't know how easy it would be to aim something specifically, because we would have a few Turkish people, a few Hungarians or Bulgaria, a lot of Polish, Latvia, so… It would have to be more global. It is usually an open invitation and in saying that if you see people, 'oh are you going to come in, you don't have to bring food, just turn up and come and taste and talk to people.' And we have got a lot of people. And food is a good thing, everybody cooks food and we all have foods that we grew up with, that we think are really nice, try this, try some of that, my grandmother used to make these. And then it is the story. Where does this food come from? And then they have to talk about that and before they know it they have told you loads and they have made a friend.

Such events were seen as particularly important in order to make parents feel welcome and comfortable in the school. This was perceived across the schools as much more important than for example providing children's books that reflect the children's life experiences from other countries.

In addition to abovementioned initiatives and events, technology and apps were considered by school personnel as an effective way of involving parents from diverse cultural backgrounds. For such parents, it was recognised that they do not necessarily check hildren's bags but that they will notice communication through apps because it flashes up on their phone. To conclude this section, we provide a poignant quote from a stakeholder in School 2:

But then again for parents themselves, back to relationships, trusting the school, it is that mutual thing between the school and the parents, there is that level of friendship and community and stuff like that. I suppose in a case like our type of school you don't automatically have that, you have to build that. Whereas in a denominational school, I know people aren't as religious as they once were, but at the same time it is there, it is quite strongly there, as invisible as it might be there is always some sort of event in a religious setting, that is a thing that glues people together. And even as loosely as that it, it is definitely a couple of times a year at least where it brings everyone together in one setting. We don't obviously have that so we have to build those into our calendar, so we have done that.

As with parental involvement more generally, the significance of trust, relationships, friendship and community are identified as the most important strategy to involve parents, speaking to Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke's (2000) argument that approaches to parental involvement that work actively engage with the cultural and linguistic goals of parents because they are central to the identities of children, families and communities. In more monocultural schools, religion appears to act as a tool for such development of community and where religion is absent or where the cultural diversity of the school is such that religion loses the ability to act as such tool for integration, the school must cultivate such a community around other values. In the case of Schools 1 and 2 this sense of community has been fostered through cultural respect and understanding and in School 4 by very close involvement of parents through daily communication and a deeper sense of partnership with parents than experienced in any other school in this research.

The current research does not support Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) argument that schools often fail to engage with the cultural and linguistic goals of parents. Indeed, in the relevant schools, the schools invest considerable energy and time in fostering children's and parents cultural backgrounds and the communication of such within the school setting.

Summary.

The current research identified a range of innovative and effective approaches used by schools to effectively engage with parents that the literature identifies as at risk of marginalisation – where children have special educational needs, where families are disadvantaged, or where the language and / or culture of the home does not match those of the school. However, the common thread underlying all of the individual approaches was a strong proactive focus by schools on relationship building, development of trust, and respect for individual families 'funds of knowledge'.

Question 6: What resources developed by NCCA are being used to support parents and how are they useful? If they are not used, what is the reason for this?

School personnel and parents were shown a number of resources for parents from the NCCA and NPC. People were asked whether they are aware of them and use them. The schools vary in their engagement with and use of such materials. Except for a few parents who have seen them and some who have found them useful, the majority of parents are not aware of these resources or do not remember whether they have come across them, suggesting that they have not engaged extensively with them. The most used resources are Aistear, STen scores/standardized testing and the curriculum. In particular, the first two were also mentioned by some parents, although no more than a handful or two across the schools. The other resources were not used or known.

The school that uses these resources the most is School 3, which it must be remembered, puts greater value on homework than other schools. School personnel in this school therefore finds it very useful to attach different resources with each newsletter sent to parents for parents to use when getting involved in their children's education. It must also be remembered from School 3 that a number of the school personnel believed that parents did not necessarily engage in the most appropriate ways with their children's education. It may be that the provision of resources is partly an attempt to address such involvement. Personnel in School 3 did not mention which particular resources from the NCCA they use but did say yes to the majority of those shown by the interviewer. School 3 also uses a number of other resources, in particular those from PDST. In School 1, the HSCL coordinator puts together a pack for parents whose children are coming into Junior Infants, which in-

cludes some NCCA resources. The Principal also confirmed that they dip in and out of the resources whenever a particular issue arises with a class or with an individual child. The only specific resource, the school personnel mentioned was a resource on teaching Maths. School personnel in School 2 were mostly not aware of the resources. School 4 does not use the majority of resources as they find them not to be relevant for special educational settings and therefore use materials from the NCSE, although they generally expressed a lack of resources for their field of education. In School 5, resources are sent home with the end of year reports with suggestions for what to focus on in children's learning over the summer break and how to stimulate learning. The teachers did not seem particularly aware of resources although the school does email resources out to parents. The school does however provide some of the resources in laminated copies to browse through at information evenings held in the school. The school uses a variety of resources, such as from the IPPN, Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta and, according to several of the parents, workshops and resources on bullying and emotional awareness from the Department for Education andSkills.

Participants suggested a number of reasons why such resources are not used extensively. Some Principals and teachers simply were not aware of the resources and therefore for good reason did not use them. The inspector interviewed for the research made an interesting observation in this regard, namely that the NCCA needs to do much more to link with parents and raise awareness of their work and resources by linking in better with schools and parents. In fact, the inspector believed that the NCCA has an important role to play in educating or raising awareness amongst parents with regards to the nature and benefits of playful learning.

The inspector observed that many teachers are embracing more playful learning approaches but that parents do not always understand such approaches. This is a rather striking observation as the findings outlined in Sections 1 and 3 of this report suggest the opposite; that parents value the role of play in children's learning considerably more than teachers, albeit with exceptions.

Two participants found the resources somewhat inaccessible. Thus, while the Principal in School 1 did use the resources whenever they encountered an issue, the Principal suggested that they often have to adapt the language in available resources, due to the literacy issues faced by some parents. The school therefore reduce such resources to bullet points in simple language that they then ensure to provide in as many formats as possible, including sending

it home in children's school bags and sending out text messages to explain them. Interestingly, a parent from School 5 mentioned that NCCA resources are too long and therefore not easy to engage with. Considering the educational backgrounds of most parents in School 5, the fact that this statement came from a parent from this school is significant. Another teacher commented on the difficulty of general guidance when schools are increasingly differentiating children'seducation.

I´m not too sure what is on the websites to tell the truth. There is so much differentiation going on and every child has a different ability, everybody is at a different level, you know. It is hard to give guidance that is suitable for everyone, you know.

Another teacher, in School 4, simply found the amount of available resources overwhelming and hard to keep track of:

Some would be relevance, some would be that maybe I felt that we already had things in place, that would probably be more, not thinking that we possibly needed more, that kind of thing. And sometimes when you, like you say Google search and you pop in whatever so much comes back and you might miss something or you might say oh I thought I read that one already. Because they might all have NCCA and then something, and then you are like, oh I think I read that one. It can be nearly too much coming back at you.

Similarly, school personnel in School 2 pointed out that parents simply cannot read that much material and if too much is sent home or what is sent home is too long, parents are unlikely to engage with it.

With regards to parents' perceptions, some parents remember receiving various resources but do not necessarily remember which ones, implying that such resources have not been extensively engaged with or read in any great detail. Suggested strategies certainly have not been implemented in the home if parents do not remember receiving the resources or what they received.

Schoolpersonnelandparentsmentionedanumberofthingsthattheywouldfindhelpful to receive. Perhaps the most important finding here is that parents across schools appear to prefer receiving information and resources in a number of different formats. Some parents have very clear preferences for one particular format but a large number of parents appreciated receiving information in a variety of forms. Tip sheets and links were suggested for more general information whereas workshops and face-to-face meetings were suggested as more appropriate for areas such as special educational needs and behaviour management. The preference for a mix of communication methods to receive resources, guidance and advice is in line with broader findings from this research that to really encourage meaningful involvement of parents, a variety of forms of engagement and modes of communication need to be made available to make it easily accessible for allparents.

Of particular areas of support where parents wanted more guidance and information was in relation to what learning and achievements are expected of their children in each year of school and how to help children get from one level to the next. Again, this reflects findings presented in Section 3 that parents want to know more about the curriculum, in terms of what their children are learning, what is expected of them and what level they are at, as well as where they should be. As it was argued that using homework to achieve this is often a stressful experience for children and parents alike, it may be beneficial to provide a range of workshops and resources to address this desire for information on and greater insight into the particularities of children's education and learning. School personnel in School 1, the DEIS Band 2 school, also suggested that while assuming it impossible, they would appreciate more resources or guidance on how to involve the hardest to reach parents.

Parents also showed interest in receiving more resources on concrete things like joint and cursive handwriting, tips on study skills and transition to secondary school as well as courses for parents of children with special educational needs. In School 4, the special educational school, school personnel suggested more information for parents on speech and language and how to access speech and language therapy and assessments. The Principal of School 3 suggested resources to help with streamlining homework and providing more supports around that area of children's learning. The Principals of Schools 1 and 2, however, strongly desired higher level recommendations one liminating homework, or at least very clear guidance on what homework is appropriate, in order to use such guidance to streamline teacher practices within schools and to ensure greater buy-in to schoolpolicies.

Findings:
Part 2(B) Language Seminars

As would be expected, data gathered from parents and teachers after the language workshop bears some resemblance to data gathered in the case study workshops. Although not all parents who participated in the initial round of interviews also participated in the second round of interviews post-language workshop, some parents did participate in both rounds.

Different questions were posed at the two phases but due to the semi-structured nature of the focus groups, similar issues re-surfaced, indicating that these were issues of some importance to parents. Issues around homework were a central preoccupation of the data gathered after the language workshop. Again this is to be expected as parents and children had just participated in a two-week alternative-to-homework trial period. Findings are thus strengthened or triangulated by the two rounds of focus groups andinterviews.

Findings from the seven sub-questions will now be addressed -

Question 1: How are the schools currently using homework as a way of supporting children's oral language (teanga ó bhéal) development as presented in the new primary language curriculum?

What kind of homework are you doing at the moment?

Before engaging with the current project, most schools gave reading as part of homework and three of the five schools did not confine children to the class reader; they sent other fiction books home for the children to read and return. Children's oral language development was therefore addressed through 'reading homework'. Teachers in School 1 said they asked children occasionally to conduct interviews at home, depending on what themes were being explored across the curriculum (in SESE, for example) and they do a 'news' section every morning where children share stories from their lives. A teacher in school 3 used homework to get children to practise giving an oral report. This was related to report writing which was done in school. It happened for the limited period of time that report writing was being addressed in school. The same teacher said he would give 'Show and Tell' homework to children during the last week ofterm.

To some extent, homework followed a similar pattern in the five schools - generally story reading and phonics work in the infant classes and Maths, Irish sentences, English sentences, reading and spellings in first and second classes. Homework gets more complicated as children progress through school and parents g et more anxious about their ability to support their child's learning. This is especially true in School 1, 2 and 5, one school being a Gaelscoil where the children's homework is in Irish. (The Gaelscoil offers Irish classes to parents so they will be able to support their children's language learning and homework.) There was evidence of good homework practices, as per the literature, for example, School 1 gives differentiated homework and School 5 gives P.E homework to its senior classes because it is concerned that children are not getting sufficient opportunities for exercise and to be outdoors. Project homework was used in School 2, beginning in First Class. With proj-

ect homework, children are afforded autonomy to pursue an area of their interest, write up on it and report back to the class. The school uses a mixture of project homework and traditional homework. A teacher school 2 said project homework is probably more work for parents because they get involved in their children's projects. School 2 also provides a homework opt-out clause for parents and children but interestingly, not many parents and children availed of it. In an interview with one of the class teachers, she reported that "you could count on one hand the amount of kids that would opt out in the whole school" (teacher, school 2, p.13). School 2 does 'Mindfulness Mondays' which means there is supposed to be no 'formal' homework on Mondays. Another teacher in school 2 said that homework practices vary within the school and she described her practice of giving weekly homework, allowing children to choose what evenings to engage in homework. "What I did, a weekly homework, so you literally set the homework on Monday for the week and they could do it all on Monday if they wanted or they could do it on Thursday night" (teacher, school 2, p.10). Weekly homework is given in Junior Infants in school 1 also. The teacher distributes a sheet to parents, via their children, with the week's homework written on it.

The pilot study school ensures that all its classes at the same grade level get the same homework and different subjects are visited on different days as follows: Monday-put words into sentences, Tuesday-Maths, Wednesday-handwriting, Thursday-something else. Reading is assigned every night. Homework in school 1 consists of *"proper sums and proper questions and sentences"* (parent, school 1, p.11) and it seems to take more than thirty minutes because one parent said *"I think the homework they get in second class should really realistically only take about half an hour"*. Parents in the focus group disliked homework, saying it caused 'murder' in their homes. One parent said *"I would just love the schools to keep them until 3pm every day and do their homework with them and then send them home"* (parent, school 1, p.10). When asked about homework in the infant classes, one parent said children got *"loads"* (Field notes, school 1, p.1) and listed sounds (phonics), colouring, a nursery rhyme to practise and a library book every so often. She said homework sometimes took an hour but generally it took about twenty minutes. A teacher in school 1 described junior infant homework as follows *"I don't know about Senior Infants but Junior Infants there is a structure to it, it is the same thing every day, maths is two nights, English is two nights and it is repetitive, so it is basically the next page in the book"* (There is a dedicated homework book and all the work is contained in that.) (teacher, school 1, p10). The

teacher also described how she provided a homework sheet for parents at the beginning of the week so that parents know what is happening for the week. Parents sign the sheet to indicate that they have read it.

Homework in School 3 seems to vary in its approach from class to class. The second class involved in the project generally got spellings, sentences, Mathematics and reading for homework. Homework in Junior Infants consists of written work and phonics *"There is written work and a lot of sounds.. And then you are revising the sounds and revising the words"* (parent, school 3, p.9). Parents reported homework in Junior Infants taking from thirty minutes to one hour. They preferred the approach of the sixth class teacher who works the children hard during the day *"But she is light on homework"* (parent, school 3, p.9).

Overall parents felt that the school gave too much homework and felt that the school was proud of its reputation for lots of homework because their students were very successful when they progressed to secondary school, thus validating school practices.

In summary, there is evidence of traditional and modern approaches to homework across the five schools. Schools targeted oral language homework through story-reading and project work, including the use of interviews. Discussions at home about putting words into sentences from the traditional homework model would also be likely to promote language development.

Parents in two schools loved the idea of getting the week's homework in advance, allowing children to choose when they would do their homework. This approach is in practice in some classrooms in School 1 and 2. Interestingly, attitudes to homework vary within schools and there is evidence in three of the five schools that individual teachers do what they feel is best for children, rather than using an agreed whole-school approach.

Question 2: Through working collaboratively (teachers and teachers, teachers and parents), what types of oral language (teanga ó bhéal) homework activities do the schools and parents design for use as part of the research?

Appendix five, six, seven and eight of this report provide a description of the dialogic story-reading strategies and oral language activities introduced to parents by the research team. Parents also shared what they did at home to develop their child's language. In school 1, a teacher report-

ed that parents and children made up language games at home and the children described the games in class time at school. The teacher did not describe the games to the research team. Appendix 8 provides a list of fourteen oral language activities. Most of them were shared during the language workshop. A pocket compendium/concertina sheet of games (helpmykidlearn.ie) was given to each child and many of the fourteen games were also described on this resource. The oral language activities were hugely popular with parents and children and many parents praised the pocket compendium of games provided, - *"Highlight of it all was the little fold book with all the games and activities. Thank you very much"* (journal, parent 2, school 1). Figure 1 is an example of a tip-sheet provided for parents as optional support in developing their children's vocabulary in the context of a story. Appendix 7 features the full complement of supportsheets.
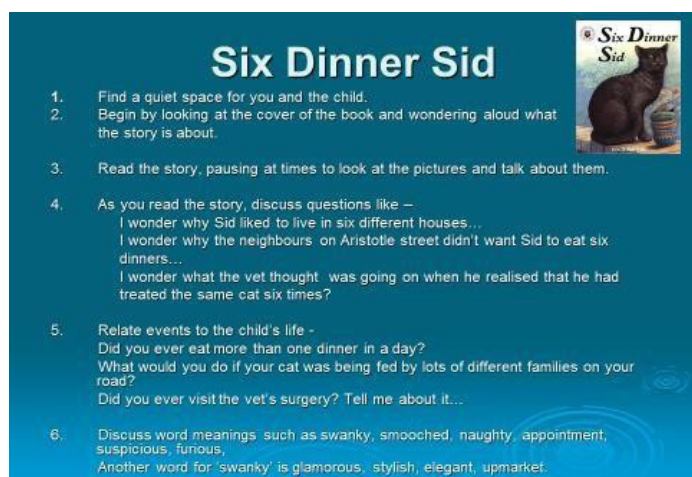

Figure 1: Story support sheet

It is clear from reading parents' journals from schools 1, 3 and the pilot study school in particular, that families were assiduous in exploring the language activities and the stories and spent much more time playing the games than the research team intended. This may explain why so many parents said in the review sessions that the alternative homework was not sustainable in the long run. They expended huge amounts of energy playing and engaging with their children during the two-week period. Many parents wrote daily accounts of their interactions. For example, one typical journal entry read as follows for Wednesday, March 27th 2019 - "Interview with Daddy about when he was a boy in school. Game -1234 Buzz, 6789 Buzz. Book: Diary of a Killer Cat" (journal, parent 2, school 3). The journal author went on to transcribe the child's answers to questions from the tip-sheet. Another journal entry from a parent in school one described the fun the family had while their child practised joke-telling–

My child chose to get up with a microphone to tell me and his Daddy jokes mainly "Knock, Knock" jokes, they were clearly made up by him, me and his Dad were laughing so loud. He was smiling really loved it. We then played single leg skills and we done who could hop the most times on one foot. Out of 5 games my child won 3
(journal, parent 6, school 1).

Parents recorded new words from the stories that were discussed in their journals - "We googled the word disgruntled" (journal, parent 5, school 1); *"glowering : sort of when you're annoyed, precious: like a valuable, a jewel, your pet, hero: like a superhero – there to save and help..."* (journal, parent 2, school 3). Some families spent a lot of time exploring the various language games and activities as illustrated in this description of a family playing Kim's game

We then choose Kim's Game; I choose 8 things at random around the house such as a coin, a pen, a remote, speaker, lip balm, hand cream, tap and a rubber. I then covered them with a tea towel. My child took a few attempts to get the hang of it; I think this game was more interesting to him. We had that much fun we spent 25 mins playing this game. We didn't even notice the time going by, in total we spent 40 mins in total on it. No frustration or being stressed at all even after a longer homework time. He always done his homework in 20 mins but dreading doing it, now he is rushing me to do it because he is really looking forward to what story is next and what happens in it. I really enjoyed the memory game - I could really see him trying to remember the object I took away
(journal, parent 6, school 1).

A particular set of language development strategies was chosen for use in the Gaelscoil. Four texts were provided for the children, as they were for all schools. Texts included two traditional tales *Na Trí Mhuicín* and *An Tornapa Mór Millteach*, and two contemporary books were also chosen: *Uinseann Donn* and *Beag Bídeach*. Each family was provided with the text of the story and an English translation, prompt questions and suggested activities, words of encouragement translated to Irish (see appendix 9) and oral language games.

The data reveals that parents and children practised the language activities and games, including those prepared for families in the Irish language, with great enthusiasm and zeal.

Some of the suggested activities came from the research team, others from the pocket compendium (helpmykidlearn.ie) of games provided by the research team, some from teachers' extant repertoire of language activities and more ideas came from parents' descriptions of how they informally support their children's language development in the home environment.

Question 3: How do these 'new' homework activities linked to oral language (teanga ó bhéal) differ from the types of homework activities previously used by the schools? How do these differ across the four classes from Junior Infants to second class?

The most noteworthy differences between the traditional and alternative homework was the interactive nature of the alternative homework, causing increased parental involvement; the dedicated focus on language which some parents were nervous about (parents, school 3, language workshop) and the fact that children were provided with homework choices. The alternative homework seemed more in tune with children's interests and there was an absence of a 'drill and practice' approach to homework. There was also an absence of written work, which some children lamented (e.g. child, First Class, school 1, p. 7). Homework differed across Junior Infants to second class in terms of complexity and challenge but the curriculum content focus was the same across all classes. Children were provided with four books, to choose two to focus on for the two-week period. Some of the books chosen were deemed suitable for junior and Senior Infants and others for first and second class (see appendix 6). There was a choice of fourteen oral language activities for families to choose from (see appendix 8), as well as games and activities that parents devised themselves. Parents and children made their own decisions around the books and games with which they would engage. Children then reported the next day in school on the various language activities they had undertaken at home. Teachers in three of the five schools reported that they regularly used story as a means to develop children's oral language, some had used interviews and oral reports but none had engaged parents in playing language games with their children at home, though some of them may have played games such as Kim's game, role plays, 'find the odd one out' and twenty questions in school during class time.

Teachers in school 1 said the oral language games were a great success and they got some good ideas from the pocket compendium/concertina of games provided for each child (helpmykidlearn.ie). They also said that children and parents made up their own games and children described the games to their teacher in school. The reporting back by children in school was an oral language lesson in itself (teacher, school 1, p.3). Teachers said that the focus on oral language for two weeks helped them to re-focus on oral language and they realised the value of using interviews, for example, even though they had used them sporadically previously. They said they would like to do a dedicated focus on oral language, maybe once a term, whereby they would abandon other homework for a dedicated focus on oral language, just as the current project did. The teachers said that the new books introduced to the children were successful because children love encountering new books and they found them amusing but it was challenging to always have a supply of new books in the school. One teacher mentioned that some of the children in her class went to the library the week after the alternative homework concluded – *"they wanted to keep reading"* (teacher, school 1, p.11).

In School 2, having explored oral language development in the project, teachers decided to focus on the language of Maths and 'Mental' Maths. Teachers shared counting games with children to try out at home and on car journeys and shopping activities when doing the family shopping. There was a move away from some writing activities and a move towards interactive work in Maths that involved the whole family.

Question 4: What are children's thoughts on these 'new' homework activities? What are parents' thoughts? What are teachers' thoughts?

Child's reflection: What did you love about this homework?

He said he loved reading the stories. His favourite was Louisa. When I told him it was the last day doing his homework his reply was *"this is a sad day".* He enjoyed and loved every minute of this homework (journal, parent 6, school 1).

Parent's Reflection: This homework worked in so many different ways, his whole attitude towards it changed as he was enjoying doing it. We spent a lot more time doing homework that we ever had before. He never once got stressed or frustrated.

He always said he didn't want to do homework on our

way home, even leaving school he would be thinking about having to go home at 5 o clock in the evening to do homework.

He would dread it. I work full time so my child finishes school and goes to an after school club until I finish work at 4. He has a long day just as much as me. With the new homework he was so eager to go home and do the homework, I could actually see the weight and worry lifted from my child. He was more positive and happy. I wouldn't have much time in the evenings to sit and play with my child as much as I would like us to as we just don't have time during the week.

This gives parents a great opportunity to do that while still helping him learn. I immensely enjoyed doing this homework with my child as I witnessed how well it went with my child. I would really love if primary schools implemented this homework to every child's feel their learning and enjoyment through learning will soar in a more positive way, mentally, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Amazing approach towards homework. I am really devastated we won't be doing this homework tomorrow evening (journal, parent 6, school 1).

Children.

Children from Junior Infants to second class were consulted widely in the review of the alternative homework and it was clear that they relished the opportunity to have their say. This was backed up by parents who said children liked to be asked their opinion and loved the choices that the alternative homework offered (parent, pilot school, p.7). The research team used a microphone which was passed around by the children as they wished to make a comment. The children seemed to enjoy this process. Children generally used the focus groups to compliment the alternative homework and to voice their dissatisfaction with traditional homework. It must be said, however, that a good number of children said they missed the old homework because they liked writing. Children liked the alternative homework because "It wasn't boring" (child, second class, school 3, p.3), it was *"funner"* (child, second class, school 3, p.4), than the old homework. Children also liked the alternative homework because it meant more quality time with their parents *"Is breá liomsa ag léamh leabhar le mo mhamaí"* (child, Senior Infants, school 5, p.3); *"Because they are more fun and I get to spend more time with my mummy"* (Child, First Class, school 2, p. 4). This came up repeatedly in the data. Children loved the interactive aspect of the alternative homework and spoke repeatedly about the oral language games and activities they had played *"Bhí na cluichí ana mhaith"* (child,

Senior Infants, school 5, p.5); *"And it was also very fun playing a game afterwards"* (child, First Class, school 2, p.2).

In the junior infant classes some children seemed happy with the old *and* the new homework. This may be because it was customary in three of the five schools to send story-books home for reading, therefore junior infant children's experience of the alternative homework may not have been that different from their experience of their normal homework. Although many parents complained about the length of Junior Infants' homework in schools 1 and 3, the children's experience of homework did not come across as negative. In fact, junior and senior infant children tended to say that they liked homework. Again, this could be because very young children enjoy the time they spend with their parents, regardless of the activity involved. Additionally, young children tend to see homework as a signifier for being 'grown up', a moniker they uniquely relish. Criticism of traditional homework and praise for the alternative homework was much clearer with the older children (7-8) year olds. This seems to be because 'normal' homework is more boring. Older children seem to dislike repetitive, drill and practice homework or homework designed to consolidate learning in school. Many children preferred the alternative homework despite the fact that it took longer than their usual homework-

Interviewer: *That is very interesting now, the ordinary homework that you normally do took five minutes but this one took much longer. And was that good or was it bad?*
Child: *Good.*
Interviewer: *You still liked doing it, did you?*
Okay... (Interviewer and child, second class, school 3, p.7).

Parents.

The literature on homework is characterised by a lack of consensus and this was also the case in relation to parents' thoughts on the new homework activities. There are parents who are struggling in multiple other aspects of their lives and don't have the time or mental energy to engage with homework. Evidence that schools could understand and empathise with this group of parents was borne out by identical comments from Principals of two schools. The research team assured Principals that they would receive a copy of the final report on the study. Two Principal teachers gave the same response 'Don't come back to me unless you're recommending that homework be banned'. Comments were made partly in jest but they suggest that those

Principal teachers are keenly aware that many families feel burdened by homework.

Other parents loved the new approaches to homework. The data revealed that the oral language games were a great success with parents and children alike. Both parties derived immense fun from doing the oral language activities and playing the games and favourable comments in relation to these activities were repeated many times in the data across all schools and all class levels. "I had them do interviews, gave one to do a weather forecast and one to do a sports report and that was absolutely fantastic craic, they loved that" (parent, pilot school, p.3). "Even if it was two days a week or something like that, that would be my perfect homework, a lot more time to spend on reading stories and playing the games. I thought the games were brilliant and my daughter absolutely loved it. We did it as part of the night time routine so she kind of felt she had no homework". (parent, pilot school, p.10). Parents and children really liked that there were choices involved in the alternative homework – there was a choice of books to read and a choice of games to play.

Some parents seem to like the drill and practice approach to homework although this may be because they know the routine, how long it will take and what is required in terms of their input. Homework is more or less the same every night; it takes a certain amount of time; there are no surprises and children do it as part of an established routine. Parental involvement is limited to suggestions for how words could be put into sentences or checking spellings. Many parents find themselves time-poor and depleted in energy in the evenings and this approach to homework demands less of them than more creative approaches.

Teachers.

The language workshop seemed to provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their homework practice. It also acted as a prompt for teachers to re-focus on oral language. Radical changes were not made immediately after the workshop but there were instances of reducing the amount of homework, including dropping some written work *"I got rid of the sentences"* (teacher, school 1, p.1); *"She skipped some pages"* (Child, First Class, school 1, p.6); *"She moved the spellings"* (Child, First Class, school 1, p. 6). School 1 put 'Oral language Development' on the agenda for their staff meeting following completion of the data collection. The First Class teacher in the pilot school adapted some of the oral language activities and games to suit whole class involvement (teacher, pilot school, p.1). The teacher in school 3 described how he already used oral language strategies

such as interviews and 'Show and Tell' as the need arose in class but professed that *"I will definitely be making use of that [material used in the language workshop] for the rest of the year in some shape or form, whether it is a week in a month or a night a week or..."*(teacher, school 3, p.9). He added that the alternative homework made his class 'giddy' and this could be because of the complete 'block' break from traditional homework. He speculated that if some of the ideas from the alternative homework were incorporated into the structure of regular homework, it might have less effect on classroom management (p.9).

Question 5: What are the impacts, if any, of the 'new' homework activities on children's experience of homework? On parents' experience of homework? On teachers' experience?

Overall children seemed very happy with the new homework and claimed to be sad when the class reverted to 'normal' homework. Children were especially delighted with the increased time spent with their parents playing language games and reading books together. There were some dissenting voices; children who missed writing opportunities and also Maths and another child, whose parent reported *"He missed the spelling, he missed the structure"* (parent, school 2, p.5). Some junior infant children did not seem to notice much difference between the two homework experiences, perhaps because their class already focused on story-reading. As mentioned previously, children relished the interactive nature of the alternative homework and there were many reports of joyful family engagement with the activities, - *"She loved the games, particularly the jokes, I don't know whether she got them all but she was rolling about, thought they were hilarious..."*(parent, school 5, p. 7).

Literature on homework is marked by a lack of consensus and it was also thus in relation to parents' views of the alternative homework. Many parents enjoyed the new homework, particularly because their children relished the various games and activities. There are ample data attesting to this. (e.g. parent, school 1, p.6; parent, pilot school, p.2). Parents described how the 'new' homework helped them to notice their children's use of vocabulary and many parents cited examples of new words their child learned. A parent in school 2 recounted how her child began to inquire about the meaning of words -

"And he was reading it and saying the earth around the

volcano is very fertile. And that was the first time ever he turned around and said to me

– what does that mean? He never asked what does a word mean, he would just read it like a robot…" (parent, school 2, p. 6).

Another parent from a minority language background described how much vocabulary both she and her child learned because they were focusing singularly on one book for a week with no other distractions *"this book, wow, fantastic for me and for my daughter and for my husband"* (laughs) (parent, school 2, p. 7). Other parents seemed to struggle with the change of routine. Although they professed they had enjoyed the games and the stories, there was a sense of relief when they returned to regular homework. This may have been because the interactive nature of the alternative homework made greater demands on their time. They enjoyed the time spent but as mentioned previously, many parents did not see that increased involvement as sustainable in the long-term. One parent spoke about how she was not interested in any type of homework. She felt the school day was long enough for children.

"Children should be out climbing trees. When I collect my kids, if they don't have any homework I can go straight to the park and they can climb trees and do nature things. I really resent homework" (parent, school 5, p. 10).

Some parents worried that other subjects would suffer if there was a singular focus on oral language (parents, school 3).

"I would much prefer homework given by teacher, the structure works for us, we are familiar with it. And I think it's more beneficial to practise maths, reading, spelling etc. Books provided by school re-enforce language skills and changing every 2 days keeps kids interested. Found it difficult to come up with different games every day that worked for us, and the books and questions provided did not benefit my son as much as reading himself" (journal, parent 4, pilotschool).

Another parent said that if children were continually doing the alternative homework

"I would have no idea how is he doing in Maths, how is he doing in Irish? I just know he is great a reading, we have that covered, but I wouldn't know anything else" (parent, school 2,p.8).

However, overall it is clear from the data that parents noticed the positive impact of the alternative homework on their children. Their children were happier and more motivated to engage with the alternative homework (e.g. parent, school 3, p.3).

Teachers reported that they noticed increased parental involvement in their children's homework for the duration of the project (teacher, school 1, p.4). *"I know that the parents did love it and a lot of them did actually really engage with it"* (teacher, school 1, p. 5). Two teachers mentioned that the children were very excited about and motivated around trying out the new homework (teacher, school 5, p.1; teacher, school 3, p.9). One teacher mentioned how some children who are usually quiet or shy, putting up their hands and wishing to chat about the game they played or the book they read with their parents (teacher, school 3, p.4). In School 1, the teacher reported that children in her class were telling her every day about games they played and games they made up themselves at home (teacher, school 1, p.3).

Another teacher commented that the alternative homework period gave him space to talk about the books with the children. Normally the children were given graded readers and there were always logistical issues around distributing and collecting readers of different grade levels to different children and making a note of unreturned books and absent children. The alternative homework freed him from this task and gave him class-time that he was able to use to chat in a deeper way about the books the children were reading (teacher, school 5, p.2). One child in Senior Infants spontaneously played some of the language games with her peers during Aistear time (teacher, school 5, p.2). Teachers were reluctant to comment on whether children's vocabulary had improved during the trial homework period, though some speculated that it may have. They said the trial period was too short and there was no measurement or test used to gauge vocabulary levels before and after the trial period.

However, they felt the overall impact of the alternative homework was positive in terms of increased parental involvement in their children's homework and in children's enthusiastic participation in the various games and activities.

Question 6: What types of supports, if any, would schools welcome in order to support them in planning more engaging, interactive and real-life homework activities with the children?

Teachers in schools 1 and 2 said that it would be helpful to have a series of fun, interactive, educationally worthwhile language games and activities, including Maths language activities available in book form. A selection of these activities could be used for homework on a nightly basis. This would support teachers in providing more interactive and playful homework experiences for children and parents. The teacher in school 3 lauded the work of the Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST) in primary schools – *"I would have great 'grá' for the PDST because they provide a great service"* (teacher, school 3, p. 8). He added that a colleague of his is on secondment to the PDST and having that link was very helpful. This teacher loved the fact that experts come to the school and give advice on a face-to-face, one-to- one basis to teachers. The teacher was aware of support documentation from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and reported that he photocopied the documentation and gave it to parents *"just tips for doing homework or whatever or reading activities"* (teacher, school 3, p. 8). He added – *"I think face-to-face is more engagement, you could be looking at a sheet or doing an online course. It doesn't suit me anyway, if I am there, there is a chance it might go in or I take it on board. It might only be one thing but at least you'd be taking something from it"* (teacher, school 3, p.9). One of the teachers in the Gaelscoil said that parents needed more explicit guidance in how to read stories to their children and it would be helpful to have videos to show parents how to do this (teacher, school 5, p.3).

Question 7: What types of supports, if any, would parents welcome in order to support them in helping their children to develop their oral language (teanga ó bhéal) through fun and interactive experiences at home?

Some parents reported that they would like to know more about what is going on in school (in terms of the curriculum) and this would put them in a better position to support their children's learning (parent, school 3). Additional opportunities to meet class teachers outside of parent-teacher meetings would therefore be beneficial. This opinion was not voiced in school 2 where parents seemed to have a lot of and regular communication with the school.

Parents in school 5 asked for school support for children who are fluent Irish speakers and need a greater challenge and also for parents for whom their first language is neither Irish nor English. One parent made the point that if the aim of the language workshop is to support children's language development, that language should not necessarily be English or Irish – parents have the right to try and develop children's love of language and vocabulary in the language of the home. Perhaps one in every three to four books that the child reads or has read to her/him, could be in the language of the child's home. The language games and activities shared at the workshop can also be played in any language. Research on additional language learning supports the view that proficiency in one language supports the development of proficiency in another (e.g. O' Duibhir & Cummins, 2012).

It was clear from the data that parents would welcome a reduction in the time needed to do regular homework and this would afford them time for other family activities that are educational. They spoke repeatedly of the difficulty in getting tired children to focus on homework. They were also concerned about reduced quality family time and reduced time to allow children to engage in their own freely chosen play activities. Children's voices in the data supported this; when children were asked what kind of homework they would like, a considerable majority mentioned play activities such as playing on my trampoline, playing with my dog, playing with Lego, riding ponies, playing digital games and playing with family and friends.

Finally, to complete the analysis related to the language workshops, a look at some of the data revealed in parents' journals is merited. The following is a picture of data from one of three sets of journals collected by the research team. It resonates with data collected in focus groups and individual interviews.

Analysis of twenty-one journals completed by parents in the pilot study during the two-week trial period of alternative homework.

Analysis of journals for the pilot school revealed an almost universally positive response to the project and strong fidelity in its implementation. This was surprising, given that feedback at the parents' focus group was quite critical at times. What emerged from the journals was that parents and children had a lot of fun playing the language games. The word 'laughed' and 'laughter' featured several times.

"Every day, even weekends we are playing question games with both my daughter and younger son. So this two-week exercise has had a huge beneficial impact on my family time" (journal, parent 16, pilot school).

It has also taken the pressure off every afternoon - taking out written homework. "

My daughter loves homework, but she has loved having her mammy on her own - one and one reading". "We played 20 questions again. My daughter is loving this game. I feel bad I haven't played it before with my kids. It has definitely improved my daughter's confidence (journal, parent 16, pilot school)".

"Overall the reading and games were a huge success with my daughter. She was disappointed to return to normal homework this week. My own personal view is that I think homework is a good idea. It gives us parents a chance to see how our children are doing. Then if we have concerns we can approach the teachers ourselves. I wonder if there was no written homework and it was reading and games every night would I stick to it every night - perhaps not. But we always do the written homework 'cos it will be corrected the following day. Overall I did enjoy the reading games. Homework was fun" (journal, parent 19, pilot school).

Parents spoke about how much they enjoyed reading the books and discussing them with their children. They also enjoyed the language activities such as interviews and weather reports hugely as well as games such as twenty questions, marbles and making up stories about the neighbours. However, some parents commented that they were happy to revert to the traditional homework, though their children preferred the 'new' homework. They said that they thought the experimental homework was fine for a two-

week period but it was not sustainable in the long run. As previously stated, this could be due to the extraordinary amount of time, effort and energy parents put into the trial homework. Parents also speculated that the 'new' homework would become pedestrian if it continued, just like more established homework. It would seem that there is room for taking on some of the language activities so enjoyed by the children but perhaps not at the rate experienced during the two-week trial homework period.

Summary of findings in relation to the language workshop

Children.

1. The data revealed that children repeatedly and in large numbers, reported enjoying the increased time that parents spent with them
2. Children loved the interactive nature of the alternative homework. It *"drew them in"* (teacher, school 3, p.5)
3. Children like having choices around homework. They loved having a choice of books to read and a choice of language games to play. It *"made them feel like they had something to offer, they were able to offer an opinion"* (teacher, school 3, p.5). Children loved having a choice when doing their alternative homework. *"The choice of stories, even the games, it was all about choice so she had bought more into it because of the choice"* (parent, pilot school, p6). *"She really enjoyed choosing the different books"* (parent, pilot school,p.7).
4. The oral language games seemed to prompt great fun andengagement. Parents and children loved playing games, practising their reports on the weather for school and doing interviews. This was repeated throughout the data and across the schools.
5. The books chosen for the workshop were enjoyed very much by the children andwere considered to befunny.

Parents.

1. Parents and children loved the language activities and playing games. Many parents described the games they played, the books they read and the new words explored in journal entries. It was clear that there was huge 'buy-in' and project fidelity during the two-week trial homeworkperiod.
2. Many parents, although they enjoyed very much the new approach to homework, did not see it as sustainable because of the increased time, engagement and

energy demanded of them. It was clear from reading journal entries that families spent much more time playing games and exploring the language activities than was intended by the research team. They did this because their children were enjoying the experience but it may have exhaustedparents.

3. Parents thought the alternative homework could be introduced at intervals throughout the year, *"maybe during the winter months"* (journal, parent 1, school3).

Teachers.

- The language workshop acted as a prompt for teachers to re-focus on oral language and to re- consider their approach tohomework.
- Teachers across all schools thought that regular homework could be periodically shelved, say, once a term, in favour of 'alternative' homework.
- Teachers across all schools noticed that "there was more input from home", parents were more involved than usual in their children's homework for the duration of the project (teacher, school 3, teacher, school 1,p4).
- There was no evidence that teachers were interested in a radical overhaul of homework.

Nonetheless, there was evidence of some good homework practice in place already, such as project homework, P.E. homework, use of interviews with family and neighbours, setting weekly homework to give children choice in deciding when to do homework and giving one subject per night instead of a smattering of a number of subjects.

The books chosen for the workshop (Dirty Bertie by David Roberts (Junior Infants), Dirty Bertie (Fame) by Alan Mc Donald (second class upwards), Avocado Baby by John Burningham (junior and Senior Infants), Six Dinner Sid by Inga Moore (Senior Infants – second class), Love from Louisa by Simon Puttock (Senior Infants – second class), The Tiger Who Came to Tea by Judith Kerr (Junior Infants – second class), Mog the Forgetful Cat by Judith Kerr (Junior Infants – second class), Diary of a Killer Cat by Anne Fine (second class upwards), were enjoyed very much by the children and were considered to be funny. Teachers reported that it was great to have a new/fresh set of books to use and that it was difficult to continually replenish book stores in schools.

Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT)

Exploration of our data analysed in the context of other literature represents significant contribution to the body of knowledge on parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education. It is important to theorise these explorations of home learning environment and the role of parents in children's learning, as otherwise there is the risk of viewing certain homes, parents and children through a deficit lens, and misconstruing apparent disengagement as disinterest (Brooker, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) can provide an appropriate conceptual framework through which to interpret processes of parental involvement, engagement and partnership, particularly through the use of the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) framework outlined in detail in the literature review published as Part 1 of the current research (O'Toole et al., 2019). Analysis within a bioecological framework leads to a conception of parental empowerment as opposed to mere involvement (O'Toole,2016).

The findings of Part 2 (A and B) of the current research have identified a wide range of skills, abilities, needs and challenges within homes. Some parents may feel intimidated by schools due to factors relating to socio-economic status or other reasons for potential marginalisation, and need proactive invitations from school staff to engage with their child's education. On the other hand, some parents struggle to balance the demands of busy working lives and caring for other children with the needs of one child's education. Ongoing invitations for these parents may be experienced as pressure and add to existing stress levels. The key message to emerge from the analysis of data is that 'parents' are not a homogenous group, and so a wide range of strategies must be sensitively employed in the hope of reaching dif-

ferent parents in different ways. This may allow for the very different contributions and capacities of individual homes to be valued, so that parents and schools can work together in the interests of all children. All of these strategies must be underpinned by a respectful, non- judgmental, relational approach if they are to be successful.

Here we use the lens of a bioecological framework, to identify important factors under the banners of 'process', 'person', 'context' and 'time', while acknowledging the complex and mutually influencing nature of all four. This section synthesises and evaluates our findings on parental involvement, engagement and partnership and leads us to conclusions and recommendations for practice, policy and future research.

Process
(Interactions and relationships)

Relationship building.

A repeated theme throughout the data from every school and from all groups of participants (parents, teachers, Principals, children and inspectorate) is the crucial role played by positive relationships in facilitating parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education. In exploring strategies that work, many participants indicated that it is not the strategies in themselves that are potentially successful, but rather the ethos or the 'feel' of the school, and the basic relationships, one human being to another, that underpin them. The main role of schools as identified by participants has been to create the kinds of welcoming ethos where parents feel part of the school community and so are more likely to become engaged. The centrality of relationships and the role of leadership and communication in supporting this, or not, ran through all the case studies. A recognition of the importance of openness and approachability within a sense of trust and value was identified repeatedly across the case study schools. The possibility of transforming negative perceptions and experiences to positive ones through the relationships and ethos of the school provides a possible roadmap of how this can be fostered. One concrete example given by parents was that of going to the Principal's office, now construed as a positive experience by parents as opposed to how such interactions would have been viewed during their own school days.

Boundaries.

However, one crucial element of relationship building that remains largely unexplored in the literature is the setting of appropriate boundaries that create a safe, comfortable space for all involved but do not exclude, marginalise or exert the power of one group over another.

Boundary setting was of particular concern for Schools 2 and 3 where very specific dynamics around parental involvement had developed. Thus in School 2 where school-based parental involvement is so prominent and parents are considerably more visible in the school compared to the other case study schools, some parents feel that there is a lack of boundaries and feel very uneasy about certain elements of the heavy parental involvement. The concern for protecting children from the perceptions of other parents – and protecting other parents from comments around their children's behaviour, friendships or the parents' parenting – was also raised by parents in School 2 as one of the most difficult aspects of the prominent parental involvement there. A number of parents were very concerned with these specific implications of parents' presence inside the school for extensive periods of time.

In School 3, on the other hand, school personnel and even some parents seemed to push back from too much parental involvement due to such a concern around boundaries, seeming to wish to maintain distance in interactions. The Parents' Association appeared to be used as a tool through which to distance the majority of parents, while privileging the few who were involved in it. In School 4, the special education school, issues of boundaries were much less prominent. Here, boundaries seemed mainly a concern when teachers worried about parents comparing their children – in terms of academic ability – to other pupils they observed in the classrooms through their involvement in the school, when not taking into consideration that School 4 had mostly classes with mixed ages and abilities.

However, across all the schools, the need to examine boundaries came up as an important theme. Parental involvement was considered detrimental or not constructive where parents over stepped the boundaries. Over-involvement was for example considered detrimental to both children and parents, and to the general school community, by a number of parents. A parent in School 1 suggested that over involvement on the part of parents leads to children becoming dependent on having their parents in the school, a situation that perhaps seems to be developing in School 2. Equally however, boundaries that felt too rigid and unsupportive were identified as problematic for parents from School 3. A key issue in relation to this was for parents to

know when and where it is appropriate to get involved and communicate with the school. This captures the essence of building relationships and partnerships with parents, on the side of the school, and the importance of good communication. To this end, having clear policies and procedures in place dissipated any confusion and lessened the potentiality for crossing of boundaries. Therefore, it was considered vitally important to have clear policies and procedures in place. In the keeping with the essence of partnership, both parties had responsibilities toward each other.

So the schools and the teachers working in the schools have rights as well, the right to be treated with respect and all the rest of it. So there is responsibility on parents too to go through the correct channels, to follow the agreed procedures…And that is not dampening down the rights of the parents but there are correct ways to do things.

The difficulties around managing personalities, relationships and expectations, were recognised as a crucial aspect of the role of Principal. Where appropriate boundary setting was successful as in School 4, it was framed in the relational aim of ensuring the teacher was in a position to properly listen to parents when discussions took place, rather than aiming to exert power or distance parents, families and communities. This yields our first, and perhaps most important recommendation with regards to parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education:

Recommendation 1:
Schools might focus on relationship-building in developing their strategies for parental involvement, engagement and partnership. They might consider the subtle messages of welcome (or lack thereof) that are inherent in policies, logistical arrangements and modes of communication. Consider extending the role of HSCL coordinator beyond five years to allow for relationship building. While acknowledging the extensive budgetary implications, consider access to a similar scheme for non-DEIS schools.

Relationships between parents.
Another process-related theme to emerge across schools, one largely undocumented in the literature to date, was the importance of inter-parent relationships. Schools were seen to play a key role in supporting isolated parents to meet new people and develop new networks. However, there was potential for cliques to develop, along with splits between those with the time and capacity to be involved and those without. 'Parents' are not a homogenous group, but rather

bring a multitude of capacities, strengths, needs and challenges to their engagement with their children's schools (explored in more detail below with regards to the influence of 'person' factors). Particularly in the more advantaged case study schools, therewere examples of parents who were in the financial position for one parent to stay at home with children, and who as a result were also in the position to devote considerable time and energy to their child's education and their child's school. For a minority of these parents, there was also the potential for a judgmental attitude to develop, whereby they denigrated parents who were less involved as 'disinterested' or 'not bothered'.

Similar deficit models have been previously documented among teachers with regards to parental involvement, but not, as far as we are aware, among other parents. The effect of such deficit models by parents seemed to have similar effects to those identified in the literature on teachers' attitudes – other parents were even less likely than before to engage with the school, as they sought to avoid the sense of inferiority and judgment they felt they were likely to encounter. Therefore our second recommendation, to be reiterated with regard to 'person' factors, is:

Recommendation 2:
Strategies to encourage parental involvement, engagement and partnership must recognise the different capacities, needs and availability of different families. Schools might identify and offer a variety of approaches, options for engagement and levels of engagement so that parents can get involved in manner that is feasible and sustainable both for them and the school. In turn, parents must be clear about what kind of involvement is feasible and of benefit to them and their child. Schools need to consider the multiple demands on parents' time in considering how best to provide support to parents. This may include providing a suite of opportunities for parents to engage with the school, for example via digital media, face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and use of written notes. In terms of time, schools might consider facilitating occasional early morning or evening meetings as well as school- time meetings. This may be in addition to the traditional parent-teacher meetings.

School leadership must be aware of and proactively counter deficit models of parents who, for whatever reason, are not in a position to get involved, whether those models come from other school personnel or from other parents. The research has shown that the schools' leadership teams are often exemplifying excellent practice in terms of countering deficit models of parental involvement but it has also

shown that such excellent practice does not always transfer to teachers' attitudes of and approaches to engagement and communication with parents. Whole school approaches and an explicit focus on engagement with parents in staff meetings and training may be beneficial in schools where such is the case.

Boundary setting should focus on the creation of safe, welcoming spaces for all stake-holders where productive engagement can be fostered, and not on exclusion or distancing of parents. In order to ensure appropriate boundaries, an inclusive culture of parental involvement and positive inter-parental relationships, schools and parents may find it beneficial to jointly consider a Charter of Respect and Dignity or similar, outlining in a positive language what is expected of parents and school personnel alike with regards to parental involvement in the school.

Homework – a link between home and school.

Data on homework reveals that homework is only mildly problematic for children and families who experience success in school and is more problematic for children who struggle in school. The Matthew effect (Merton, 1968) applies; those who already experience success in school benefit from homework and those who already struggle in school find that homework compounds their struggle with schoolwork and reinforces a sense of failure. Thus, the successful experience more success and those who struggle experience more failure.

Areas for attention in relation to homework include the use of a differentiated approach for learners who are struggling (this is in place in school 1 but is not entirely successful in that such learners still experience struggle and stress) and a whole-school approach to homework, including parent consultation. Many schools have homework policies but adherence to them can be patchy. Actions that may make homework outcomes more successful include the provision of homework that coincides with children's learning dispositions and real-life interests, for example project homework, and P.E. homework; providing children and families with choice in relation to managing the timing of their homework, that is, provision of weekly homework and focusing on one subject per night.

Interactive and project-based homework encourages children to be autonomous learners and develops metacognition (Rudman, 2014; Vatterot, 2017; Felicello, 2018), as well as igniting a love of learning and opportunities for bridging school and home learning through emergent curriculum, but it may require more support or involvement for parents,

especially if children are in junior classes. Interactive homework based on story and oral language activities, provided for the two-week trial homework period, was enjoyed by almost all children and many parents but parents did not see a switch to this type of homework as a solution to alleviating pressure on their time-pressed lives. The challenges of engaging around homework with tired children, following long school days and work days respectively, remain. Of course the advantages of homework in terms of instilling study habits and reinforcing learning (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008), are arguments that many teachers and parents continue to use to persist with homework. The homework debate clearly has its advocates and detractors. Perhaps some of the suggestions mentioned here and ideas such as confining homework for children under age six to story-reading, using a more interactive approach to homework and the provision of a school homework opt-out clause would make homework more palatable for families. Extensive recommendations regarding homework were identified in Part 2(B) of the current research and are reiterated in full at the end of this report.

Person factors impacting on parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education.

One of the strongest findings of the current research is that parents cannot all be considered as being the same or similar in developing strategies for parental involvement. Schools must recognise and respond to issues of diversity and person factors related to individual parents in developing approaches to parental involvement. Sensitive, individualised approaches that offer variety in the mode and frequency of involvement are most likely to be successful. Some areas of diversity for consideration include children's special educational needs, socioeconomic factors, language and culture, parents' own experiences of education and the impact of work and other responsibilities on parents' capacity for involvement.

Children with additional needs.

Similar to previous research findings, our data showed that children's additional needs could support the development of parental involvement through necessity – for children with multiple and complex needs, home-school communication was not optional but rather intrinsic to the ability of both to meet the needs of the child. A variety of innovative methods of communication, particularly daily communication books, were identified. On the other hand, a child's additional need could be a point of contention between

parents and teachers, especially in the early stage after a diagnosis, when parents may still be coming to terms with their circumstances, or if parents and teachers disagree on a child's abilities and needs. Such issues must be treated with great sensitivity and empathy by school staff, since by their stressful nature, they may impact negatively on parents' coping skills. Especially School 4 has for obvious reasons managed this balance, while the other schools varied in their ability to achieve this.

One difficulty that parents really struggled with when their children had special educational needs was access to ancillary services such as therapies and assessments. While there may be little that schools can do on a broader scale with regards to funding and accessibility of such services, openness to joint meetings and other such child-centred approaches can make a big difference to children and families. At the very least, schools must ensure that their own policies, logistics and practices do not exacerbate situations that may be very stressful for individual parents. This yields the following recommendation:

Recommendation 3:

When children experience special educational needs, parents may experience additional stressors and so may require additional supports and stronger communication from schools. A child-centred approach to meeting needs where SEN is in question is crucial in partnership with parents and other relevant professionals. Schools may need support from various agencies and organisations in facilitating this. The impact of socioeconomic status on parental self-efficacy beliefs and role construction for parental involvement also needs to be taken into consideration.

In terms of how schools support parental involvement in communities where disadvantage exists, the importance of networks and that of Home School Community Liaison within DEIS designated schools was seen as vitally important in building and fostering relationships.

Because without that home school liaison system you would have the potential for difficult relationships with schools where maybe schools mightn't have the time, you see time is a huge issue for Principals, for teachers.

The differences based on socioeconomic status in our study were largely grounded in parents' understandings of informal learning and the role of play and technology herein. A key finding is that parents of lower socio-economic status tended to underestimate the significant positive influence they were having on their children's learning, and did not give themselves credit for educational activities in the ways that more middle class parents did.

Some of this may be explained by a 'poverty of discourse' in that as a particularly disadvantaged group, many parents in School 1, for example, may not have access to dominant discourses of the importance of play based learning available to the higher socio- economic groups.

In reality, children in School 1 had as much if not more time to play and had more opportunities for richer play with friends and neighbours in parks, gardens and streets but the language and belief systems around what this play meant for their learning differed greatly. When probed further, the parents in School 1 were actually more involved than initial discussionwouldsuggest.ParentsfromSchool1suggestedtheirrolewastooverseehomework (but not get overly involved) and to ensure that their children get to school on time. In addition, they also thought it was important to teach their children about money and the time, and to focus on moral development, including encouraging good manners and appropriate speech, views on parental involvement that were in fact shared across the fiveschools.

Parents in the disadvantaged School 1 and those in the more privileged School 5 in fact described very similar home-based activities, in terms of scaffolding children's learning without over-involvement, and supplementing school based learning with additional educational activities in the home. However, the parents in School 5 had access to the kind of language used in educational systems to describe these activities and the self-confidence to identify what they did as parental involvement in their children's education. The parents in School 1 on the other hand underestimated their educational role. This is important to note, since such differing capacities to express their educational inputs could potentially lead to inappropriate deficit models of parents of lower socio-economic status as disinterested in their children's education (Hayes et al., 2017), when in fact to the critically engaged ear, they are expressing very similar input to that of other parents albeit not getting the same enjoyment out of it.

A relatively stark contrast between the parents in School 1 and the other schools is the sense of responsibility for certain areas of children's learning, perhaps also linked to parents' self-efficacy beliefs (O'Toole, 2016). Thus, in the areas where parents in School 1 felt their children were behind or struggling, parents voice dawish for the school to address this problem rather than working in collaboration with the school or doing additional things at home. In School 1, parents were more likely to suggest that areas such as completing homework or teaching about sexuality should be

dealt with in school rather than at home. On further probing parents in School 1 did describe some of the things they did or wanted to do at home so the contrast is less around what parents actually did do and more so around parents' sense of having the required abilities to support their children's learning in specific areas (see Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Thus, in School 1, rather than necessarily wanting more direction or training from the school, parents wanted the school to do it directly with the children rather than involving them as parents. In other words, while parents thought their communication at home around school and their involvement in the school is important for their children's perception of school, they did not consider themselves as significant educators in their children'slives

In contrast, in Schools 2, 3 and 5 (and to some extent School 4, the special education school), parents considered themselves as their children's primary educators. A stark difference between the majority of parents in School 1 and the other three mainstream schools is particularly around parents' desire to act as key educators in their children's lives and thus the discourses they deploy when reflecting on the home learning environments they seek to create for their children. Thus, parents in School 2, 3 and 5, and indeed in School 4, have high ambitions for what they would like to be able to do with their children and regret not always having the time to do so. While parents across all the schools recognised the need to educate their children on things like telling the time, handling money and basic manners, life skills and communication, the effort put into creating rich home learning environments varied according to parents' sense of responsibility as educators, which in turn was influenced by self-efficacy beliefs (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Räty, 2010; O'Toole, 2016). The strongest predictor of self-efficacy beliefs to emerge in the current research was socioeconomic status, with parents living in poverty more likely to underestimate their capacities for involvement in theirchildren'seducation.This leads us to our next recommendation:

Recommendation 4:

When engaging with parents living in poverty or at risk of marginalisation, schools might be cognisant that such parents may underestimate their capacities for supporting their child's learning. Strategies to promote parental involvement should target parents' self- efficacy beliefs with regard to their role in educating their child, and identify the skills parents do have.

Language and culture.

It is evident that each school included in this research has its own particular challenges with language but that in the large majority of cases the perception of language as a barrier is much greater than the reality of language as a barrier. Schools have adopted successful strategies in dealing with different language barriers and in most cases the strategies they rely upon for inclusion of parents experiencing other barriers are equally efficient and beneficial with regards to English as an additional language as well. The greatest challenges identified with regards to English as an additional language are to do with, obviously, the ability to communicate effectively, for which schools rely on a variety of approaches. The activities and strategies schools rely on in relation to addressing language barriers include language classes held in the school (see also O'Toole, 2016; 2017; Smyth et al, 2009). While the literature has identified the provision of such classes as a potential deficit approach to parents (Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013), the schools here in the main found this a very welcome initiative and perceived the provision of such classes to be effective in building parents' confidence in engaging with the school (as also found by O'Toole, 2016), although sometimes take-up was not extensive. It appears where parents take up the classes that they find such classes to be empowering.

In no cases did the schools encourage parents to speak English at home, and this is crucial. English was requested only in the educational setting for ease of communication, except in School 5 where English and Irish were equally accepted, even if Irish was encouraged. Thus, in none of the schools were home languages devalued, as can otherwise be the tendency (Burck, 2005; Edwards, 2009; Kraftsoff and Quinn, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000).

On the other hand, no school seemed to provide or be aware of dual language books, facilitating children's engagement with their home language. Indeed, in School 5, recommendation of English books for parents struggling with Irish was only done in very extreme circumstances where parents really struggled with the Irish.

Schools also endeavour to communicate with parents in as many ways as possible, including leaflets, emails, text messages and other written information as the majority of school personnel recognise the difficulty experienced by parents in face-to-face meetings and phone conversations. Some schools have used translators where needed and a number of teachers have relied on children for translation, however this seems to be avoided where at all possible due to the inappropriate nature of this in some contexts. Parents

however do rely on children for certain aspects and do not perceive this as a problem.

Parents' confidence in relation to language was perceived as a greater issue than the language itself. In other words, language was not seen as a barrier with regards to effective communication except for in a minority of cases, and was more so identified as a perceived barrier to do with parents' own feelings of insecurity. School personnel and parents alike agree on the importance of ethos in facilitating the inclusion of parents who feel the barrier of language to be a problem. Thus, teachers spoke of the importance of being persistent, welcoming and encouraging and of trying to meet the parents where they are at. It was also emphasised that parents who are nervous about language or feel language to be a barrier to effective communication are very proactive in engaging with the school and participate in whatever is available of language classes and opportunities to improve their language, except where time is an issue.

Of course the issue of 'culture' goes beyond language, as can be seen in School 1's extensive efforts to provide welcoming and culturally respectful spaces for the one third of their families who come from the Travelling community. Ensuring that cultures are visible in curriculum content, and getting engaged with community organisations outside of the school setting can be very effective ways of ensuring that parents from ethnic minorities are more

likely to become involved with their children's school. Again, warm, respectful, human relationships go a long way. This speaks to Erdreich and Golden's (2017) suggestion that processes around parental involvement entail more than just the fit between parents' cultural capital and the school, or in other words, it goes beyond issues of 'cultural clashes'; rather, supportive encounters between school and family can facilitate the cultural shaping of parental involvement, as we also argued in the literature review (O'Toole, Kiely, McGillicuddy, O'Brien and O'Keeffe, 2018). Thus, we offer the following recommendation:

Recommendation 5:
A variety of means of communication are currently being used in reaching out to parents for whom English is an additional language, or who have minority ethnicities, and this important work must continue and be adopted by all schools. A variety of languages and cultures should be visible within school settings and practices.

Parents' own educational experiences as a mediating factor for parental involvement.
A key factor in how parents support their children's learning,

and thus the home learning environment they foster, is how they think about and view their role in children's education, and by implication, how they consider their own role in relation to the school. 'Person' factors had a significant effect on how such roles were constructed, particularly with regards to socio- economic status and parents' own school experiences. Different language is used by parents from different socio-economic groups, implying a difference in their sense of being educators, that partly derives from their own experiences of school. This supports the work of Räty (2010) who showed that "parents' school recollections can be seen as one potential social-psychological link in the chain through which the meanings of education are transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 581). Where the topic of parents' own school experiences came up was only in relation to when teachers and HSCL coordinators spoke about challenges in involving parents in their children's education, whether in the home or in relation to the school itself. In School 4, it was mentioned by only one teacher in relation to one particular parent:

I suppose if I give you a little story. I would have had a student at one time who had a single parent who had had anextremelybadexperiencethemselvesinschoolandkindof had the idea that the child really didn't need an education, just needed minding. So it was very difficult to show that this was actually a place of education

This also arose in School 3, which perhaps is not surprising as School 3 did seem to rely on a deficit approach to parental involvement more so than the other school. Thus, the vice Principal in School 3 commented:

It would be maybe if their attitude towards school is not the best, they have a negative attitude towards school, if they had a bad experience themselves obviously that attitude might come through and they might say what is the point in doing homework? There is no point in doing that. And that rubs off on the children and they don't put their best effort in then. But then the poor child gets into trouble then if they don't have their homework done.

As parents' own experiences of schooling is an important reason for parents not engaging in their children's education, it is unsurprising that such parents were not highly represented in the current research. It is therefore to be expected that only school personnel and not parents, mentioned it in interviews, other than glimpses that could be drawn from their comparisons between activities like

visiting the Principal's office in their own childhoods and now with their children. Parents' negative experiences of school may however come out more clearly in children's accounts yet no obvious differences were observed across the schools, which either suggests that parents' school experiences are generally mixed or that where parents have had poor experiences they may not elaborate on these to their children.

Alternatively, an interpretation is that positive experiences with their child's school had overlaid parents' own negative educational experiences, allowing for more positive attitudes to develop. This was certainly observed in School 1 where the parent who had had very positive experiences of school herself spent huge energy on creating an incredibly rich home learning environment for her children. Indeed, this research found that many parents across all schools recognised how much school had changed for the better.

The impact of work and other responsibilities on parents' capacity for involvement.

One of the barriers to parental involvement most often noted by participants in the current research was time. Across the schools, it is evident that involvement becomes particularly difficult for working parents, single parents, parents who have many children, or where they live a considerable distance from the school. In busy households where perhaps both parents work, or there are other caring responsibilities, finding the time to engage directly with a child's school could be extremely challenging. This highlights the complexity of parental involvement – for very busy parents, the proactivity and repeated invitations recommended for some groups of parents, could be experienced as pressure leading to guilt and distress when not in a position to respond. One potential positive response can be found in Harris and Robinson's (2016) concept of 'stage setting' and Johansson's (2009) ideas on drawing parents' funds of knowledge into curriculum planning without them necessarily having to be on-site in schools. A positive message for parents may be that playing with their child, getting out into nature, talking and reading together, and other such activities that they may be doing anyway when they have time together outside of working hours, have educational value for children. It is also timely at this point to reiterate recommendation 2:

Recommendation 2: Strategies to encourage parental involvement, engagement and partnership need to recognise the different capacities, needs and availability of different families. Schools might identify and offer a variety of approaches, options for engagement and levels of engagement so that parents can get involved in a manner that is feasible and sustainable both for them and the school. School staff need to proactively counter deficit models of parents who, for whatever reason, are not in a position to get involved, whether those models come from other school personnel or from other parents.

Another person factor related to parents' views on their role as educators is the theme of motivation for involvement, which came up in different ways across the schools.

Motivations here referred to a number of aspects, including children's abilities, or difficulties, in school and, from the perspective of teachers and other parents, some parents' personalities and more personal motivations and agendas. From the data, it is evident that parents' reasons for getting involved with the school affects the manner of their engagement and the consequent dynamics around it. Many of the challenges that arise with parental involvement also seem to be grounded in parents' particular personalities and circumstances of involvement. It goes without saying that where parents get involved with their children's school for the greater good of the school this is more likely to feel like a benefit to the school than when parents get involved for personal reasons.

Across the schools, parents suggested that they tend to get more involved where there may be a greater need to liaise with the school around homework, particular difficulties with contents and when parents are still learning how to navigate the school environment. Parents generally felt positive about their children's school and found the schools to be very approachable. However, a large number of parents also qualified this statement with the fact that their children had never had any particular issues in school and therefore did not know how approachable the school would be in cases where children may face difficulties.

Certainly, for a significant number of parents, they did find communication with the school somewhat challenging in cases where their children faced certain difficulties. This was especially an issue in School 3 but also emerged for one or two parents in School 4, as well as in School 1 during the second round of data collection.

The most difficult aspect for schools to manage in relation to parental involvement however, seemed to be where parents got involved for very personal and individual reasons, and perhaps found it difficult to understand that schools had other children to serve beyond just the parent's own child. The issue of personality especially came up in Schools 2 and 3. In School 1 there were very few issues around over-involvement and inappropriate involvement, although the HSCL coordinator

had experienced some difficulties with parents struggling to navigate between schools, the HSE and various therapists, and thereby overstepping boundaries. Some of these issues, of necessity, fall to Principals to resolve.

The role of the Principal.

A small number of parents who felt uneasy about the heavy involvement of some parents in the school believed that it was the Principal's role to manage individual personalities and parental over- involvement. However, across the board, school leadership was seen as crucial in terms of creating the kinds of relational environments where parents feel welcome and so want to contribute to the life of the school:

The role of the school leader is key because everything in the school is filtered down. The ethos of the school comes from the leadership and when the school leader has respect for parents and when the school leader encourages positive and frequent home school communication, when the school leader is open and empowers their staff to feel we have nothing to fear here from parents. We see parents as part of our armoury, our support in helping to understand the children. [Inspector, DES]

Leadership was emphasised in all schools as critical for parental involvement. Each Principal set the ethos in the school which trickled down through all aspects of it. This leadership role encapsulated acknowledging the different stakeholders within the school community and acting in a supportive role. In the ethos of the school and among the responsibilities of the school leader, an open door policy was seen as essential, parents needed to feel they had permission to cross the threshold. However, depending on 'open doors' was not viewed as sufficient to ensure involvement, especially among parents traditionally at risk of marginalisation, and proactive invitations were required. These invitations needed to be genuine, repeated and varied in nature.

Other areas tasked to Principals were - facilitating parents to express any concerns and meetings to address them, and supporting the Parents' Association in working within the school. As a former school Principal, the DES Inspector recognised the importance of the 'relational'. Where conflict or difficulties might arise, an informal approach of *"sitting down with a cup of tea"* offered as a roadmap in making parents feel they can approach the school and reinforcing the sense that all stakeholders were on the same team. The role of the Principal and the leadership team was extended by our participants to a mentoring role for new teachers in negotiating and managing communicating with parents, to support young teachers in how to listen, how to negotiate, *"How not to go on the defensive mode straight away like I would have done all of those years ago".* This role played by the Principal in setting the tone for parental involvement was one of the strongest findings of the current research, and so it yields another recommendation:

Recommendation 6:

School Principals, generally lauded by participants in this research study, must recognise the crucially important role they play (along with the whole school leadership team), in setting the tone for parental involvement in their schools. Principals/School leadership could audit all school policies, logistical arrangements and methods of communication for practices that may inadvertently exclude parents. Equally, they should maximise practices that create messages of welcome, and a sense that parents have a place inside the school walls.

Context.

One of the largest contributions of Urie Bronfenbrenner and the bioecological model has made to our understanding of how children learn and develop is the recognition that such learning and development is deeply rooted in the contexts in which it takes place (Hayes et al., 2017). This is not to deny the significant contribution of socio-cultural theory or anthropological traditions, which see culture and society as central to children's development (Vygotsky; Briggs; Rogoff). This was evident in the current research, as different home learning environments and different school environments provided a variety of opportunities for and barriers to parentalinvolvement.

Home LearningEnvironment.

Despite some commonalities across the five case study schools, significant differences were also evident in how parents understand their role in children's education and thus in the home learning environments that children experience. An interesting aspect of the home learning environment across different contexts is the role of play. Play was considered by parents in Schools 2 through to 5 to be the most appropriate way for children to learn, a view that was not shared by parents in School 1. Nonetheless, several children in School 2 felt that their parents did not always have time to play with them or do the things they wanted, something that was not voiced by children in the other schools. It may thus be that parents' deep sense of acting as primary educators meant that they transferred most of those energies into the school so that children experienced

greater parental involvement in school but less in the home learning environment.

Socio-economic status has to be considered in this regard. It must be remembered that Schools 1 and 2 are DEIS schools and therefore not all parents have the means or capacity to create rich and varied home learning environments. In Schools 3 and 5, the schools' location in middle class, and indeed upper middle class, areas had a significant impact on the kinds of experiences they could facilitate for their children. Thus, children in these two schools were much more likely to mention holidays abroad, trips to museums, hiking trips and a variety of cultural activities, as well as going to funfairs and restaurants, in addition to more home based activities. Parents were also more likely in these two schools to read with their children and control the use of technology (despite the Principal's claim to the opposite in the case of School 3). One important reflection, however, is that while parents in Schools 2, 3 and 5 spoke extensively of the need for children to learn through play, and therefore said they structured the home learning environments accordingly, it appeared primarily to be children in Schools 1 and 2 who had ample time for unsupervised play with siblings, friends and neighbours' children, in particular in School 1 where structured afterschool activities were less prominent.

In School 3, a lot of such play involved screens, despite children's and parents' shared view, supported by the literature (Eivers et al., 2010; Kavanagh et al., 2015) that restrictions should be in place around technology, while in School 4, structured afterschool activities seemed to dominate. In School 3, children seemed to enjoy after school clubs exactly because they could play and have fun with their school friends.

School context.

Another very strong finding from the current research is that different school contexts impact significantly on modes, means and frequency of parental involvement. 'Ethos' means character and is apt to capture different elements such as atmosphere, values and attitudes parents spoke of when describing how schools support their involvement in the child's learning journey. This ethos underpins all experiences of parental involvement in schools. It was very clear in our data that where schools made strong, proactive efforts to welcome parents, parental involvement was strong and for the most part positive. On the other hand, where such openness was not visible in schools, involvement was reduced both in frequency and in quality.

Analysis of our data highlights the need for school context to provide opportunities for parental involvement to develop through both formal and informal approaches. Parent-teacher meetings are still seen as a key point of contact between home and school. Some schools also offer workshops on various aspects of the curriculum such as phonics, new approaches to mathematics or Irish language learning, as well as other courses like gardening. They also hold one-off events like Science Days, Sports Days or Cake Sales in which parents are involved. The context in which this happens is also important and physical structures such as parents' rooms and permission for parents to come into the school at drop-off and pick-up rather than lining up outside were seen as important, although the exception to this was School 5 where communication was strong in spite of drop off at the schoolgate.

Interestingly, the Parents' Associations were not mentioned a lot when parents were asked about their role in their children's education, except for in School 3 where it was the primary mode of involvement with the school. It was primarily the Principals who spoke about the PAs. Sometimes Principals felt that they needed to step in to help manage the committee and make sure it was run properly and that documents such as minutes taken at meetings were checked before being sent out to parents. In the schools where it was only mentioned very little, such as School 2, the PA primarily had a fundraising function, whereas in the schools where parents spoke more about the PA, it seemed to serve a more educational role by listening to parents' ideas about improving certain aspects of the school and often taking onboard these ideas. In School 3, participating in the Parents' Association seemed to be a beneficial way to get involved in the school in more education-relevant activities, as opposed to some of the other schools where the PA was primarily a fundraising mechanism. The sense of knowing what goes on in the school, for the children and more broadly in running the school, was definitely an important aspect of the Parents' Association in School 3, perhaps due to limitations in other routes to get involved. In School 2, this 'tuning in' was filled by the parents' room and the use of parents as teaching assistants and aids in the classroom but in School 3 the Parents' Association very much filled this space.

Indeed, it became apparent from one focus group in School 3 that parents of children in the infant classes had not yet learned the informal culture of the school and how to approach teachers around particular issues. The parents in question were asked to bring it to the Parents' Association, which was a challenge as the parents were not in a position to attend. However, during the focus group it was obvious that the link between parents not in the PA and

parents involved in the PA had been established and the non-involved parents had been given a link into the Parents' Association. The Parents' Association here thus serves a particular purpose in making parents more aware of the depth, richness and holistic nature of children's learning.

However, one disadvantage to a strong Parents' Association seemed to be that it was used as a way to direct parents' ideas and requests. Thus, one parent had approached the Principal to have a room made available for parents to do homework with their younger children while waiting to collect an older child as it is a rural school and many parents have some distance to travel. Rather than felt heard, the parent felt she had been directed to the PA whereas she felt that this request was not one for the PA but for the school to address. Thus, in having a strong PA, issues around responsibility and means of communication and feedback have to be clearly delineated and parents who are not in a position to get involvedin the PA must be given appropriate means of engaging constructively with the school around concrete ideas. Of course, there is also a larger question of how responsibility is split between the school and the PA, as the parent rightlyraised.

Overall, when they work well PAs may be an easy and appropriate way for parents to get actively involved in the school but it appears that only a small minority of parents are interested in getting involved this way. Instead they get involved with their children's education by creating rich and child-appropriate learning environments and play an active role in balancing children's time spent at homework, play and technology, and ensuring to communicate with the school through whatever means are available and felt to be appropriate whenever they feel there is an issue with their child's learning or welfare in school. As most schools experience that only a small group of parents get involved in the Parents' Association or particular parents tend to dominate a lot, PAs also quickly get associated with tensions amongstparents.Insomeschools,theformalstructureoftheParents'Associationwasbelieved to deter parents. According to the teachers and Principals, the fact of having to have a chair and secretary, having to take minutes and have an agenda, felt off-putting to parents and most schools therefore struggled to maintain enough parents in the Association. Even in the schools where the Parents' Association was relatively or very active, parents did not elaborate greatly on their involvement with the Association but rather mentioned it in passing. Some of the children were aware of their parents' engagement in the Association and knew they helped organise events and collect money for the school but in the main Parents' Associations seemed neither the most important nor impactful way for parents to be involved, except as a fundraisingmechanism.

Parents across the schools value an open, welcoming ethos where they feel understood and listened to, and for many parents this is indeed the case. However, the case studies also suggest that some cohorts of parents feel more welcomed than others and that certain parents tend to dominate. Parents also believed that if the school could accommodate for the difficult logistics often associated with school, parental involvement would become considerably easier.

Recommendation 7:

Schools might consider structural and logistical features that invite or discourage parental involvement. Parents' Associations may offer one valuable form of parental involvement, but they should not be the only option a parent has for communication with the school.

Time.

The bioecological framework recognises the impact of time on parental involvement. This was the case in our data, both in socio-historical terms, with changing expectations and experiences in schools over time and the influence of technology noted, and across the life-course with parental involvement seen as more crucial for young children, perhaps waning as children progressed through school systems.

Changing expectations and experiences in schools over time.

There was consensus across the schools that school had generally developed in Ireland in recent decades, from a rigid and strict adult-controlled environment to a more fun, child- led space where children felt safe and had enjoyable experiences. This had significant influences on parental involvement, because when parents felt that teachers were treating their children well, they were unsurprisingly more open to engaging with them. As noted above, this was particularly important when parents' own school experiences werenegative.

Technology.

One of the most significant changes in Irish homes and schools when compared to previous generations is the ubiquity of technology at this time. As noted by a Department of Education and Skills inspector during an interview:

One of the biggest challenges that schools would talk

to me about now at the minute is the frequency of little children presented in Junior Infants and pushing their water bottle to the teachers instead of saying, 'teacher would you open this please?' Maybe grunting, speaking words, maybe not speaking in full sentences. And they would say that that is directly due to the fact that children are exposed to so much ICT now, they are swiping iPads, they are in front of screens, they have screens in their bedrooms. And it is having a direct impact on children's language. But not just that, their whole socialisation and their ability to play with other children. So I think schools could... It is a difficult area though because there can be barriers and I suppose there are different value systems out there and we have to be careful how we mediate the message.

Only children were directly asked about technology and from their answers it is evident that children across the case study schools have ample access to technology devices. In School 5, there was a lot of discussion on rules surrounding technology. Technology use here appears strictly monitored in terms of the time spent on devices, as advised by researchers in discussion of positive HLEs (Eivers et al., 2010). Yet the fact that at least one boy was allowed to play Fortnight suggests that contents are not as monitored as time spent on devices. Monitoring contents was discussed in relation to the new project homework in School 2 as some parents felt that this homework relied heavily on using the internet and therefore required much closer parental supervision so as to avoid children coming across inappropriate material. With regard to technology and homework, one parent also mentioned a difficulty of technology - that not all homes in rural areas have reliable internet. So, while technology seemed a potential issue of contention in HLEs due to its abundance and potentially its overuse, it also became a problem in other HLEs when sufficient access to the internet was absent. An additional point in relation to the use of digital media that should be noted is that although connections are made anecdotally between use of digital media devices and poor oral language skills, this is not backed up by research literature, (see Kucirkova, (2014), for example).

Despite a lesser focus on rules in School 3, there was also some consensus amongst the children that technology was only allowed by parents after homework and chores had been done. In School 3, the parents mentioned having attended a workshop or meeting at the school around children's use of technology, which may have led to more consistency in how parents approach it in this school. There was also some discussion of rules in School 2 although consensus was not as strong. In School 1, there was very little talk by children of restrictions around screen time except for the parent who stood out with the efforts she put into the HLE. The only rule mentioned was by a child who was 'only' allowed two hours of screen time per day (14 hours per week), which is in considerable contrast to the weekly 'ration' of 3.5 hours mentioned by a boy in School 5. Significantly, some children in School 1 mentioned that they were allowed screen time as part of their bedtime routine (possibly instead of bed time stories, which was of lesser focus here or treated as a 'treat' like technology). These findings are significant when mapped onto the school's socio-economic status, as the more disadvantaged schools are less focused on structuring and restricting technology use within the home, a good example of interaction between person, context and time factors.

The Principal of School 3 raised some of the issues around social media and some parents' engagement with the school inappropriately through social media. The use of technology was something that came up with parents also. One parent in School 2 mentioned that some parents wanted the school to give guidance on how much parents should allow their children to be one their phones. However, according to the parent interviewed, the school had said it was not appropriate for them to tell parents what to do in this regard. The topic also came up with a number of parents during a focus group in School 1 to assess the different homework introduced as part of the research project. On this occasion, the parents described that the new homework, namely story reading in a fun and engaging way for the children, had been a good 'carrot' to get children off their screens at bedtime to get the story instead. In School 4 screen time was of much less contention, as the majority of the children here needed iPads for communication and for a lot of their individual education plans (IEP). A lot of the activities undertaken by parents in the home therefore revolved around practising skills together on iPads. Even so, there was also here evidence of parents having to monitor and more actively structure the use of technology.

Changing levels of involvement as children get older.

As noted in previous literature (Dockett et al., 2012; O'Toole et al., 2013), transition into primary school offers a crucial opportunity to set the tone for parental involvement.

Many schools emphasised working with parents of Junior and Senior Infants, and this appears to be a worthwhile approach – when positive relationships were established early on, these tended to continue throughout a child's time in the school. Equally, when the norms, expectations and boundaries of parental involvement were clear from the beginning, future difficulties could, in some cases, be avoided. Working with feeder preschools to leverage their existing relationships with families and knowledge of children was seen as a positive and effective approach, particularly in School 3. This yields the final following recommendation:

Recommendation 8:

Schools might view times of transition (children starting/changing school or moving class, for example), as good opportunities to establish positive relationships with families. This needs to be widespread practice across all schools. Working in partnership with preschools may be a useful approach.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The balancing act of parental involvement

In integrating the findings of the current research, it is clear that processes of parental involvement, engagement and partnership are complex and multi-faceted. This is encapsulated within the following quote from a parent in School 2:

One of the things I see and have seen over the years is with involvement is that often people are either really involved or not involved at all. Or people are really involved for a period of time and then they get burnt in some way and they withdraw completely. So knowing that it is a marathon rather than a sprint, so our kids are going to be there for twelve years from start to finish, do you want to be able to do something that is good, that you can maintain without putting people out, jeopardising relationships. So the Parents' Association for example requires people who have time and who are really invested and then it is easy for other parents to leave it to them as well, myself included, so

you are trying to support that without leaving everything to people where then they themselves can get burnt out or resentful or teachers can be like, why is that one here every day of the week? So you are trying to manage that bit."

Parents contribute to good parent-school partnerships in diverse ways and when coming from different motivations and perspectives. A key finding in relation to parents' role in contributing to positive partnerships is that parental involvement is a delicate balancing act of getting involved for the right reasons and in appropriate ways; maintaining a balance between contributing to the day-to-day life of the school and respecting boundaries with regards to relationships to other parents, children and teachers; and, understanding the balance between getting involved and not assuming the right to decision-making authority. From parents' perspectives on their role in children's education, and from school personnel's views on such involvement, it is clear that an appropriate balance of parental involvement is seen to lead to a more holistic education for children where schools and parents can work in collaboration to integrate academic learning with moral education and the development of social skills.

This balancing act is particularly important to reflect on in relation to the notion of a partnership between the school and parents. It was observed in the case studies that parental involvement in the different schools is based on very different interpretations of partnerships, and indeed not in all schools is parental involvement interpreted in terms of a partnership. It was clear in School 1 that parents, while very positive about the school and feel they contribute to their children's education, do not consider themselves active partners in relation to the school.

The same is to some extent the case in School 3, albeit for different reasons. In School 2 in contrast, many parents consider themselves so active in the school that they are not only active partners but dominant decision-makers. Schools 4 and 5 seem to have achieved a balance in that there is such a correspondence between the school ethos and their own parental beliefs that partnership immediately becomes integral to parental involvement. In School 5, a Gaelscoil, families may have actively chosen the school because of their beliefs, rather than accepting the nearest local school. In School 4, the sense of genuine partnership is expressed by school personnel and by the large majority of parents. This sense of partnership seems to correlate more or less directly with parental activities in relation to

the home learning environment and parental views on their roles as educators and facilitators of children's learning.

Some new findings in the current research that have not been significantly highlighted in the literature on parental involvement to date include the interesting dynamic at play for parents who are teachers themselves. Inter-parent dynamics in the context of school involvement also require further investigation. While relationships between parents can be very supportive as in cases where parents were new to an area or were coming to terms with a special educational need, sometimes tension between parents who were heavily involved and those who were not had the potential to deteriorate into negative dynamics.

Potentially one of the most important findings is that parents are not always aware that the ordinary day to day interactions they have are vital for development, and it is certainly interesting that when analysing the discourse in the most disadvantaged and one of the most privileged schools, both sets of parents described very similar activities based on scaffolding rather than over involvement in homework and other learning coupled with other educational activities outside of school time. However, the more advantaged parents had the language to express that in a way that educators would understand and support. On the other hand, the more disadvantaged parents did not possess that language, or at least did not use it, leaving potential for uncritical deficit models to arise (disinterested parents of lower socio-economic status) when in fact both groups are describing similar dynamics.

Our central finding is that when strategies for promoting parental involvement work, it tends in fact to be the relationships underpinning them that are effective, rather than the specific approaches used. We conclude by collating the recommendations from Part 2(A) and Part 2(B) of the research.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Schools might focus on relationship-building in developing their strategies for parental involvement, engagement and partnership. They might consider the subtle messages of welcome (or lack thereof) that are inherent in policies, logistical arrangements and modes of communication. Consider extending the role of HSCL beyond five years to allow for relationship building. While acknowledging the extensive budgetary implications, consider access to a similar scheme for non-DEIS schools.

Recommendation 2:

Strategies to encourage parental involvement, engagement and partnership need to recognise the different capacities, needs and availability of different families. Schools could identify and offer a variety of approaches, options for engagement and levels of engagement so that parents can get involved in a manner that is feasible and sustainable both for them and the school. School leadership teams and all staff members need to proactively counter deficit models of parents who, for whatever reason, are not in a position to get involved, whether those models come from other school personnel or from other parents.

Boundary setting should focus on the creation of safe, welcoming spaces for all stake- holders where productive engagement can be fostered, and not on exclusion or distancing of parents. In order to ensure appropriate boundaries, an inclusive culture of parental involvement and positive inter-parental relationships, schools and parents may find it beneficial to jointly consider a Charter of Respect and Dignity or similar, outlining in a positive language what is

expected of parents and school personnel alike with regards to parental involvement in the school.

Recommendation 3:
When children experience special educational needs, parents may encounter additional stressors and so may require additional supports and stronger communication from schools.

Schools should continue to endeavour to facilitate a child-centred approach to meeting needs where SEN is in question, in partnership with parents and other relevant professionals.

Recommendation 4:
When engaging with parents living in poverty or at risk of marginalisation, schools need to be aware that such parents may underestimate their capacities for supporting their child's learning. Strategies to promote parental involvement should target parents' self- efficacy beliefs with regard to their role in educating their child, and identify the skills parents do have.

Recommendation 5:
Schools can be commended for their culturally inclusive approaches to working with parents with regards to their children's education. Such approaches must be maintained and important lessons can be learned by schools currently less experienced in cultural inclusion. A variety of means of communication are currently being used in reaching out to parents for whom English is an additional language, or who have minority ethnicities, and this important work must continue and be adopted by all schools. A variety of languages and cultures should be visible within school settings andpractices.

Recommendation 6:
School leadership teams need to be cognisant of the crucial role they play in setting the tone for parental involvement in their schools, for better or for worse. School policies, logistical arrangements and methods of communication would benefit from an audit for practices that may inadvertently exclude parents. Equally schools should maximise practices that create messages of welcome, and a sense that parents have a place inside the school walls.

Recommendation 7:
Schools might consider structural and logistical features that invite or discourage parental involvement. Parents' Associations may offer one valuable form of parental involvement, but they should not be the only option a parent has for communication with the school.

Recommendation 8:
Schools should view times of transition as crucial opportunities to establish positive relationships with families. Working in partnership with preschools may be a useful approach.

Recommendation 9:
There are a suite of recommendations related to homework -

• More opportunities could be provided for parents and teachers to discuss how to support children's language development in the home. This could begin with a conversation about homework
• Schools need to review homework policies and to ensure a whole-school approach is applied in relation tohomework
• Although there is evidence of good homework practice in schools, schools may still benefit from guidance on homework in relation to time, content and method that suits children best, according to research in thefield
• Entertaining and interactive oral language games and activities should be incorporated into children'shomework
• In planning homework, schools might take into consideration the demands on children's time to do planned activities outside of school and the importance of outdoor free play opportunities for youngchildren
• Colleges of education might consider a module on parental involvement in their children's education and to include a focus on homework in the module
• Schools might consider removing homework from junior infant classes with the exception ofstory-time

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Themes phase 2A

Theme 1: Role of parents	How do parents actively contribute to partnership with schools? What types of parental activities make a difference to educational outcomes? How do we define involvement, engagement or partnership?
Theme 2: Home learning environment	How do schools support, learn from and build on the home learning environment? What can parents do in the home to promote learning? How can we engage with the concept of 'home learning environment' appropriately, and avoid culturally biased or deficit assumptions about children and families?
Theme 3: Homework	How is homework designed to promote partnership between schools, children and parents?
Theme 4: Role of schools	How do schools support parents' involvement in their child's educational journey? What is the role of attitudes, relationships and values? What structural and contextual supports are required? What is the role of school leadership?
Theme 5: Potential Barriers to Parental Involvement	What strategies enhance partnership with parents where there may be potential barriers e.g. SEN, socio- economic disadvantage, cultural, religious or linguistic differences between home and school, gender, etc?
Theme 6: NCCA resources	What resources developed by the NCCA are being used to support parents and how are they useful? If they are not being used, what is the reason for this?

Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Topic Guides (2A and 2B)

Inspectorate Topic Guide.

Parent–School Interaction.

1. What does parental involvement/ engagement mean toy ou?
2. Is parental involvement something that the inspectorate looks for in aschool?
3. What kinds of things would you look for as an inspector with regards to parental involvement when you are in aschool?
4. What do you think is the role of the Principal regarding parentalinvolvement? What is the role of the class teacher?
5. In your experience in schools, when they are building relationships withparents:

   a. What has workedbest?
   b. What are thechallenges?
   c. What can beimproved?

6. Are there any benefits to having parents involved? For the school? For the children? For theparents?
7. Can parental involvement be detrimental or not constructive? If so, can you identify instances and why you feel them to be counterproductive
8. What are appropriate boundaries/how should schools setthem?
9. Could you comment on potential language / cultural barriers (e.g. class, creed, race, family experience) between home andschool?
   a. How should schools address these?
   b. Do you have any thoughts on contact with local community / cultural groups?

Parental Role.

9. Do you see a role for parents in supporting children's learning athome?
   j. What about at school?
11. What is the role of a parent in parent-teachermeetings?
12. How do you think schools should support parents and children in their home learningenvironment?
   m. Could you elaborate further...

14. What is your understanding of how the school and home should worktogether?
   o. Have you discussed this with the schools you havevisited?

Homework.

13. Tell me about what you think of homework. Is itimportant?
14. Do you think teachers need support in structuring homework, like guidelines or somethingsimilar?

Homework prompts:
   a. If you had one piece of advice for parents about homework, what would thatbe?
   b. Do you think children should be given choices with regard to the content and timeframe of theirhomework?
   c. Anything you would like toadd?

Parents' Association.

15. Can you talk to me about your experiences of Parents'Associations?
16. Do you think schools are aware of NCCA/NPC documents or publications or other supports (NPC/NCCA/IPPN/Education Centre) that support parental involvement?
   a. Do schools use these or any other documents or resources related to parentalinvolvement?
2. Are there any other areas in which you feel NCCA/NPC etc. could provide parents withsupport?

Additional.

3. Do you have any further comments you feel may berelevant?

Teacher Topic Guide.

Parent–Teacher Interaction.

1. What does parental involvement/ engagement mean to you?
2. How do you work towards building relationships with parents?
   a. What has worked best?
   b. What are the challenges?
   c. What can be improved?

3. Are there opportunities for you, outside of formal parent-teacher meetings, to exchange ideas with parents on how you can work together to support children's learning?
    d. Prompt - tip-sheets, newsletters, NCCA/NPCmaterials

Parental Involvement.

4. Are there any benefits to having parents involved? For the school? For the children? For the parents?
5. Can parental involvement be detrimental or not constructive? If so, can you identify instances and why you feel them to be counter productive?
6. What are appropriate boundaries/how do you setthem?
7. Are there ever language / cultural barriers (e.g. class, creed, race, family experience) between home and school?
8. How do you addressthese?
9. Do you have any contact with local community / culturalgroups?
10. What about the role of the Principal regarding parentalinvolvement?

Parental Role.

11. Do you see a role for parents in supporting children's learning athome?
12. What about atschool?
13. As a teacher, how do you see your role in promoting parentalinvolvement?
14. What is the role of a parent in parent-teachermeetings?
15. Are there any school supports in place to help parents and children in theirhome learning environment? Could you elaborate further...
16. What is your understanding of how the school and home should work together?
17. Have you discussed this with your colleagues?

Homework

18. Tell me about what you think of homework. Is it important?
19. Do you think teachers need support in structuring homework, like guidelines or something similar?

Homework prompts.
    a. Tell me about the homework you give – how do you decide on what to give?

b. How much time do you expect the children in your class to spend doing homework eachday?
c. Do you set and correct homework daily? How much time does thattake?
d. Do you set the same type of homework everyday?
e. Do you give children choices with regard to the content of their homework?
f. Do you give children choices with regard to the timeframe for homework completion?
g. Does your school have a homeworkpolicy?
h. If your school has a homework policy, are there elements of it that you would like tochange?
i. Do you discuss homework withparents?
j. Do you provide information/training for parents on how they might support their child at homeworktime?
k. If you had one piece of advice for parents about homework, what would thatbe?
l. Anything you would like toadd?

Parental Supports.

19. What guidance do parents ask for to support home-learning?
20. What further assistance do you think might be helpful for parents to support the home learningenvironment?
21. Are there specific supports for parents whose first language is not the language of the school? For example, does the school have a supply of children's books that reflect the children's life experience/children's first language? Does the school use dual language children'sbooks?

Parents' Association.

22. Can you talk to me about your experiences of the Parents' Association?
23. Are you aware of NCCA/NPC documents or publications or other supports (NPC/NCCA/IPPN/Education Centre) that support parental involvement?
24. Have you used these or any other documents or resources related to parental involvement?
25. Are there any other areas in which you feel NCCA/NPC etc. could provide parents with support? What would be the best way to provide this support to your group of parents?

Additional.

26. Do you have any further comments you feel may be relevant?

HSCL Topic Guide.

1. What does parental involvement/engagement mean toyou?
2. What are the parental activities in the school that support children's educational outcomes?
3. Are you aware of, or do you use, strategies or initiatives that support the role of parents in making a difference in their child's educational outcomes, for example, such as Parental Involvement Project(PIP)?
4. Are there strategies or initiatives that build partnerships between parents and schools?
5. When parents don't get involved in school, why do you think thatis?
6. Are you aware of NCCA/NPC documents or publications or resources that support parental involvement? Many of the NCCA resources are available in other languages (name languages); do these languages cater to the parents in this school? Have you used any other documents or resources related to parentalinvolvement?
7. Are there any other areas that you feel NCCA/NPC could provide parents with support in? What would be the best way to provide this support to your group of parents?
8. Are there any benefits to having parents involved? For the school? For the children? For the parents?
9. Are there any challenges to having parentsinvolved?
10. What have you learned from parents about what happens in their home learning environment? What are parents already doing that might be builtupon?
11. What supports do parents ask for or what supports do you think might be helpful for parents to support their home learning environment? What supports are already in place by theschool?
12. Do you think that due consideration is given to the diverse cultural experiences of parents and children by theschool?
13. What is already done and how might it be improved? Tell me about what you think of homework? Is itimportant?
14. Since becoming HSCL coordinator, have your opinions on homework evolved? Did you think differently about homeworkbefore?

15. From visiting homes and talking with parents, do you get any sense of how parents and children feel about doinghomework?
16. What supports, if any, would you like to see put in place to assist parents in helping their children withhomework?
17. Does your school have a homework policy? If you could write your own homework policy, what changes would youmake?
18. Do you chat with parents about homework? If you do talk with parents about homework, what issues tend to comeup?
19. Tell me a little about how you support the building of relationships between parents and theschool.
20. How does the HSCL coordinator assist parents to support their children'slearning?
    What are the challenges for parents? How can these challenges be overcome? What has worked well already?
21. What modes are there in place to communicate with parents? Can this beimproved?
22. Tell me about the school. Is it open long? Is it similar or different to the kind of school you went toyourself?
23. When either side struggles to communicate, what do you think are the factors involved?
24. Are there particular groups of parents that tend to be more or less involved with children's education, do you think? Are fathers and mothers equallyinvolved?
25. Have you ever had any training or other support in working with parents? (ITE / CPD)

Principals' Topic Guide

Parent–School Interaction.

1. What does parental involvement/ engagement mean to you?
2. What do you think is your role as Principal regarding parentalinvolvement?
3. How do you work in the school towards building relationships with parents?
    a. What has worked best?
    b. What are the challenges?
    c. What can be improved?
4. Are there opportunities for teachers, outside of formal parent-teacher meetings, to exchange ideas with parents on how they can work together to support children's learning?
    a. Prompt - tip-sheets, newsletters, NCCA/NPCmaterials

Parental Involvement.

5. Are there any benefits to having parents involved? For the school? For thechildren? For the parents?
6. Can parental involvement be detrimental or not constructive? If so, can you identify instances and why you feel them to be counterproductive
    a. What are appropriate boundaries/how do you setthem?
7. Are there ever language / cultural barriers (e.g. class, creed, race, family experience) between home and school?
    a. How do you address these?
    b. Do you have any contact with local community / cultural groups?

Parental Role.

8. Do you see a role for parents in supporting children's learning athome?
    a. What about at school?
9. What is the role of a parent in parent-teacher meetings?
10. Are there any school supports in place to help parents and children in their home learning environment?
    a. Could you elaborate further...
11. What is your understanding of how the school and home should work together?
    a. Have you discussed this with your staff?

Homework.

12. Tell me about what you think of homework. Is itimportant?
13. Do you think teachers need support in structuring homework, like guidelines or somethingsimilar?

Homework prompts.

    a. Does your school have a homeworkpolicy?
    b. If your school has a homework policy, are there elements of it that you would like to change?
    c. Do you discuss homework with parents?
    d. Do you provide information/training for parents on how they might support their child at homework time?
    e. If you had one piece of advice for parents about homework, what would that be?
    f. Do you think children should be given choices with regard to the content and time frame of their homework?
    g. Anything you would like to add?

Parental Supports.

14. What guidance do parents ask for to support home learning?
15. What further assistance do you think might be helpful for parents to support the home learning environment?
16. Are there specific supports for parents whose first language is not the language of the school? For example, does the school have a supply of children's books that reflect the children's life experience/children's first language? Does the school use dual language children's books?

Parents' Association.

17. Can you talk to me about your experiences of the Parents' Association?
18. Are you aware of NCCA/NPC documents or publications or other supports (NPC/NCCA/IPPN/Education Centre) that support parental involvement?
    a. Have you used these or any other documents or resources related to parental involvement?
19. Are there any other areas in which you feel NCCA/NPC etc. could provide parents with support? What would be the best way to provide this support to your group of parents?

Additional.

20. Do you have any further comments you feel may berelevant?

Parents' Topic Guide.

21. Do you feel as if your opinion and input is important to theteacher/Principal?

22. What makes it hard for parents to be involved in their children'seducation?

23. When either side struggles to communicate, what do you think are the factors involved?

24. If you were Principal, what changes would you make to encourage and support parentalinvolvement?

25. What is your view on homework? If you could make changes to it, what would they be?

26. Do you help your child with their homework, is it a positive experience? Can you tell me more about the experience ofit?

27. If you help your child with homework, what areas of homework do you helpwith?

28. Do you feel able to help with your child'shomework?

29. Does your school give guidance on how you might support your child in doing homework?

30. Does your school have a homework policy? If so, does the school explain to you what its policy on homeworkis?

31. Do you discuss your child's homework with the classroomteacher?

32. How do you see your role as a parent in your child's learning at home? What activities or things do you do that you feel shows engagement in your child's learning?

33. Tell me about the types of fun and leisure activities you do with your child. (For example, do you read stories to your child, pretend play together, play in other ways together, such as playing sports, exercising, make up dance routines, play with construction toys; practise a skill together, such as fixing a car, doing household tasks, feed/groom/walk/play with a pet, dressing up, personal grooming, gardening, cooking; compile shopping lists together, go shopping together; play board games/electronic games, watch TV together, sing songs/make music, tell stories/jokes, practise religious rituals, attend religious ceremonies, visit relatives, go to theme parks, go to the cinema, bring the baby for awalk...)

34. Are there any benefits to having parents involved? For the school? For thechildren? For the parents?

35. Are there any challenges to having parents involved? For the school? For the children? For theparents?

36. Do you drop your child to school or does someone else?

Do you have any opportunity for talking informally to school staff / teachers? If you had a concern or news to share what would youdo?

37. Do parents have enough opportunities to get information? Do parents have enough opportunities to giveinformation?

38. Does your school communicate with you about how it could support your child's learning at home? Does your school give you advice/guidelines about how you might support your child's learning athome?

39. Tell me a little about your relationship with the school? How is this relationship nurtured?

40. Any obstacles to building the relationship with the school? What works best in building therelationship?

41. Do you think the school Principal plays a role in building and nurturing relationships? Tell me a littlemore.

42. Have you ever seen any documents from the NCCA/ NPC on supporting your children's learning? Where did you see them? What other resources are you familiar with that help you to understand your child'seducation?

43. Has the school/teacher every sent any resources home to help you with any aspect of your child's education? If so, what and how useful did you find them? What type of resources do you prefer: videos, online courses, online workshops, booklets, tip sheets or face-to-face workshops/courses?

44. Tell me about the school. Is it similar or different to the kind of school you went to yourself?

45. Do you speak a language other than English at home? Is language a barrier to your communication with the school in any way? Is there anything the school does or could do to help with that? Are you involved with any cultural groups in the area? Do they link with theschool?

46. Are there any particular aspects of your child's schooling that you would like more information about or supportwith?

Children's Topic Guide.

Parent-School Interaction.

1. Who lives at home with you? Who minds you themost?
2. Who brings you to school and who collects you? Does X[4] ever come to the school for any other reason? What does X do when they're in theschool?
3. Do you like X coming to the school? Can you tell me a little bit aboutthat?
4. Do you think X liked school when they were your age? Do you think X likes coming to your school? Do you think X likes talking to yourteacher?
5. Have you ever seen a parent/guardian in the classroom working with thechildren? Tell me a bit about that.

Home Learning Environment.

6. What places do you like to go to with X?
7. Tell me about what you play at home? Who do you play with
8. Do you ever play with X? What do you like to play with X?
9. Do you have any storybooks/comics at home? What stories do you like? Does X ever get time to read a story to you?
10. Do you have tablets/Nintendo DS or anything like that? Are you allowed to play it every day or only at special times?

Homework.

11. Tell me about your homework...

PROMPTS Does teacher give you homework? – what do you have to do? Do you do your homework? Does it take a long time or a short time? Do you get homework every night? Do you think you should get homework at weekends? What do you think homework is for? What does it feel like when you are doing your homework? (Does your teacher let you bring home a teddy[5] for homework sometimes? Tell me about that.) Does your teacher look at your homework in school?

12. What do you do if your homework is too hard? Who is good at helping you with your homework...or do you do it on your own? How does X help you? Does your X talk to your teacher about yourhomework?
13. If you had a wish about homework what would itbe?

Communication.

14. If teacher had a message for X or wanted to tell them how you are getting on in school what would s/he do? What do you think about that? What would you do if you wereteacher/Principal?
15. In school you speak English and now you're learning Irish (adapt forGaelscoil). Does anybody speak Irish at home? Does anybody speak a different language at home? What language do you speak?
16. Who are the grown-ups you know the most? Are teachers the same as mammies / daddies / guardians or are theydifferent?
17. If I gave you a magic wand and said you could make a wish about your X doing more stuff to help you with your learning/school – what would youwish?
18. Would you like to draw me a picture of you doing yourhomework?

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[5] Teacher may send something other than a teddy. We will check with teachers ahead of time and refer specifically to relevant artefacts.

Part 2(B) language workshops

Children's topic guide - language workshop: Part 2 (B).

1. Has homework been different since our workshop? Tell me aboutit.
2. What do you like about doing homeworknow?
3. What do you not like about doing homeworknow?
4. If you were in charge, how would you choose to dohomework?
5. Tell me about reading stories with your parent / guardian. Do you read together more often or not? Is your parent / guardian better at reading stories or not?

Parents' Topic Guide – Language Workshop: Part 2 (B).

1. Did you try out any of the ideas shared at the language workshop for getting your child to talk during a shared reading experience, for example, beginning your question with "I wonder" or relating events of the story to your child'slife?

   How did that work out for you and your child?

2. Has homework been different since our workshop? Tell me aboutit.
3. What do you like about doing homework with your childnow?
4. What do you not like about doing homework with your childnow?
5. If you were designing homework, how would you choose to doit?
6. Tell me about reading stories with your child. Do you read together more often or not? Do you feel that you are better at reading stories or not?
7. Was there any moment of revelation about your child, - did you discover something about her /him that surprised you?
8. Do you think that your child's vocabulary improved at all as a result of trying out some of the ideas shared at the language workshop? Anyexamples?
9. Do you think that involvement in the language workshop and working with your child at home has supported your understanding of how to develop children's oral language or not?
10. Do you think that involvement in the language workshop supported you to develop your understanding of the new Primary Language Curriculum?
11. What would you change about the workshop for the nexttime?
12. What types of supports, if any, would you welcome in order to support you in helping your child to develop their oral language (teanga ó bhéal) through fun and interactive experiences at home?

Teachers' Topic Guide – Language Workshop: Part 2 (B).

Workshop 1.

1. How are you currently using homework to support children's oral language (teanga ó bhéal) development as presented in the new primary language curriculum?

Workshop 2.

2. What types of oral language (teanga ó bhéal) home-work activities are you now using?

3. How do these 'new' homework activities link to oral-language?

4. Did you try out any of the ideas shared at the language workshop in your class? How did that work out for you and the children in yourclass?

5. Do you think that children's oral language improved at all as a result of the ideas shared at the language work-shop? Any examples? Have you noticed any differences in the children of parents who attended the workshop in terms of oral language or engagement withliteracy?

6. Do you think that involvement in the language work-shop and working with their child at home has support-ed parents' understanding of how to develop children's oral language ornot?

7. Do you think that involvement in the language work-shop supported you to develop your understanding of the new Primary Language Curriculum and / or how to implementit?

8. Did the language workshop help you to structure home-work to support oral language development? Has your approach to setting homework changed atall?

9. What would you change about the workshop for the next time? What types of supports, if any, would you welcome in order to support you in planning more en-gaging, interactive and real-life homework activities with thechildren?

Appendix 3:
NVivo Codebook Nodes.

Nodes\\Phase 2 -
Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding)

Nodes\\Phase 3 -
Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

Name	Description
Benefits of PI	school, child parents
Boundaries	Boundaries
disadvantages of PI	
Benefits to PI	
Benefit to school	
Benefits for the child	
Benefits to parents	
Child related factors	References to child motivation, attitude, capacity, ability, experience, relationship with parent and school and teacher
Communication	References to communication between home and school to include dissemination of information i.e. newsletter, notes home, texts, website, emails, social media, phone calls, face- to-face communication, apps, school gate, children's journals
parent teacher meetings, other opportunities	parent teacher meetings, IEP meetings, school yard, other opportunities to meet and communicate

Name	Description
Cultural Capital	References to past-times, networks, participation in society including school, community, books, museums, library
Home Learning Environment	How do school support the home learning environment? What can parents do in the home to promote learning?
Deficit thinking	How can we engage with the concept of HLE appropriately and avoid culturally bias or deficit assumptions about children and families
Deficit thinking v Strengths Based Approach	How can we engage with the concept of HLE appropriately and avoid culturally bias or deficit assumptions about children and families
IT usage	References to use of iPads, gaming, computers etc for either home learning or play
Location of Homework	Where is homework is done in home, other locations such as creche, homework etc
Parent Support - home	What parents do at home to help their children's learning
Parental Attitude to school	References to parents positive or negative attitudes toward school
Personnel involved in homework other than parents	Family member, childcare worker, homework club, teacher

Name	Description
School Support for HLE	How do schools support learn from and build on the HLE?
Homework	How is homework designed to promote partnership between schools, children and parents?
Amount given	References to the types and amounts of homework given
Children's attitude to homework	References to like/dislike of homework or other views expressed by children
High input	Parents spending a lot of time inputting to homework
Low Input	References to low levels of input
Positive reasons why	References included negative impact on learning, perception of homework, child's independence.
Parental attitude to homework	Parents' attitude to homework, positive and negative
Promote Partnership	How is homework designed to promote partnership between schools, children and parents?
SEN Disability	
structuring homework supports	reference to structuring homework teacher perspective; parental views on supports for homework
Teacher expectations	Teachers' expectations of homework being done, including expectations of parents' role herein.
Time taken	References to the time it takes for children to complete homework

Name	Description
NCCA Resources	What NCCA resources are being used to support parents? Are they useful? If not being used, why?
NPC	Anything to do with the National Parents Council
Parents Association	Anything related to the role of the Parents Association
Political and societal considerations	Impact of policy, politics and society - exo- and macro-system
Potential Barriers to Parental Involvement	What are the barriers to parental involvement - SEN, SES, Cultural, Linguistic, Religious differences between home and school, gender, cultural capital, parental literacy
Child as mediator	References to child as mediator between home and school, to include cultural nuances bi-directionally
Cultural Differences	References to cultural differences between home and school.
Garda Vetting	other obstacles to parental involvement in school to include garda vetting
Gender	References gender as a barrier
Linguistic factors	References to linguistic differences between home and school, parents level of English, child as translator, child's level of English
Parental capacity	Ability to help or get involved with learning
Parental Literacy levels	
Parental stress levels	References to poverty, alcohol, drug related problems and other mental health stressors

Name	Description
Time or Work	References to time or lack of or work, job in relation to ability to get involved/more involved
Parents' own experiences of school	Parents' own experiences of school
Personal factors	Personality etc
positive influences on parental involvement	parental knowledge, influences that support parental involvement
Religion	References to religion as a barrier
Resources	Resources available or unavailable from outside agencies
SEN or Disability	Parent or child disability, parent or child perception
Socio economic disadvantage	Poverty, references to money as a barrier,
Relationships	References to interpersonal relationships
Child and home school liaison officer	Anything to do with the relationship between a child and a home school liaison officer in DEIS schools.
Child and Parent	
Child and teacher	
Other	to include reference to multiple relationships (parent, teacher and child) Other professional relationships. Other relatives such as grandparents etc

Name	Description
Parent and home school liaison officer	Anything to do with the relationship between the home school liaison officer and a parent/parents.
Parent and Principal	
Parent and teacher	
Parents to parents	Anything to do with parental networks and relationships in between parents.
school and parents	parent association, school and parent activities
Teacher and Principal	
Role of Parents	References to the role of parents in their child's learning at home and in school
Active Partnership	How do parents actively contribute to partnership with school
Definitions of parental involvement	How do we define Parental involvement. engagement and partnership?
Hands off approach to homework	References to parents adopting a hands-off approach to supporting their children's homework
Parental Activities	What types of parental activities make a difference to educational outcomes
parental beliefs	parental beliefs about their child to include defensiveness or denial about child experiencing difficulties in school, SLD

Name	Description
Role of Schools	How can schools support parents involvement in their child's learning?
Attitudes, Relation-ships and Values	What is the role of same?
School Leadership	What is the role of school leadership in supporting parental involvement?
School support for PI	How does school support parents' involvement in their child's educational journey?
Structural and contextual supports for PI	What structural and contextual supports are required to support parents?
Strategies to over-come barrier to PI	Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children's Learning
Engagement with commu-nity	
Home school liaison	
strategies to encourage PI	
Technology	Use of technology to support PI

Appendix 4: presentation for Language Workshops

Slide 1

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS

MARINO

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

*An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin*

**LANGUAGE SEMINAR
NCCA/NPC RESEARCH PROJECT**

FEBRUARY 2019

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Slide 2

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS

MARINO

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

*An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin*

AIMS OF SEMINAR

- Identify what homework children currently do

- Introduce and discuss enjoyable ideas for homework to improve children's oral language development in line with the learning outcomes of the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015)

- Plan **two** of these enjoyable ideas with parents (twenty minutes a night for a two-week period)

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Slide 3

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS

MARINO

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

*An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin*

WHAT HOMEWORK DOES YOUR CHILD GET AT THE MOMENT?

- Spellings?
- Sums?
- Reading?
- Sentences?
- Other?

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Slide 4

There are three elements of Oral language

○ Developing Communicative Relationships through Language (Learning outcomes 1-3)

○ Understanding the content and structure of language (Learning outcomes 4-7)

○ Exploring and Using Language (Learning outcomes 8-14)

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Slide 5

THERE ARE 14 ORAL LANGUAGE LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Engagement, listening and attention
2. & 3. Social conventions and awareness of others (e.g. eye contact, tone)
4. Sentence structure and grammar
5. & 6. Acquisition and use of vocabulary
7. Demonstration of understanding
8. & 9. Requests and questions
10. Categorisation (Beef is meat, apples are fruit…)
11. Retelling and elaboration
12. Playful and creative use of language (word play, puns, nonsense language)
13. Information giving, explanation and justification
14. Description, prediction and reflection

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Slide 6

EACH LEARNING OUTCOME BEGINS AS FOLLOWS:

○ "Through appropriately playful learning experiences, children should be able to …"

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Slide 7

RETHINKING HOMEWORK

- *Homework can have both positive and negative effects on children's learning and family relationships depending on how it is structured (Marzano and Pickering, 2007; Center for Public Education, 2007, Cooper et al., 2006).*

- *Dialogue between parents and teachers about homework could give clarity to expectations around homework and might lead to a shared vision about the purpose of homework (Rudman, 2014).*

- What do you think of homework? Would you/How would you like to see homework done differently?

- Would you like more or less involvement in homework?

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Slide 8

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOMEWORK BASED ON DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S ORAL LANGUAGE

- **Dialogic story-reading.**

  Parents read and discuss two books with their child over a two week period.

- **Child reporter with a microphone**

  Child reports on something each day, e.g. the weather, a favourite   book, a favourite TV programme, a favourite family activity, tells a   joke

- **Parent and child play a game from a suite of suggested activities**

- **Child conducts an interview** with a friend, parent, grand-parent, aunt, uncle, or neighbour on a topic chosen by the child and discussed in school with the teacher

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Slide 9

DO YOU HAVE SOME ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS?

- Songs and rhymes on cd in the car…

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Slide 10

DIALOGIC STORY-READING

- Parents read and talk about a story with their child for approximately ten minutes a night
- The same story is focused upon for four nights, Monday to Friday.
- The aim of dialogic story-reading is that by the end of the week the child takes control and tells you the story in her/his own words
- Parents try some dialogic story-reading strategies to encourage their child to talk about the story
- Parents might decide to use some ideas from the tip-sheet accompanying the story

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Slide 11

Dialogic story reading: Oral language strategies to encourage dialogue

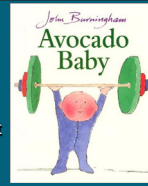|		
1.	Setting the scene	E.g. I wonder what this is about .... Look at author, illustrator.....
2.	Checking the child is 'with you'.	E.g. It's a beautiful blue sky and there are no cl----.
3.	Connecting to life experience	E.g. There's a cat. Do you have a cat?
4.	Connecting picture to text.	E.g. It says "the clown was unhappy". There he is in the picture looking a bit sad all right....
5.	Eliciting comments by questions, especially open-ended questions	E.g. I wonder.......
6.	Discussing new words, phrases	E.g. He's pulling my leg – what does that mean? Another word for 'fib'?
7.	Supporting, echoing, sustaining	E.g. You're dead right! Oh I see, and did he ......?
8.	Listen to what your child says and build on that.	E.g.You think there might be a dinosaur in the story as well? Mmm. There could be. Why do you think that?
9.	Pause to allow your child to offer a comment.	
10.	Recasting	E.g. Child: He thrun the ball Adult: Did he? He threw the ball?
11.	Checking / Clarifying	E.g. I see...do you mean...?
12.	Repeating	E.g. He huffed and he puffed and he...
13.	Summarising	E.g. So far Goldilocks has broken the chairs, eaten the porridge, slept in the beds......
14.	Predicting	E.g. I wonder what will happen?
15.	Speculating	E.g. I wonder if the wolf will become a good wolf. He might change and.....
16.	Projecting	E.g. What would you do if you were Red Riding Hood?
17.	Informing, explaining	E.g. A pumpkin? It's a vegetable. You can eat it. It's round and orange. It grows in the ground.

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Dirty Bertie

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Bertie was called Dirty Bertie…
   I wonder how many bad habits Bertie had…
   I wonder why Bertie had so many bad habits…
   I wonder which habit of Bertie's was the worst…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   When you were small did you ever do any of the things that Bertie did?
   What would you do if you saw somebody going for a wee in their garden?
   Did you ever eat something that fell on the floor? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as habits, shout, slugs, lick, hunting.
   Another word for shout is roar, bellow, holler…
   Another word for hunting is tracking down, searching for, looking for, pursuing…
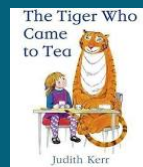
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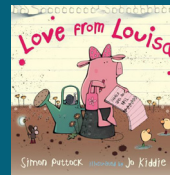
Avocado Baby

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why the whole Hargrave family was weak…
   I wonder why it is often hard to feed a young baby…
   I wonder if it is true that avocados make you strong…
   I wonder why the author didn't tell us if the baby was a boy or a girl…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever eat an avocado? What did you think of it?
   What would you do if your baby brother or sister wouldn't eat their food?
   What food makes you strong?
   Did you ever see a baby do something like the avocado baby?

6. Discuss word meanings such as avocado, wrench, wailed, notice, Beware, furniture, bullies, nasty, push-chair, mashed, amazing.
   Another word for 'wrench' is pull strongly or tug or yank.
   Another word for 'wailed' is cried.
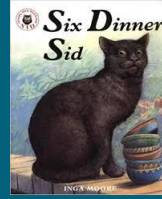
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The Tiger Who Came to Tea

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Sophie and her mammy were not scared of the tiger…
   I wonder why the tiger did not eat Sophie and her Mammy…
   I wonder would it be safe to let a tiger come to tea…
   I wonder why the tiger never came to tea again…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Do you think your mam would allow a tiger come to tea in your house?
   What food would you feed a tiger if he came to tea?
   What do you think your neighbours would do if they saw a tiger going into your house?
   Did you ever go to a café or a restaurant for your tea?

6. Discuss word meanings such as grocer, buns, supper, saucepans, cupboard, café, street lamps,
   Another word for supper is tea. Another word for grocer is shop-keeper
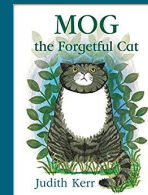
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Love from Louisa

1 Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Louisa kept writing letters to Farmer Giles
   I wonder are all pigs tidy like Louisa.....
   I wonder why Louisa didn't like the city
   I wonder was Farmer Giles happy to hear that Louisa was coming back

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever get a letter from somebody?
   Do you like your house to be tidy? Why?
   Do you think Louisa should have helped to tidy up?

6. Discuss word meanings such as impressed, pigsty, disgruntled, admiring, handiwork, confounded, muttered, dreary, beauty parlour, sulked, hitched, smoggy,
   Another word for muttered is ….. Another word for dreary is …..

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Six Dinner Sid

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.
2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Sid liked to live in six different houses…
   I wonder why the neighbours on Aristotle street didn't want Sid to eat six dinners…
   I wonder what the vet thought was going on when he realised that he had treated the same cat six times?

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever eat more than one dinner in a day?
   What would you do if your cat was being fed by lots of different families on your road?
   Did you ever visit the vet's surgery? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as swanky, smooched, naughty, appointment, suspicious, furious,
   Another word for 'swanky' is glamorous, stylish, elegant, upmarket.

NCCA/NPC Research Project, Marino
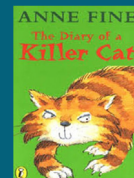Institute of Education January 2019   16

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Mog the Forgetful Cat

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were always saying "Bother that cat"…
   I wonder why Debbie dreamed that a tiger was going to eat her…
   I wonder do cats have memories like people…
   I wonder was Mog really a remarkable cat…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever see a cat getting chased by a dog?
   Do you think Mog is an unusual cat or does she just act like all cats?
   Do you think cats are good for guarding the house?

6. Discuss word meanings such as forgetful, meowed, cat flap, remarkable, medal, fault, milkman, dark thoughts, treat.
   What does 'Bother that cat' mean?
   Another word for 'remarkable' is extraordinary or amazing.

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The Diary of a Killer Cat

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Ellie's family put the dead rabbit back in its hutch in their neighbour's garden…
   I wonder why Ellie's dad altered the cat flap so Tuffy could go out but couldn't get into the house…
   I wonder why Tuffy was afraid to go to the vet's clinic…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever do something bad and then cover your tracks like Ellie's dad did?
   Did you ever get blamed for something you didn't do, like Tuffy?
   Did you ever visit the vet's surgery? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as expression, glowering, cowering, precious, deceitful, thoughtful, hero, extraordinary, prise, dunked, plonked, burglar, sniffles
   'Woe betide you' means 'You'll be in trouble if…
   For example, - "Woe betide you if start a row with your brother…
                                                                              18

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Dirty Bertie – FAME!

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.
2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Bertie wanted to be on TV…
   I wonder why Bertie blushed and felt embarrassed…
   I wonder why Bertie didn't leave the audition when he found out what he had to do…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever appear on TV?
   What would you do if you were in Bertie's situation?
   Do you ever feel embarrassed? Will I tell you about a time I felt a bit embarrassed…

6. Discuss word meanings such as plodded, audition, advert, impressions, frowned, expression, envy, warpath, autograph, gulped, mumbled.

   If you are 'on the warpath', it means that you are very annoyed or furious or very angry, just like somebody going into a battle.

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Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

GAMES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES CAN BE PLAYED ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL, AT MEAL TIMES, ON A CAR JOURNEY…

➤ **Example 1**: Invent stories about people who live in houses that you pass. What do they do for work? Favourite food? Do they snore? Are they afraid of spiders?

➤ **Example 2**: Build a story with another person at home. Retell in school

➤ **Example 3**: Pick a colour and challenge your child to tell you 20 items that are this colour, eg. blue sky, blue eyes, blue sea, blue mould, bluebells…

➤ **Reporter activity**: Use home-made microphones with household roll holder and cotton wool with an onion net wrapped around it… Then, report on the weather, a book review, TV programme review, song or music review, report on a family activity, tell a joke…

➤ **Interview** with a friend, aunt etc. Pick something that is interesting to the child and unusual. Eg. an aunt who has an unusual job, a neighbour who is famous…

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INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS ★
MARINO
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

WHEN THE HOMEWORK IS DONE -

➤ Parents let the teacher know what homework was done

➤ Teacher will review the homework with children in pairs and then in plenary session every day. (This may be part of an oral language lesson)

➤ Teachers and parents write a comment in a journal every day/night about their experience of the homework (anything from one sentence onwards). This journal is anonymous and will be collected as data by researchers

➤ Parents participate in a focus group discussion about the process on **Thursday February 28th at 9am**

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Appendix 5: Dialogic Story-Reading Strategies to Support Oral Language Development

1. Setting the scene	E.g. I wonder what this is about ....Look at author, illustrator.....
2. Checking the child is 'with you'.	E.g. It's a beautiful blue sky and there are no cl----.
3. Connecting to life experience	E.g. There's a cat. Do you have a cat?
4. Connecting picture to text.	E.g. It says "the clown was unhappy". There he is in the picture looking a bit sad all right....
5. Eliciting comments by questions, especially open-ended questions	E.g. I wonder.......
6. Discussing new words, phrases	E.g. He's pulling my leg – what does that mean? Another word for 'fib'?
7. Supporting, echoing, sustaining	E.g. You're dead right! Oh I see, and did he......?
8. Listen to what your child says and build on that.	E.g. You think there might be a dinosaur in the story as well? Mmm. There could be. Why do you think that?
9. Pause to allow your child to offer a comment.	

10.Recasting	E.g. Child: He thrun the ball Adult: Did he? He threw the ball?
11. Checking / Clarifying	E.g. I see...do you mean...?
12. Repeating	E.g. He huffed and he puffed and he...
13. Summarising	E.g. So far Goldilocks has broken the chairs, eaten the porridge, slept in the beds......
14. Predicting	E.g. I wonder what will happen?
15. Speculating	E.g. I wonder if the wolf will become a good wolf. He might change and.....
16. Projecting	E.g. What would you do if you were Red Riding Hood?
17. Informing, explaining	E.g. A pumpkin? It's a vegetable. You can eat it. It's round and orange. It grows in the ground.
18. Draw attention to 'reading' by tracking	E.g. Those are the words. Will I read what it says?

(Kiely, 2017).

Appendix 6: Children's Books used for Alternative Homework

Avocado Baby
by John Burningham (Junior and Senior Infants)

Dirty Bertie by David Roberts (Junior Infants)

Six Dinner Sid by Inga Moore (Senior Infants – Second Class)

Love from Louisa by Simon Puttock
(Senior Infants – Second Class)

The Tiger Who Came to Tea by Judith Kerr
(Junior Infants – Second Class)

Mog the Forgetful Cat
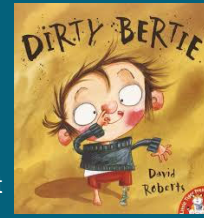by Judith Kerr (Junior Infants – Second Class)

Diary of a Killer Cat by Anne Fine (Second Class upwards)

Dirty Bertie (Fame)
by Alan Mc Donald (Second Class upwards)

Appendix 7: Tip-sheets used for Language Workshop

Dirty Bertie

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
    I wonder why Bertie was called Dirty Bertie…
    I wonder how many bad habits Bertie had…
    I wonder why Bertie had so many bad habits…
    I wonder which habit of Bertie's was the worst…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
    When you were small did you ever do any of the things that Bertie did?
    What would you do if you saw somebody going for a wee in their garden?
    Did you ever eat something that fell on the floor? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as habits, shout, slugs, lick, hunting.
    Another word for shout is roar, bellow, holler…
    Another word for hunting is tracking down, searching for, looking for, pursuing…
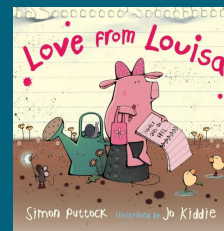
Avocado Baby

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
    I wonder why the whole Hargrave family was weak…
    I wonder why it is often hard to feed a young baby…
    I wonder if it is true that avocados make you strong…
    I wonder why the author didn't tell us if the baby was a boy or a girl…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
    Did you ever eat an avocado? What did you think of it?
    What would you do if your baby brother or sister wouldn't eat their food?
    What food makes you strong?
    Did you ever see a baby do something like the avocado baby?

6. Discuss word meanings such as avocado, wrench, wailed, notice, Beware, furniture, bullies, nasty, push-chair, mashed, amazing.
    Another word for 'wrench' is pull strongly or tug or yank.
    Another word for 'wailed' is cried.

The Tiger Who Came to Tea

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Sophie and her mammy were not scared of the tiger…
   I wonder why the tiger did not eat Sophie and her Mammy…
   I wonder would it be safe to let a tiger come to tea…
   I wonder why the tiger never came to tea again…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Do you think your mam would allow a tiger come to tea in your house?
   What food would you feed a tiger if he came to tea?
   What do you think your neighbours would do if they saw a tiger going into your house?
   Did you ever go to a café or a restaurant for your tea?

6. Discuss word meanings such as grocer, buns, supper, saucepans, cupboard, café, street lamps,
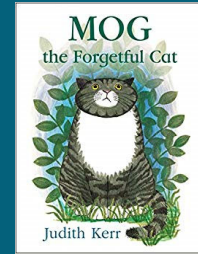   Another word for supper is tea. Another word for grocer is shop-keeper

Love from Louisa

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Louisa kept writing letters to Farmer Giles
   I wonder are all pigs tidy like Louisa.....
   I wonder why Louisa didn't like the city
   I wonder was Farmer Giles happy to hear that Louisa was coming back

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever get a letter from somebody?
   Do you like your house to be tidy? Why?
   Do you think Louisa should have helped to tidy up?

6. Discuss word meanings such as impressed, pigsty, disgruntled, admiring, handiwork, confounded, muttered, dreary, beauty parlour, sulked, hitched, smoggy,
   Another word for muttered is ….. Another word for dreary is …..
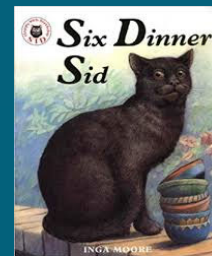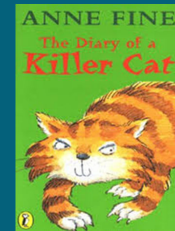
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Mog the Forgetful Cat

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were always saying "Bother that cat"…
   I wonder why Debbie dreamed that a tiger was going to eat her…
   I wonder do cats have memories like people…
   I wonder was Mog really a remarkable cat…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever see a cat getting chased by a dog?
   Do you think Mog is an unusual cat or does she just act like all cats?
   Do you think cats are good for guarding the house?

6. Discuss word meanings such as forgetful, meowed, cat flap, remarkable, medal, fault, milkman, dark thoughts, treat.
   What does 'Bother that cat' mean?
   Another word for 'remarkable' is extraordinary or amazing.

Six Dinner Sid

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.
2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Sid liked to live in six different houses…
   I wonder why the neighbours on Aristotle street didn't want Sid to eat six dinners…
   I wonder what the vet thought was going on when he realised that he had treated the same cat six times?

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever eat more than one dinner in a day?
   What would you do if your cat was being fed by lots of different families on your road?
   Did you ever visit the vet's surgery? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as swanky, smooched, naughty, appointment, suspicious, furious,
   Another word for 'swanky' is glamorous, stylish, elegant, upmarket.

The Diary of a Killer Cat

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Ellie's family put the dead rabbit back in its hutch in their neighbour's garden…
   I wonder why Ellie's dad altered the cat flap so Tuffy could go out but couldn't get into the house…
   I wonder why Tuffy was afraid to go to the vet's clinic…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever do something bad and then cover your tracks like Ellie's dad did?
   Did you ever get blamed for something you didn't do, like Tuffy?
   Did you ever visit the vet's surgery? Tell me about it…

6. Discuss word meanings such as expression, glowering, cowering, precious, deceitful, thoughtful, hero, extraordinary, prise, dunked, plonked, burglar, sniffles
   'Woe betide you' means 'You'll be in trouble if…
   For example, - "Woe betide you if start a row with your brother…

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Dirty Bertie – FAME!

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.
2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder why Bertie wanted to be on TV…
   I wonder why Bertie blushed and felt embarrassed…
   I wonder why Bertie didn't leave the audition when he found out what he had to do…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever appear on TV?
   What would you do if you were in Bertie's situation?
   Do you ever feel embarrassed? Will I tell you about a time I felt a bit embarrassed…

6. Discuss word meanings such as plodded, audition, advert, impressions, frowned, expression, envy, warpath, autograph, gulped, mumbled.

   If you are 'on the warpath', it means that you are very annoyed or furious or very angry, just like somebody going into a battle.
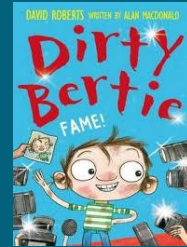
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Dirty Bertie – FISHY!

1.   Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2.   Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3.   Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4.   As you read the story, discuss questions like –
      I wonder why Bertie's dad didn't want to bring Bertie fishing with him…
      I wonder why Nick insisted that Bertie eat half the sandwich…
      I wonder did Bertie's dad forgive Bertie when he caught the big fish…

5.   Relate events to the child's life -
      Did you ever go fishing or any sort of outing, with somebody in your family?
      Did you ever get into trouble for playing a trick?
      Do you think Bertie is nice to other boys in his school? What makes you think that?

6.   Discuss word meanings such as groaned, grumbled, 'cast a line', shudder, shrugged, measly, touchy, claim, anxious, simpered, bragged, scoffed, gnome, gloat

7.   If you are 'touchy', it means it is easy to upset you or you are over-sensitive or it is easy to offend you.

Dirty Bertie – Outlaw!

1.   Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2.   Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3.   Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4.   As you read the story, discuss questions like –
      I wonder why Bertie wasn't bored and yawning this time during teacher's story...
      I wonder why the other school children wouldn't take Bertie seriously…
      I wonder what

5.   Relate events to the child's life –
      Did you ever play a Robin Hood game? What games do you play with your friends
      Bertie is not allowed to eat sweets at school. Do you think that is a good school rule? Are you allowed to eat sweets in school?
      Were you pleased that Bertie got found out in the end with the blue dye around his mouth? Did you ever get caught out like that?

6.   Discuss word meanings such as ambush, victim, outlaw, signal, surrender, cowardly, jeered, shrugged, disguise, triumph, howled, complicated, vegetarian, filed,

Appendix 8: Activities and Games to Promote Oral Language in the home

- Interviewing a member of the family or neighbour

- Reporter game – a child prepares a weather report, news report, book review, TV review, cookery review etc for classmates and reports to them in school.

- Practise joke-telling at home. Tell the joke in school next day.

- Synonyms game. Another word for glasses is spectacles...

- Pick the odd one out

- Yes, No game (also called 20 questions) – a series of questions are devised but the answer can only be 'YES' or 'NO'.

- Name as many objects that you can think of that are blue, green, red...(helpmykidlearn.ie)

- Story building where each participant contributes a line to the story.

- Sound game called - What was that? – name all the sounds you can hear (helpmykidlearn.ie)

- Eat the alphabet. "I'm so hungry I could eat an apple. I'm so hungry I could eat an apple and a banana. I'm so hungry I could eat an apple, a banana and a cake. I'm so hungry... (helpmykidlearn.ie)

- Kim's game (Spot what item is missing when removed from a group of items)

- Invent stories about people in houses that you pass. What do you think they do for work? What's their favourite food? Where do they go on holidays? Do they have hobbies? Do they snore? (helpmykidlearn.ie).

- Simple Maths game – count the coloured cars on a trip. 2 points for a truck, 3 for a tractor, 5 for a bus etc (helpmykidlearn.ie).

- Don't say YES or NO. One person asks the other a question to which 'yes' or 'no' is the obvious answer. For example, Do you live in a house? The other person must answer the question without saying 'yes' or 'no'. If they make a mistake and say 'yes' or 'no', they're out and must ask become the questioner (helpmykidlearn.ie).

Appendix 9: Words of Encouragement

Maith thú!
Well done!

Lean ar aghaidh!
Keep going!

Ar fheabhas!
Fantastic!

Tá an-iarracht á déanamh agat!
You're making a great effort!

Tá ag éirí go maith leat!
You aredoing well!

Tá mébródúilasat!
I'm proud of you!

Thaitin sé sin liom!
I enjoyed that!

Rinne tú do dhícheall!
You did your best!

Tá na focail Ghaeilge sin ar eolas agat!
You know all those Irish words!

Appendix 10: Overview of Homework Approaches

Type of homework	Description	School	School personnel's views	Parents' views	Children's views
Type 1 Conventional homework					
Revision and repetition Rote learning	- Reading - Writing - Spelling/Sentences - Maths - Irish	Schools 1, 2, 3 and 5	Generally positive if the right amount is set but differences of opinion exist	Very mixed and strong opinions for or against. Generally has to be set in moderation.	Mixed. Those who find it easy like it, those who find it difficult do not.
Type 2 'New'/alternative academic homework					
Mathletics					No opinions stated
Digitally based homework	Magic Maths www.irishhomework.ie Mathletics	Schools 2 and 5		Very mixed.	No opinions stated
Project based homework	Students either select or a given a topic to research and present in one of several options for presentation, including podcasts,	Schools 2 and 5	School 2: Generally mixed with pros and cons considered carefully.	School 2: Very mixed and strong opinions for and against.	Very mixed.
	powerpoint presentations, posters.		School 5: Generally	School 5: Very positive	
French for Life Programme		School 3			

Type 3 – Informal types of homework	Description	School	School personnel's views	Parents' views	Children's views
Teddy Bear homework	A teddy bear goes around the class so that each child gets a turn to bring it home for the week or over a weekend. The child's family then has to bring the teddy on an outing or engage in some family activity with the teddy bear and record it through pictures, a journal or similar and report back to theclass.	Schools 1	Mixed. Principal in School 1 in favour of it, some teachers less convinced	Very positive	Positive where opinions stated
Mindful Mondays		School 2	Principal not convinced. Teachers did not voice strong opinions.	Very mixed where opinions stated. Generally across school	
Physical activity		Schools 1, 2, 3 and 5 at various points	Generally positive. Especially personnel in School 3 identified the need for this.	No real opinions stated specifically on physical activity. Schools 2 and 4: parents value anything play based, outdoors and working on children's non- academic skills.	Very positive where opinion stated.
Outdoor play – activities		Schools 1, 2 and 5		No real opinions stated specifically on physical activity. Schools 2 and 4: parents value anything play based, outdoors and working on children's non- academic skills.	Very positive, especially in School 1

Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning during the primary school years

**Part 2 (A)
Case Studies & 2 (B)
Oral Language Workshops**

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