10: ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

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10: ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Context:

In 1980 the *White Paper on Educational Development* addressed in some detail the needs of the educationally disadvantaged and particularly those living in deprived areas:

> **Few people doubt that many children who grow up in such areas are at a disadvantage. The conclusion that special provision would have to be made for those children led to the identification of the principle that equality of educational opportunity implied unequal treatment of children within an educational system.**

(p. 31)

One of the objectives set out in the *Education Act 1998* is:" to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education". (Section 6 pr.1)

There has been a commitment to reducing and preventing educational disadvantage and, in particular, early school leaving within the Irish education system in recent years. A substantial number of initiatives have been introduced and developed throughout the 1990s to address the problem of educational disadvantage in Ireland.

School Development Planning is a valuable process for every school. However, because of the variety and multiplicity of factors which impinge on the day to day teaching and learning environment in schools serving disadvantaged communities, school development planning can be particularly useful in providing a cohesive whole school approach—establishing priorities for the school and setting realistic targets.

Purpose:

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide schools with:

 ♦ a greater understanding of the complex nature of educational disadvantage (Section I)

 ♦ guidance on co-operative planning within the context of educational disadvantage (Sections 2 and 3)

 ♦ a comprehensive list of references (Section 4)

I. Complex Nature of Educational Disadvantage

Defining Educational Disadvantage

Critical to effective school planning in this context is that all those involved have some understanding of what is meant by the term "educational disadvantage". Trying to define educational disadvantage is both complex and problematic. One has to take account of the particular conditions and interrelated factors which determine its nature. The definition should be neither so broad as to have little meaningful and practical application for teachers, nor so narrow as to exclude people or conditions that can validly be included under its umbrella.

In *Disadvantage, Learning and Young People* (Crooks, T. and Stokes, D., eds. 1987), a number of contributors offer definitions of the term educational disadvantage:

> Hannan suggests that: "educational disadvantage is leaving school early, without any qualifications or…having failed the junior cycle examinations, or …with disabling educational problems and minimal chances of employment" (pp.47-48).

> Corcoran defines it as: "leaving the education system with few or no qualifications" (p.54).

> Crooks says that: "Disadvantage can be seen as inability to take advantage of opportunities and services and in an educational sense young people are considered disadvantaged who leave school at or near minimum school-leaving age (15) with no 'effective' formal qualifications" (p.66).

According to Mortimore and Blackstone (*Disadvantage and Education*, 1982):

> "Educational disadvantage means the denial of equal access to educational opportunities, the tendency to leave education at the first opportunity, and the hindrance of achievement by social and environmental factors".

This last definition is the most inclusive of all. It implies that students in all educational settings may experience educational disadvantage. Disadvantage may arise from a number of issues and there are a number of contributing and inter-related factors in dealing with it.

Academic Issues:

- ♦ Giftedness
- ♦ Special needs
- ♦ Literacy and numeracy difficulties
- ♦ Underachievement

Social/Environmental/Personal Issues:

- ♦ Poverty, Housing, Health, Unemployment, Dysfunctional families
- ♦ Issues affecting minority groupings including refugees, asylum seekers and other non-nationals for whom English is not the mother tongue
- ♦ Substance abuse, pregnancy
- ♦ Unsupportive home back-grounds-dysfunctional families
- ♦ Single parent families

Psychological/Behavioural Issues:

- ♦ Child sexual abuse
- ♦ Non-attendance
- ♦ Bereavement
- ♦ Behavioural and emotional difficulties

Contributing and Inter-related Factors

Administration Services

Organisation:
Formal vs. Informal

B.O.M./V.E.C.

Teachers

Employment Opportunities

Outside Agencies/ Supports

Curriculum Provision

EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Resources

Parents/ Community

Students

D.E.S

Pastoral needs/ Support structures
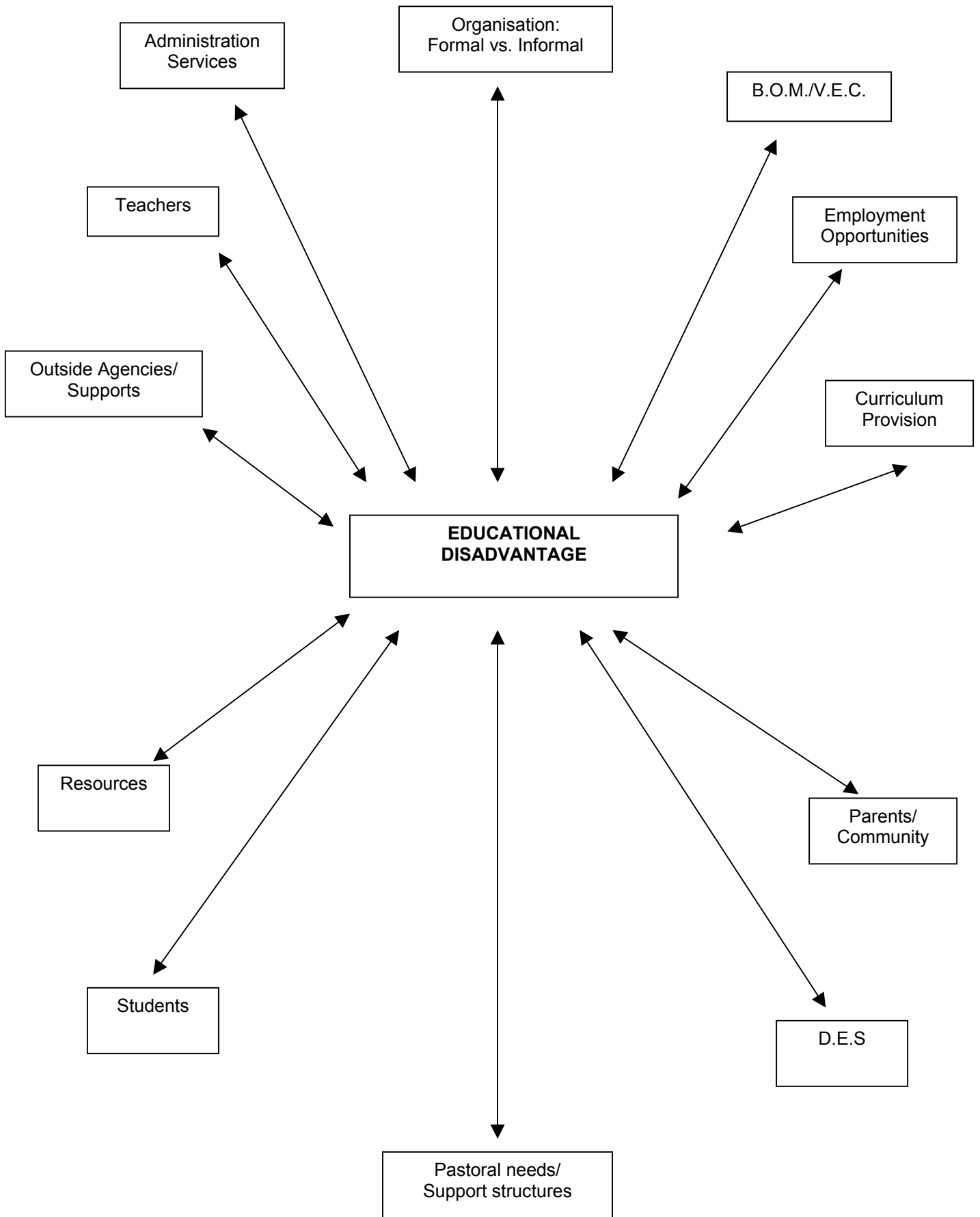
Social disadvantage both limits access to educational opportunities and reduces the ability of children to benefit from the schooling they do get. It is not confined to inner cities, but is also present in suburbs, smaller towns and rural areas. What must be recognised is that teaching in schools serving socially disadvantaged communities requires a particular set of attitudes, competencies and skills. Teachers' attention needs to be drawn to the complex nature of disadvantage, so the school development plan in a disadvantaged setting needs to be drawn up with appropriate attention to the needs of both staff and students. A school is a complex organisation. When change is being effected through the planning process, it is necessary to consider the impact of a change on all parts of the organisation. Each part is dependent upon all others and all parts react to changes in any other part.

While schools have a crucial role to play in dealing with the problems of educational disadvantage, it must now be recognised that other institutions and agencies, both statutory and voluntary, are equally important in addressing this issue, as the diagram on the previous page seeks to indicate.

School Culture

We can view schools in two dimensions:

1. Formal Dimension: which includes aspects such as policies and rules, and school size.

2. Informal Dimension: which is traditionally known as the hidden curriculum.

Culture embraces both these dimensions. It is one of the most complex and important concepts in education. It includes attitudes and beliefs, school norms and relationships, both within the school and between the school and community. Culture describes how things are and it helps to define a reality for those within a social organisation. It can be described as:

- ♦ "difficult to define but … best thought of as procedures, values and expectations that guide people's behaviour within an organisation" (Hargreaves and Hopkins, *The Empowered School*, 1991)

- ♦ having "a major influence on the quality of opportunities that the school provides for each child" (Dalin, *Changing the School Culture,* 1993).

- ♦ most clearly "seen" in the way people relate to and work together; the management of the schools' structures, systems and physical environment; and the extent to which there is a learning focus for both pupils and adults (Prosser, *School Culture*, 1999).

- ♦ "an abstraction used to label a variety of appearances, intensities and effects in a group. It develops around tasks, challenges and issues" (Tuohy, *The Inner World of Teaching*, 1999).

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy working group states:

> **Educational disadvantage is considered to result from discontinuities between the school and non-school experiences of children.** This discontinuity makes the initial transition from home to school difficult and leads, throughout the school years, to a situation in which the academic performance of disadvantaged children is consistently lower than that of other children. Such discontinuity occurs for cultural and socio-economic reasons and involves not only the child's inability to cope with school but also the school's inability to cope with the needs of the disadvantaged child.

The culture of a school is influenced by its own history, context, the people working in it, and the many pupils in the school and their social class background. Thrupp (1997) cited in

Prosser (*School Culture*, 1999) states that the social mix of the school plays a major role in how it functions, in large part because of the cumulative effect of the reference group processes of the pupils. In essence, the very pupils who attend the school, flavour it in a particular way, through their own pupil culture. Smyth (*Do Schools Differ*, 1999) suggests that the social context of the school has an additional effect on pupil outcomes, over and above a pupil's background.

Educational disadvantage is rooted in the social and economic factors that characterise the communities and families in which children reside. The conditions which define the day-to-day experience of young people influence the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they develop.

Implications

♦   To maximise the chances of a successful outcome, and promote a better planning process, it is necessary that a certain level of cultural understanding is in place or is capable of being put in place.

♦   Within the planning process, how a school listens to the community it serves can be crucial in helping a school define its role, its goals and its needs.

♦   Key to planning to address educational disadvantage is that all staff understand the factors contributing to educational disadvantage, are familiar with the current educational context, and are aware of the increasing number of partners available to support them

II.   Planning Within the Context of Educational Disadvantage

What is Different?

The ongoing experiences of financial, social and environmental difficulties of social disadvantage can create a lifestyle and world view which may not concur with the predominantly middle class world view upheld and maintained by the school. It appears to spell a cultural conflict between school and socially disadvantaged groups. O'Brien suggests that schools have to be aware of and sensitive to students and parents from these backgrounds and that they should understand the positive and negative contributions they make towards the children's education and learning.

> (O'Brien, cited in Mulholland and Keogh, *Education in Ireland: For What and For Whom*, 1990).

Teachers have to be aware of the cultural and value differences which children bring into the classroom. They need to understand the importance of the community in children's lives and be attentive to the conflicts which can arise between school and this community. These social and cultural differences also mean pedagogy and curricula should be reconsidered.

Wehlage believes that there are four core values that together constitute a positive teacher culture facilitating engagement for students:

1. Teachers accept personal accountability for student success

2. Teachers believe in practising an extended teacher role

3. Teachers accept the need to be persistent with students who are not ideal pupils

4. Teachers express a sense of optimism that all students can learn if one builds on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses

> [Wehlage et al. (1989) cited in *No School No Future* (1997, p.36)]

The White Paper on Education, *Charting Our Education Future,* suggests that the "process of planning offers an excellent opportunity to engaging the board of management, the principal, staff and parents in a collaborative exercise aimed at defining the school's mission…Staff can become involved in planning and teamwork by focusing on whole-school issues. Teachers development needs are identified….teachers and parents are empowered". (p.157) Teachers are therefore both participants and beneficiaries of the process

Core Objectives of the Planning Process within a context of Educational Disadvantage:

♦ To focus attention on educational disadvantage

♦ To identify and facilitate the different educational needs of **all** students

♦ To respond to different educational needs by planning and implementing appropriate courses of action

♦ To optimise the educational experience, achievement and holistic development for everyone involved

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Outline of Tasks involved in the Planning Process:

♦   Promote awareness and understanding of the numerous factors which impact directly on educational disadvantage

♦   Analyse the needs of the whole school community

♦   Review current practices and policies

♦   Identify what is working well

♦   Build on and share existing good practice

♦   Identify unmet needs

♦   Research various initiatives

♦   Prioritise areas for development

♦   Plan courses of action to meet the unmet needs

♦   Identify success criteria

♦   Support training and development of teachers

♦   Encourage the development of effective linkages between school and outside agencies

♦   Incorporate ongoing evaluation as part of the implementation of the plan

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Planning Process

A phased process of planning is outlined in this section. Materials to support the suggested activities in each phase are provided in Section III of this unit.

Planning Phase 1: Exploring the Context

The initial phase promotes an understanding of the need for collective planning within an educational disadvantage setting. It endeavours to ensure a clear focus in order to address the key issues.

Stage I: School and Community

1. An exploration by the full staff of their understanding of educational disadvantage
    (Activity 1: Thinking about Educational Disadvantage)

2. A reflection involving the full staff on how they view the community and how the community views itself and the school
    (Activity 2: School and Community)

3. An exploration by staff of their own motivation and values
    (Activity 3: Exploration of Motivation and Values)

4. An exploration of the school's own cultures
    (Activity 4: Exploration of School Culture)

Stage 2: National Context

1. Examining the legislative context
    (Activity 5: Education Act and Disadvantage)

2. Developing an overview of the national education context within which school planning takes place
    (Activity 6: Changes and Initiatives in Irish Education)

Outcomes:

By the end of these stages, there should be an increased awareness and understanding of:

1. the "concept" of educational disadvantage
2. the "concept" of school culture
3. the context of planning within the educational system

Planning Phase 2: Identification of Needs

Following on from Phase 1, this phase enables staff to reflect and comment on the current school situation and to identify needs with a view to planning for the future

Key Activities:

1. Reflecting on the current situation in the school
    (Activity 5: Diagnostic Window)

2. Viewing the school from the different perspectives of different members of the school community
    (Activity 6: Imagine your school)

3. Identifying what needs to be put in place over a specified time span
    (Activity 7: Challenges Ahead)

Following on from this phase, there are two possible steps:

1. *The staff themselves prioritise the needs of their school based on the work that has been done to date*

2. *A steering committee is formed to oversee and direct the planning process*

Planning Phase 3: The Way Ahead

This phase involves the design of action plans to address the needs identified in Phase 2.

(Activity 8: Action Planning: See Unit 4 for full details)

(Action Planning Template: See Section III of this unit)

Addressing Particular Issues

The following issues have been chosen for exploration as they are issues which constantly arise in schools serving disadvantaged areas:

1. **Teacher Expectations**
2. **Parent and Family Involvement**
3. **Curriculum and Disadvantage**
4. **Attendance**

Various methods can be used to address these issues. The ones described here have been chosen because of their proven success in schools serving disadvantaged areas. SDPI wished to thank the different schools and teachers who contributed to the development of these materials.

1. Teacher Expectations

Context: Educational Research Findings

❑ Schools that establish and communicate high expectations and create high-achieving learning environments for all students have high rates of academic success (Rutter et al.,1979).

❑ There is evidence that "in many cases, teachers have expectations of disadvantaged children which are unduly negative" (CMRS, 1992, p. 48, cited in Fleming, 1995). Kennedy (1995) found that teachers had lower expectations of the working class child even in cases where the teacher him/herself came from a working class background (Fleming, 1995, pp. 26-27). The teacher may not be conscious of these attitudes on his/her part (Scheerens et. al, 1992).

❑ Smyth suggests that: "the social context of the school has an additional effect on pupil outcomes, over and above a pupil's background" (1999, p.216).

❑ Clancy (1990) holds the view that:

    While it is clear that the differential performance of the various types of school reflect deficiencies in their individual pupil characteristics at intake, it is also certain that the social class composition of the school has a significant effect on student aspirations and achievements, independent of the social class background of any individual student" (p.18).

❑ Drudy and Lynch (1993) suggest that: "The middle-class origins and orientation of the teaching profession may have implications for teachers' interactions with working-class pupils" (p.109).

Implications

If schools are to achieve the desired goal of success for all students, they must hold high expectations for all, especially for those who are placed "at risk". They must view these students as having strengths, not deficits, and adapt programmes and practices that help all

students achieve their true potential. If teachers continue to believe that some students cannot learn, then as a result they will not expect students to succeed in school. The problems of disadvantage manifest themselves in difficulties in adjusting to school, which in turn, may result in poor educational performance.

Section III of this unit provides a questionnaire to promote teachers' reflection on their expectations of pupils

(Activity 9: Exploring Teacher Expectations)

2. Parent and Family Involvement

Context: Education Legislation and Educational Research

❑   Under the Education Act (1998) parents may: "establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of the school" (Part 1v Section 26-(1))

❑   Drudy and Lynch (1993) consider the position of disadvantaged parents. In their view, such parents are as interested, as any, in their children's progress, though many teachers may think otherwise. They point out that lack of attendance at meetings etc. is not an accurate reflection of interest. In their view this problem: "relates to their educational experiences during their own school time" (p.155). Hannon and Shorthall (1991) note that low income or unemployed parents are most likely to have left school alienated. Morton-Williams and Finch (1968) feel such behaviour on parents may reflect three attitudes, namely, the delegation of responsibility for children's education to the school, fear that they would be thought of as inferior, and the lack of confidence about approaching the school (p.118). (Three studies cited in Fleming, 1995, p. 16.)

❑   Craft, cited in Drudy and Lynch, in a study of children in a working class suburb of Dublin found that value orientations of parents, especially mothers, were related to their children's decision to leave school early or stay on past the minimum age. He also found that the children of parents who were 'future orientated' were more likely to stay at school (ibid. p.150).

❑   O'Brien (1990) suggests that schools have to be aware of and sensitive to students and parents from these backgrounds and that they should understand the positive and negative contributions they make towards the children's education and learning.

❑   In addition to the question of level of interest, such parents may also have lower expectations of schools (CMRS, 1992). This may arise from their own unhappy school experiences, or what Hannon and O'Riain (1993, p.200) describe as "family culture, fatalism, powerlessness and incapacity to address ones own problems". (Research cited in Fleming, 1995, p. 18.)

Implications

Many students' home cultures differ significantly from the culture of their teachers and school. All students can be supported in their learning if links are made between the learning environment of the home and school. One of the reasons that the role of parents can be confusing is that what is meant by involvement is not often specifically defined, nor is it linked to particular outcomes. Through school development planning the role of the parent, and the formation of parent associations and parent/teacher partnerships can be clearly addressed and defined.

Section III of this unit provides materials for the following activities to promote parental involvement:
1.   Analysis of current situation re parental involvement to identify areas for future development

(Activity 10: Involving Parents)

2. Programme to formulate policy on parent-teacher partnership
                    (Activity 11: Establishing Parent-Teacher Partnership)

3. **Curriculum and Educational Disadvantage**

The curriculum and the teaching-learning processes and organisation of a school are intimately linked to a school's culture and ethos. In designing or redesigning educational programmes for educationally disadvantaged students, there are a number of important issues to be addressed:

- ◆ The needs of all students must be taken into account, i.e. the curriculum must be comprehensive and relevant (See **Unit 9** of these Guidelines, *Curriculum Planning*)

- ◆ Extensive staff development may be necessary to design and implement new curricula. One cannot underestimate the human and fiscal cost of effectively affecting change (See **Unit 8** of these Guidelines, *Staff Development*)

- ◆ Introducing new curricular developments without real commitment among classroom teachers will only lead to disaster

- ◆ Teachers must have positive expectations for their students' achievement

A number of relevant curriculum programmes and D.E.S. Initiatives at post-primary level are listed below:

- ◆ The Junior Certificate School Programme
- ◆ Transition Year Programme
- ◆ Leaving Certificate Applied
- ◆ Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- ◆ Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme
- ◆ School Completion Programme (formerly 8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative and Stay in School Retention Initiative)
- ◆ School Development Planning Initiative

Schools can avail of the services of the various Support Teams when developing their curriculum to meet the needs of their students. See Section IV of this unit.

Developing a School Policy on Curriculum

Schools need to provide an appropriate curriculum and effective counselling on subject-choice to challenge students to explore a broad range of post-school options.

In addition to the exact composition and content of the curriculum, some basic issues also need to be considered:

- ◆ The length of the school day
- ◆ The relative length of morning and afternoon sessions
- ◆ Are the lessons are of equal length?
- ◆ Does the timetable gives all subjects a fair distribution of morning and afternoon?
- ◆ Does the timetable give all subjects a fair distribution throughout the week?

4. **Attendance**

Poor attendance contributes to educational disadvantage. It exacerbates underachievement and increases the likelihood of early school leaving.

Section III of this unit provides materials to help schools to address the issue of attendance.
(Activity 12: Attendance and the Fish Bone Diagram)

III. Activities and Worksheets

This section contains materials to support the activities outlined in Section II. Schools may select and adapt the activities and materials that are most appropriate to their own needs and circumstances.

Planning Phase 1: Exploring the Context

Activity 1:   **Thinking about Educational Disadvantage**
Activity 2:   **School and Community**
Activity 3:   **Exploration of Motivation and Values**
Activity 4:   **Exploration of School Culture**
Activity 5:   **Education Act 1998 and Disadvantage**
Activity 6:   **Developments and Initiatives in Irish Education**

Planning Phase 2: Identification of Needs

Activity 7:   **Diagnostic Window**
Activity 8:   **Imagine Your School**
Activity 9:   **Challenges Ahead**

Planning Phase 3: The Way Ahead

Activity 10:   **Action Planning**

Addressing Particular Issues

Activity 11:   **Exploring Teacher Expectations**
Activity 12:   **Involving Parents**
Activity 13:   **Establishing Parent-Teacher Partnership**
Activity 14:   **Attendance and the Fish Bone Diagram**

Some recommendations regarding use of certain materials

Planning Phase 1:

♦ Materials for Activities 1, 2, and 3 should be used in conjunction with each other.

♦ For Activity 4, Version 1 *or* Version 2 of the Questionnaire may be used

Addressing Particular Issues

♦ Teacher Expectations: The questionnaire provided is designed to be used in schools where streaming/banding is in operation.

♦ Parent and Family Involvement: It is important to clarify from the beginning how parent-teacher workgroups will be established for Activities 12 and 13—each school community can choose its own method of identifying those who wish to become involved.

ACTIVITY 1

THINKING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

SESSION 1.

Procedure:

1. Individual Reflection: (10 mins.)

♦ The full staff are asked to reflect and write individually on the questions below.

2. Group Discussion: (10 mins.)

♦ Staff are then broken into small groups to discuss their individual responses.

3. Plenary Session: (10-15 mins.)

♦ Feedback from the full staff is collated using a flip chart to produce a list of staff perspectives on disadvantage.

<u>**Questions:**</u>

➢ **What issues in your opinion contribute to educational disadvantage?**

➢ **Do these issues exist in the community which this school serves? Name them.**

➢ **How do these issues affect:**

   (1) students in our care?

   (2) us as teachers?

SESSION 2.

Procedure

1. Group Discussion: (10 mins)

♦ Staff are asked to return to their original groups to discuss the definitions on disadvantage given in **Activity 1 Handout**. They are asked to identify any areas/issues that may not have emerged in the previous session

2. Plenary Session: (15 mins)

♦ Staff return to the main group and add to the list of issues/perspectives (if necessary) relating to educational disadvantage

3. Conclusion of activity: (10 mins)

♦ A list of the issues pertinent to the individual school is then drawn up using the information on the flip charts.

Definitions of Educational Disadvantage

- "Educational disadvantage means the denial of equal access to educational opportunities, the tendency to leave education at the first opportunity, and the hindrance of achievement by social and environmental factors"

- "Educational disadvantage is leaving school early, without any qualifications or…having failed the junior cycle examinations, or …with disabling educational problems and minimal chances of employment"

- "Leaving the education system with few or no qualifications".

- "Disadvantage can be seen as inability to take advantage of opportunities and services and in an educational sense young people are considered disadvantaged who leave school at or near minimum school-leaving age (15) with no 'effective' formal qualifications"

- "The complex interaction of factors at home, in school and in the community (including economic, social, cultural and educational factors), which result in a young person deriving less benefit from formal education than their peers-they leave the formal education system with few or no qualifications putting them at a disadvantage in the labour market, curtailing personal and social development, and leading to poverty and social exclusion"

- Educational disadvantage is considered to result from discontinuities between the school and the non-school experiences of children. This discontinuity makes the initial transition from home to school difficult and leads, throughout the school years, to a situation in which the academic performance of disadvantaged children is consistently lower than that of other children. Such discontinuity occurs for cultural and socio-economic reasons and involves not only the child's inability to cope with school but also the school's inability to cope with the needs of the disadvantaged child"

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│ **ACTIVITY 2**   │
│   │
│ **HOW THE SCHOOL VIEWS THE COMMUNITY**   │
│ **HOW THE COMMUNITY VIEWS ITSELF**   │
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This is an exercise using the concept of metaphors.

Procedure

Individual Reflection: (15 mins.)

- ♦ After a brief introduction on our daily use of metaphors, each staff member is asked to write two metaphors that they would use to describe:

  (1) the school
  (2) the community

- ♦ Staff are then asked to write two metaphors that they think the parents would use to describe:

  (1) the school
  (2) the community

- ♦ Staff are then asked to write two metaphors that they think the students would use to describe:

  (1) the school
  (2) the community

Group Discussion: (10 mins.)

- ♦ Staff are broken into small groups to discuss their metaphors. (10 mins)

Plenary Session: (10 mins.)

- ♦ The metaphors of each group are reported back to the full staff. (10 mins).

Note:

This activity can be further developed by asking staff to choose metaphors they would use to describe themselves as teachers and their method/style of teaching.

ACTIVITY 3

EXPLORATION OF MOTIVATION AND VALUES

Procedure

Group Discussion: (20 mins.)

- ♦ Teachers in small groups (4-5) are asked to consider the questions below.

Plenary Session

- ♦ Responses are reported back to full staff grouping and collated on flip chart.

- ♦ Charts are kept for use at a future date.

Questions:

- ➢ **What motivated you to go into teaching?**

- ➢ **What motivates you to stay?**

- ➢ **Do you feel you make a difference? (reporter will take note of individual responses to this question without identifying the sources)**

- ➢ **How do you know?**

- ➢ **List the core values you believe are necessary when teaching in a school serving a disadvantaged community?**

- ➢ **Do these values conflict with those of your students and if so how?**

ACTIVITY 4

EXPLORATION OF THE SCHOOL'S CULTURES

Procedure

Group Discussion: (10 mins.)

♦ Staff are given a number of definitions of school culture and asked to discuss them in their groups (each group is allotted one or two of the definitions)
(**Activity 4 Handout**)

Individual Reflection: (10 Mins.)

♦ Staff are asked to complete the checklist below with regard to their own school

♦ Staff are then asked to fill out the questionnaire on school culture
(**Questionnaire on School Culture, Version 1 *or* 2**)

Note:

The checklist and questionnaire can be completed in advance, so that the collated responses are available for consideration during the Plenary Session. Alternatively, they can be completed immediately after the Group Discussion on definitions of school culture, and the findings can be considered by the staff at a later time

Plenary Session: (15 mins.)

♦ General discussion with main group on aspects of culture in their school

SUGGESTED CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL CULTURE

Which cultural aspects on the list below are evident in this school?

Please tick	Cultural Aspects
	➢ **Collegiality**
	➢ **Experimentation**
	➢ **High expectations**
	➢ **Trust and confidence**
	➢ **Tangible support**
	➢ **Reaching out to the knowledge bases**
	➢ **Appreciation and recognition**
	➢ **Caring, celebration and humour**
	➢ **Involvement in decision making**
	➢ **Protection of what's important**
	➢ **Traditions**
	➢ **Honest, open communication**

Definitions of School Culture

Concept of culture:

➢ involves core values, norms, beliefs, traditions, rituals and myths

➢ describes how things are

➢ helps define a reality for those within a social setting (e.g. school)

School Culture:

➢ "difficult to define but it best thought of as procedures, values and expectations that guide people's behaviour within an organisation"

➢ "is influenced by its own history, context, and the people working in it"

➢ "is influenced by the many external social, political, economic and educational changes"

➢ "is most clearly 'seen' in the way people relate and work together; the management of the schools' structures, systems and physical environment; and the extent to which there is a learning focus for both pupils and adults"

➢ "is conveyed by the feel or climate, the way members of the school interact with students, parents or other outsiders"

➢ "is an informal understanding of the 'way we do things and relate to each other around here'"

➢ "guiding beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates, particularly in reference to how people relate (or fail to relate) to each other"

➢ "the philosophy that guides the approach to teaching and learning…the rules of the game that new teachers have to learn in order to get along in the school or their department"

➢ a "system of attitudes, actions, and artefacts that endures over time and produces among its members a relatively unique common psychology"

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ACTIVITY 4

EXPLORATION OF THE SCHOOL'S CULTURES:

QUESTIONNAIRE ON SCHOOL CULTURE
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INFORMATION SHEET

Before filling out the questionnaire (version 1 or version 2), please read the following background information.

Cultural Norms of a school:

Stoll and Fink (*Changing Our Schools*, 1996) say because basic assumptions and values are so deep-seated, it is hard to uncover them. They also say that norms underlie most aspects of behaviour in school—that norms are an expression of deeply held values and influence workplace action. They focus on how people relate to and value each other.

The questionnaire is based on what they perceive as the ten cultural norms that influence school improvement. These norms are:

1. Shared goals ('we know where we are going')

2. Responsibility for success ('we must succeed')

3. Collegiality ('we're working on it together')

4. Continuous Improvement ('we can get better')

5. Lifelong Learning ('learning is for everyone')

6. Risk Taking ('we learn by trying something new')

7. Support ('there's always someone there to help')

8. Mutual Respect ('everyone has something to offer')

9. Openness ('we can discuss our differences')

10. Celebration and Humour ('we feel good about ourselves')

School Culture

Here are a number of statements about school culture.

In the case of this school, indicate (by circling the number) if you feel the statement is true

> 1. **Never (N)**
> 2. **Rarely (R)**
> 3. **Sometimes (S)**
> 4. **Usually (U)**
> 5. **Always (A)**

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1. Teachers are involved in decision making	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers have high expectations of students	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers share ideas about the school	1	2	3	4	5
4. The curriculum is based on clear goals and objectives	1	2	3	4	5
5. There is a need for staff development days	1	2	3	4	5
6. The school caters for the needs of all students	1	2	3	4	5
7. There's someone there to help	1	2	3	4	5
8. Everyone has something to offer	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers can discuss their differences openly	1	2	3	4	5
10. Teachers feel valued	1	2	3	4	5

(Following completion, the questionnaire can be analysed by steering committee/task group/facilitator, and the findings brought back to staff at a later date)

ACTIVITY 4: QUESTIONNAIRE VERSION 2

School Culture

Here are a number of statements about school culture.

Please tick under **Yes** or **No** to indicate whether each statement correctly describes this school, in your view.

STATEMENT	YES	NO
1. Teachers are involved in decision making		
2. Teachers have high expectations of students		
3. Teachers share ideas about the school		
4. The curriculum is based on clear goals and objectives		
5. There is a need for staff development days		
6. The school caters for the needs of all students		
7. There's someone there to help		
8. Everyone has something to offer		
9. Teachers can discuss their differences openly		
10. Teachers feel valued		

(Following completion, the questionnaire can be analysed by steering committee/task group/facilitator, and the findings brought back to staff at a later date)

ACTIVITY 5
EDUCATION ACT 1998 AND DISADVANTAGE

Procedure:

- ♦ Consider the following extracts from the Education Act, 1998 (following a presentation on the Education Act, where appropriate)
- ♦ Reflect silently on their implications for this school in its approach to combatting educational disadvantage
- ♦ In group discussion, identify and prioritise the consequent issues for this school
- ♦ In plenary session, consider feedback from all groups, with a view to reaching consensus on the key issues to be addressed

Education Act 1998

9.—A recognised school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to—

> **(a) ensure that the *educational needs of all students*, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for**

21.—

(2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including *equality of access to and participation in the school* by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.

(3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.

(Italics have been added for emphasis)

ACTIVITY 6

CHANGES AND INITIATIVES IN IRISH EDUCATION

Procedure:

♦ Consider the following lists of factors shaping the national education context (following a presentation on change in Irish education, where appropriate)
♦ Reflect on their impact (actual or potential) on this school in its approach to combatting educational disadvantage
♦ In group discussion, identify the key needs and opportunities that these factors create for this school
♦ In plenary session, consider feedback from all groups, with a view to reaching consensus on the priorities to be addressed

1. Changes in Irish Education

➢ New curriculum at Primary Level

➢ New programmes and syllabuses at Junior Cycle (post-primary)

➢ New programmes and syllabuses at Senior Cycle (post-primary)

➢ National education policy framework—Green Paper, 1992; White Paper, 1995; Education Act, 1998; Education (Welfare) Act, 2000; further developments in education legislation

2. Some Key Emphases

➢ New Forms of Certification

➢ Use of Technologies

➢ Significance of Partnerships/Networks

➢ Combating School Failure and Educational Exclusion

➢ Schools as Community Resources

➢ Second Chance Education

➢ Parental Involvement

➢ Quality of School Climate and Relationships

➢ Collaborative Culture Within Schools

3. Policies, Programmes and Initiatives responding to educational disadvantage

Primary School Interventions:

➢ The *Early Start Programme*

➢ The *Breaking the Cycle Initiative*

➢ The *Teacher Counsellor/Support Teacher Scheme*

➢ The *Home School Community Liaison Scheme*

➢ 8-15 *Early School Leavers Initiative*

Post-Primary Interventions:

➢ *School Completion Programme (formerly Stay in School Retention Initiative and 8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative)*

➢ The *Home School Community Liaison Scheme*

➢ *Junior Certificate Schools' Programme*

➢ *Second Level Support Service*

➢ *School Development Planning Initiative (Primary and Post-Primary)*

External Programmes and Initiatives:

➢ The *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (NAPS 1997)

➢ The *New Deal. A plan for Educational Opportunity* (1999)

➢ The *National Development Plan 2000-2006*(1999)

➢ The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000)

➢ The *Designation of Schools as Disadvantaged*

➢ *Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage* (Combat Poverty)

➢ The Programme for Peace and Reconciliation *Educational Disadvantage Initiative*

➢ Initiatives organised through the work of the Area-Based Partnerships

Note:

A more comprehensive guide to Government Funded Initiatives can be found in Brian Murphy, *Support for the Educationally and Socially Disadvantaged* (Cork: Education Department, University College Cork, 2000) and in Barry Cullen, *Evaluating Integrated Responses to Educational Disadvantage* (Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, 2000)

ACTIVITY 7

Diagnostic Window

With specific reference to disadvantage and this school please fill out the following:

What is already working well?	Evidence
Staff Students 	
What is not working well?	**Evidence**
Staff Students 	

ACTIVITY 8

Imagine Your School

Think of priorities and possibilities from the point of view of different members of the school community in a disadvantaged setting.

School Community Member	PRIORITY What would this person identify as most important?	PROGRESS What change would this person want to make for progress?
1st Year Student		
6th Year Student		
Teacher		
Parent		
Local Employer		
Support Staff Member		
Principal		
Year Head		
THE FUTURE?		
Your choice: What change would most benefit the school?	**How would that change affect the community?**	

ACTIVITY 9

Challenges and Changes Ahead

HOW WILL YOUR SCHOOL BE:

♦ **one year from now?**

♦ **three years from now?**

♦ **five years from now?**

In just one year, people's choices can bring about important changes.

Your task:

1. Identify three challenges facing this school

2. Then make choices for change

Your solutions must meet these criteria: they must:

✓ Lead to more opportunities for learning
✓ Involve many people in making this progress

CHALLENGE	YOUR CHOICE: HOW TO CHANGE THE SCHOOL
1	1
2	2
3	3
Select one of these changes. How would one plan to bring it about?	

ACTIVITY 10

ACTION PLANNING

Action Plan Template

Priority:	
_____	
Target:	

Tasks:	Who:	How:	When:	Resources:	Success Criteria - Implementation:

Success Criteria - Impact on Learning & Teaching:

Monitoring Procedures:

Evaluation Procedures:

ACTIVITY 11

Teacher Expectations

QUESTIONNAIRE

Subject: _____

Instructions:

Choose a 'best' or top stream class and a lower stream class from your timetable. Both classes should preferably be from the same year group. If this is not possible, both classes should then be from either the Junior or Senior end of the school. Do not choose Year 1 or Adult classes. Answer the questions below for both chosen classes

	High Stream Class	Low Stream Class
1. How many class periods do you have with this class each week?		
2. How many days do you see this class each week?		
3. How many times do you give homework to this class each week?		
4. On average, how long would you expect or hope that a student from this class would spend on homework for your subject nightly?		
5. Do you ask students to re-do unsatisfactory homework?		
6. Do you ask students in this class to purchase extra materials/books e.g. past exam papers when applicable, folders, revision notes, etc. If yes, please specify.		
7. Do you ask your students to engage in other activities relevant to your subject in their own time e.g. visit library, museum, exhibition, attend theatre, lectures, read newspapers, view Irish language programmes etc.? If yes, please specify.		

8. Do you give class exams?
    i. Weekly
   ii. Fortnightly
  iii. Monthly
  iv. Less Often		

9. How would you describe the general behaviour of the class? Please tick the response(s) appropriate to each class.
    i. Well behaved
   ii. Hard working
  iii. Quiet
  iv. Noisy
   v. Disruptive
  vi. Co-operative
 vii. Do not work to their potential		

INFORMATION SHEET

The purpose of this activity is to allow staff/parents to begin thinking, discussing and planning with regard to how the school community/parents could be effectively involved in the school planning process.

Aims:

1) Analyse current situation

2) Identify areas for future development

Procedure:

1. Group Work: (20 mins.)

♦ Staff/Parents are broken into small groups and asked to fill out three worksheets as given below.

Depending on circumstances, parents and staff may work independently or together

2. Plenary Session: (30 mins.)

♦ Feedback from the small groups is discussed. The current school/parent relationship is analysed in order to identify areas of future development.

ACTIVITY 12

Involving Parents

WORKSHEET ONE

What are the strengths in our school's programmes or practices for involving families in their children's education?

YEAR GROUP	STRENGTHS	IDEAL
1st Year		
2nd Year		
3rd Year		
Transition Year		
5th Year		
6th Year		

ACTIVITY 12

Involving Parents

WORKSHEET TWO

What areas involving partnerships between the family and school should we work on?

YEAR GROUP	Areas for Improvement	Suggested Ways
1st Year		
2nd Year		
3rd Year		
Transition Year		
5th Year		
6th Year		

ACTIVITY 12

Involving Parents

WORKSHEET THREE

Ways to reach parents

YEAR GROUP	Ways to involve families who are hard to reach	How to make parents feel part of the learning process
1st Year		
2nd Year		
3rd Year		
Transition Year		
5th Year		
6th Year		

ACTIVITY 13

Establishing Parent-Teacher Partnership

Teachers and parents meet and work together as a group to share experiences, explore common ground, and come up with suggestions and guidelines as to how parents and teachers can complement each other in their roles. By working together they will produce a school policy on Parent-Teacher Partnership.

Note: The number of parents and staff should not exceed sixteen

This activity comprises six sessions.

Session One: Creating awareness, building trust

Procedure:

1.   **Group Discussion: (20 mins)**

   ♦   Parents and teachers are initially asked to work on their own and then work together considering the questions below.

2.   **Plenary Session: (20 mins)**

   ♦   Responses are reported back to the full group and collated on flip charts.
   ♦   Charts are kept for use at further date

Questions:

1. **Who are we building trust between?**

2. **What were our good experiences of our own school days?**

3. **What was bad about our school days?**

4. **What was the effect of school days on us?**

ACTIVITY 13

ESTABLISHING PARENT TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

**Session Two: Creating an understanding of one another's roles
                      Looking at what we do**

Procedure

There is an underlying theme to this session: Understanding our roles, how they overlap and differ, and creating solidarity and respect.

1. **Group Discussion: (20 mins)**

   ♦   Parents and teachers work in separate groups for this session. Parents answer questions 1, 3, 4. Teachers answer questions 2, 3, 4

2. **Plenary Session: (30 mins)**

   ♦   The two groups come together and report back. As before responses are recorded on flip charts and kept.

Questions:

     1. **What do we do as parents?**

     2. **What do we do as teachers?**

     3. **How close are our roles?**

     4. **What is different about what we do?**

This session is about identifying strengths and areas of improvement.

Procedure

1. **Group Discussion: (30 mins)**

   ♦   Parents and teachers mix in small groups to discuss the questions below

2. **Plenary Session: (30 mins)**

   ♦   The small groups report back to the main group. Responses are again recorded on flip chart and kept.

Questions:

1. **What do we do well as (i) Parents; (ii) Teachers?**

2. **What are we pleased with as parents? i.e children are…….**

3. **What are we pleased with as teachers?**

4. **What would we like to see improved?**

This session is about moving together, to identify where and how we can bring about change.

Procedure

1. *The reports from the previous three sessions have been collated and distributed to the teachers and parents prior to this session.*

2. *A **mission statement** for the partnership is worked on before moving forward (30 mins). Once this is achieved the following group discussion can take place.*

3. **Group Discussion: (20 mins)**

   ♦ Parents and teachers are placed in working groups and are given the tasks listed below.

4. **Plenary Discussion: (30 mins)**

   ♦ They return to the main group and report back.

   ♦ The feedback is recorded and kept

Tasks:

1. Choose 5/6 areas that we can change

2. List the initial steps for change in each area

Procedure

1. Group Work: (30 mins)

- ♦ Parents and teachers work together in groups looking at what should be included in the policy document under the headings given below.

2. Plenary Session: (30 mins.)

- ♦ Parents and teachers discuss the findings of the individual groups' work. A consensus is reached as to what goes into the draft policy document

3. Follow Up

- ♦ The draft policy document is circulated to school partners for comment
- ♦ Redrafting occurs in the light of responses received, followed by further consultation and redrafting if necessary
- ♦ The completed policy document is brought to the Board of Management for approval and support

Suggested Headings for Policy Document

- ➢ Mission Statement
- ➢ The nature of the relationship between home and school
- ➢ Role of the teacher
- ➢ Role of the parent
- ➢ Teachers' supports to parents
- ➢ Parental supports to teachers
- ➢ Practical ways in which an effective partnership between parents, teachers and the community can be achieved in accordance with the mission statement.
- ➢ Role of the partnership

The document should also indicate the criteria by which the effectiveness of the policy will be gauged and the procedures that will be followed to monitor and review the policy.

| **ACTIVITY 13** |
| **ESTABLISHING PARENT TEACHER PARTNERSHIP** |
| **Session Six: Evaluation / Informal Get-Together** |

Procedure

Having spent five sessions working together and completed a policy document, it is important for parents and teachers to consider whether the content, format, and outcomes were satisfactory and to identify what if any thing could be improved.

The main purpose of this session is to allow the parents and teachers to meet in a relaxed, informal atmosphere with positive emphasis on the work completed.

<u>**Questions:**</u>

1. **What went well?**

2. **What could be done better?**

3. **Where does the partnership go from here?**

Keys to Successful Parent and Family Involvement: Suggestions for School Personnel

- ➢ Ask parents how they want to be involved

- ➢ Make school more accessible to parents

- ➢ Overcome barriers between school staff and parents

- ➢ Set goals

- ➢ Avail of the expertise of the Home School Liaison Officer (where possible)

- ➢ Communicate in new ways

- ➢ Keep parents informed

- ➢ Send home literature (other than reports)

- ➢ Design a public relations programme

- ➢ Ask parents to volunteer

- ➢ Involve parents in in-school activities

- ➢ Offer information to help with parenting

- ➢ Offer parent education classes

INFORMATION SHEET

The Fish Bone is a simple Cause and Effect diagram.

It comprises a head, a backbone, and lateral bones (or ribs) with offshoots. A box is drawn at the end of each lateral bone so that it can be labelled. See diagram below.

- ♦ The situation that is being examined, the **Effec**t, is entered on the "head" of the fish

- ♦ Each lateral bone is allocated to a category or group of contributory factors, or **Causes**. The category title (the source of each group of contributory factors) is entered in the box at the end of the lateral bone. Some boxes may be left blank at the outset to allow those participating in the activity to insert their own categories

- ♦ The factors contributing to the situation, the **Causes**, are then entered on the offshoots of the appropriate lateral bones by those participating in the activity
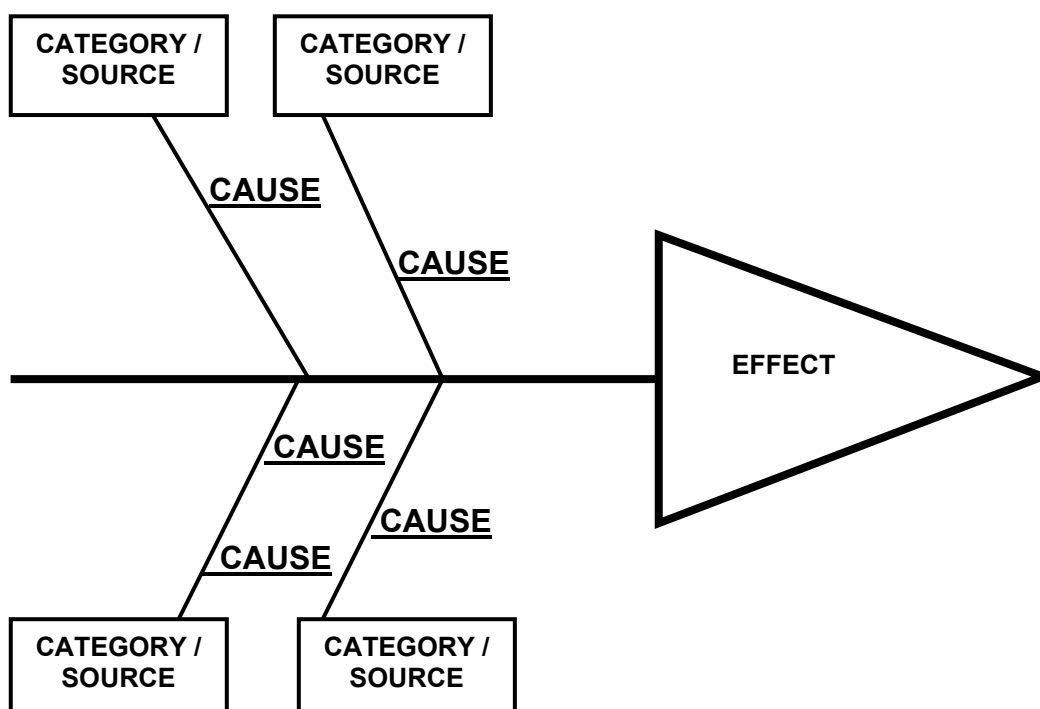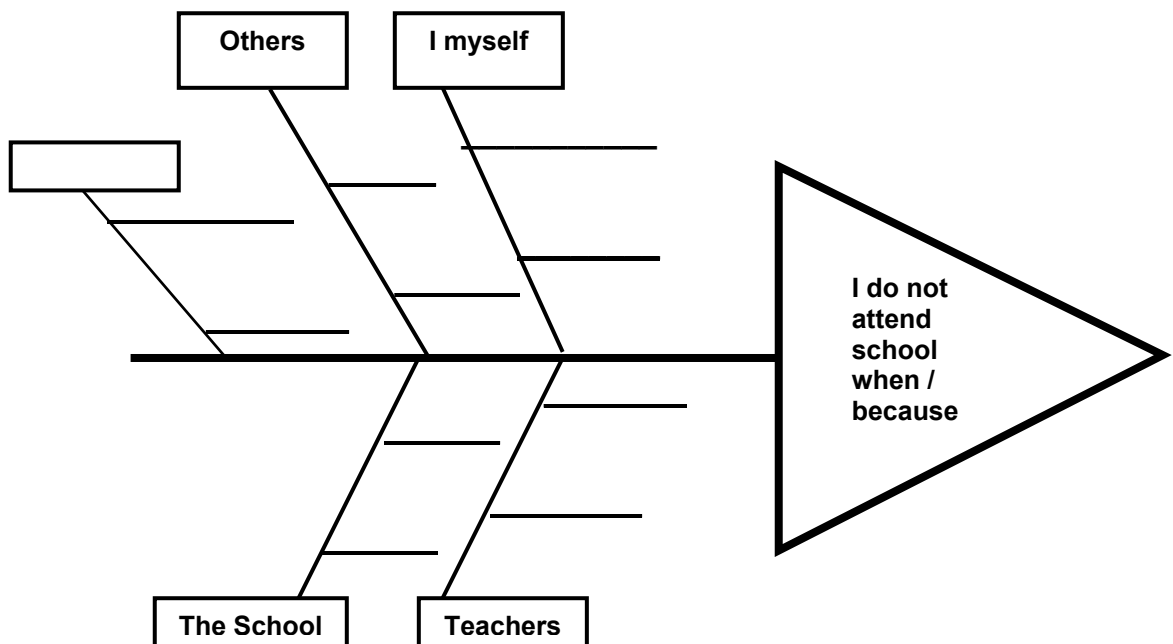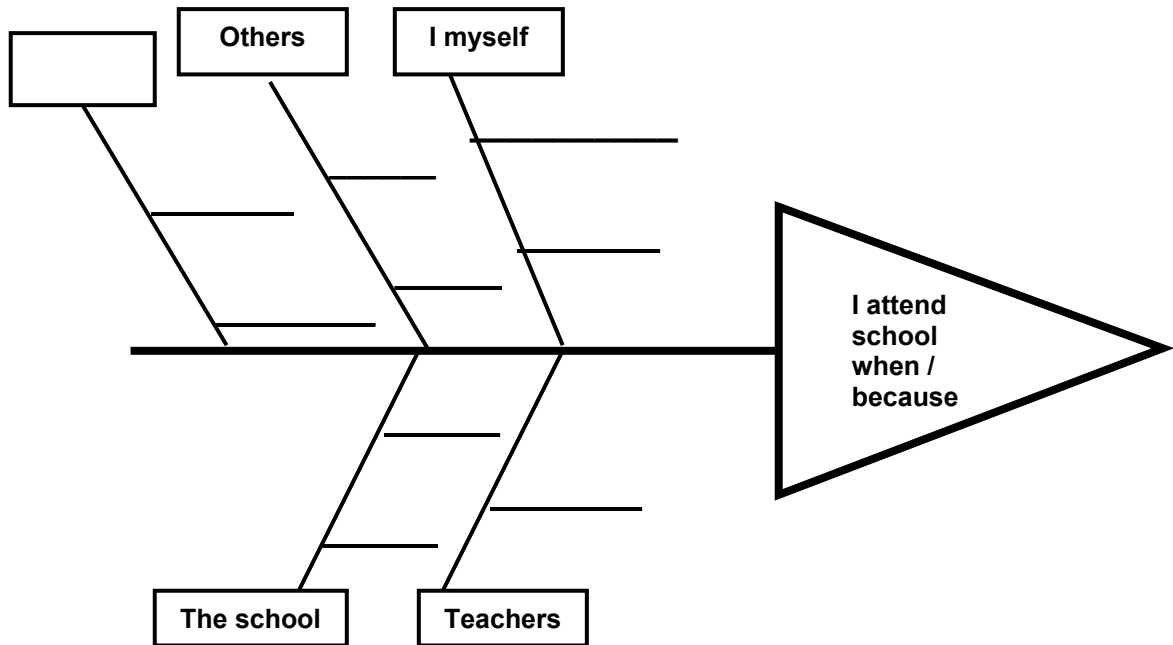

Uses of the Fish Bone Cause and Effect Diagram:

This can be a very useful tool when looking at different aspects of school policy and planning. It works particularly well with students. The main head and instructions can be altered according to the topic being addressed.

Two handouts of the diagram can be given, one relating to a **positive** situation or effect, the other relating to the **negative** equivalent of that situation.

For example:

Diagram with boxes labelled: [empty box], Others, I myself, The school, Teachers; arrow pointing to "I attend school when / because"

Diagram with boxes labelled: [empty box], Others, I myself, The School, Teachers; arrow pointing to "I do not attend school when / because"
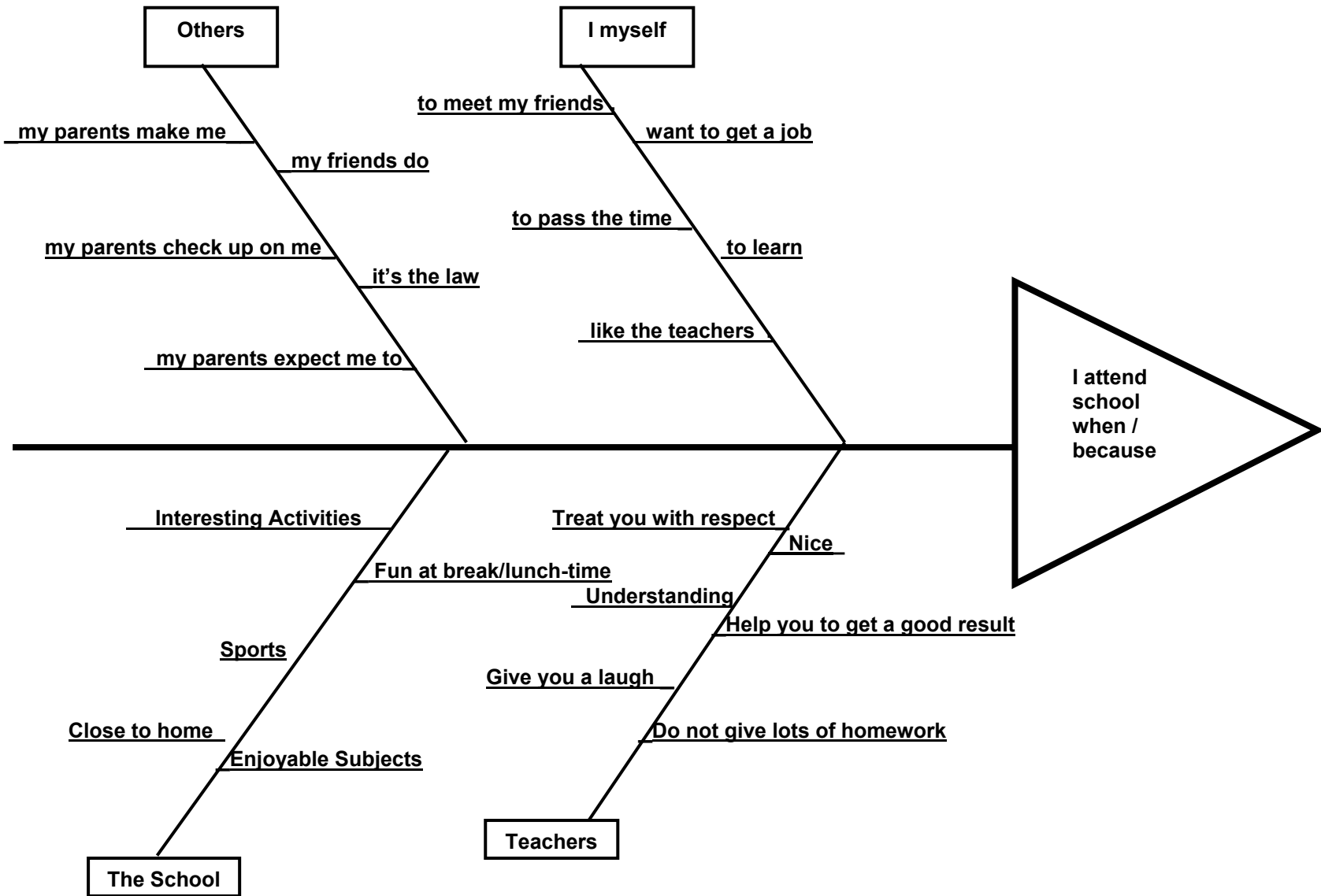
Time/Day could be entered in the empty box in the diagram

10: 45

The Fish Bone Cause and Effect Diagram: SAMPLE COMPLETED DIAGRAM   Issue: Attendance

Others

my parents make me

my friends do

my parents check up on me

it's the law

my parents expect me to

I myself

to meet my friends

want to get a job

to pass the time

to learn

like the teachers

I attend school when / because

Interesting Activities

Treat you with respect

Nice

Fun at break/lunch-time

Understanding

Help you to get a good result

Sports

Give you a laugh

Close to home

Do not give lots of homework

Enjoyable Subjects

Teachers

The School

10: 46

The Fish Bone Cause and Effect Diagram: SAMPLE COMPLETED DIAGRAM   Issue: Attendance

Day / Time

school starts too early

school day is too long

on Mondays

no half-day

on Fridays

Others

my parents are away

my friends want to mitch

my parents don't make me

my friends have left

gangs on the school bus bully me

I myself

bullied

don't like subject

sick

find school boring

too tired

don't like the teachers

at work

no homework done

have no friends

I do not attend school when / because

uniform

smelly toilets

too strict

too many rules

boring

separates me from my friends

cold classrooms

The School

don't let you explain

are missing

pick on you

give lots of homework

are too bossy

don't allow you to talk

Teachers

10: 47

Exploring the issue of Attendance using the

FISH BONE CAUSE AND EFFECT DIAGRAM

Instructions for Students

➢ This is a simple cause and effect diagram.

➢ By using this diagram you can identify, first of all, the factors that cause you to attend school, and then the factors that cause you to be absent from school

➢ You can have as many ribs and boxes as you like. In this sample we have put in the four boxes which may be most crucial and another box which you may fill if you choose.

MYSELF:
Think of all the factors that you control, the things about yourself, that cause you to attend school (e.g. being interested in learning, or wanting to do well). Then think of all the things about yourself that cause you to miss time from school.

OTHERS:
Other people, for instance your parents or other students, may influence your attendance at school. How?

TEACHERS:
Teachers are very important in school life. What is it that they do that encourages you to attend school? Are there ways in which you are put off attending school by teachers? Think of all the teachers who work with you. Do not mention names.

THE SCHOOL:
The school is the place you do most of your formal learning. What is it about the school and the way it is organised that encourages you to attend? That puts you off attending?

EMPTY BOX:
This box is deliberately left empty. You may choose to ignore it or put in it another important source that influences your attendance at school.
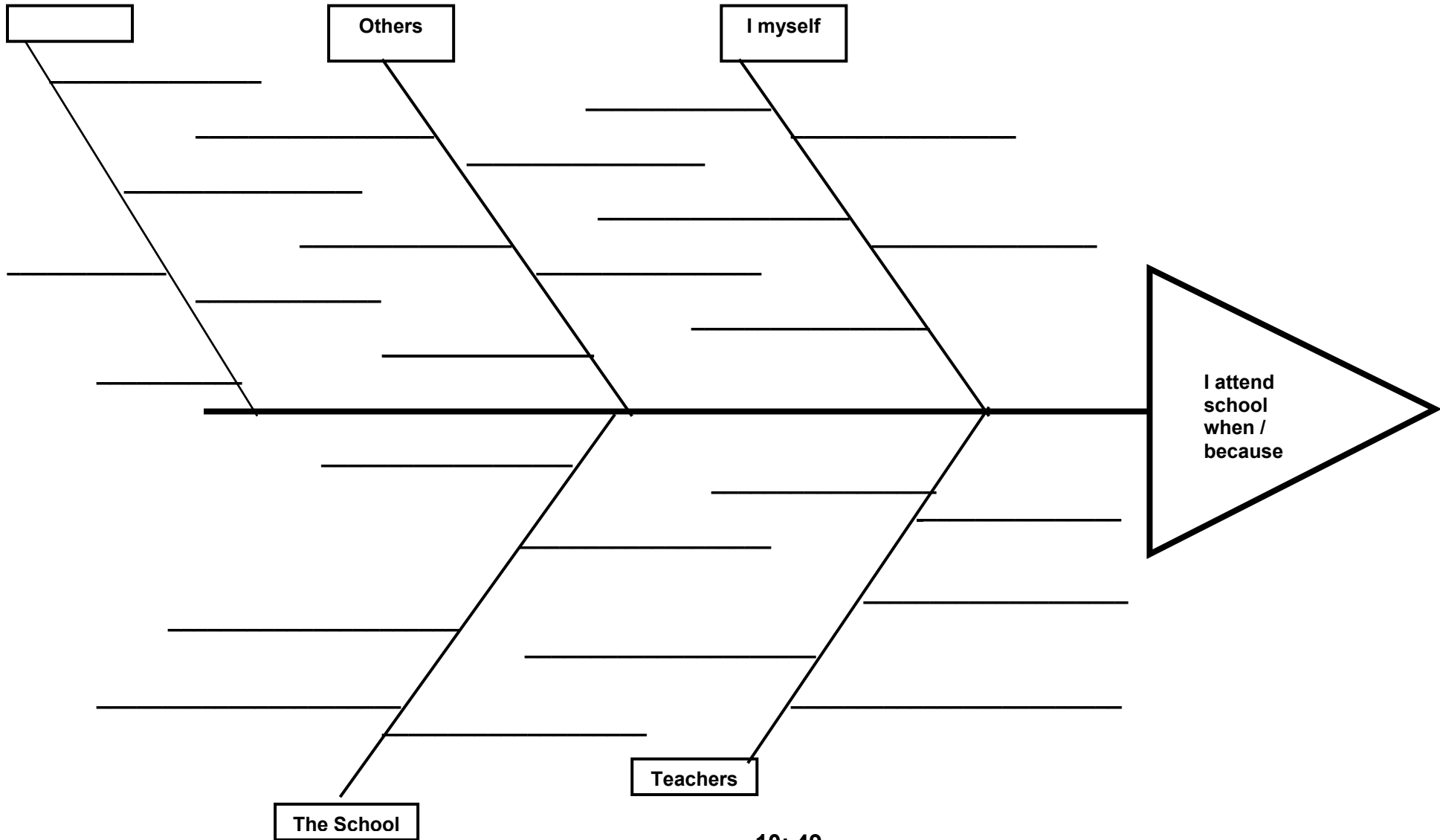
WAYS OF USING THIS INFORMATION:

1. Your teachers may want this information to help them to encourage good attendance at school

2. Your teachers might invite the class to discuss each other's ideas in small groups in order to find out the important shared ideas from the whole class. In this case you will have the opportunity of listening to other student's views and of agreeing common helpful ideas. This could be very helpful to your teachers.

The Fish Bone Cause and Effect Diagram   **Issue: Attendance**

Others

I myself

I attend school when / because

Teachers

The School

10: 49

The Fish Bone Cause and Effect Diagram   **Issue: Attendance**

Others

I myself

I do not attend school when / because

Teachers

The School

10: 50
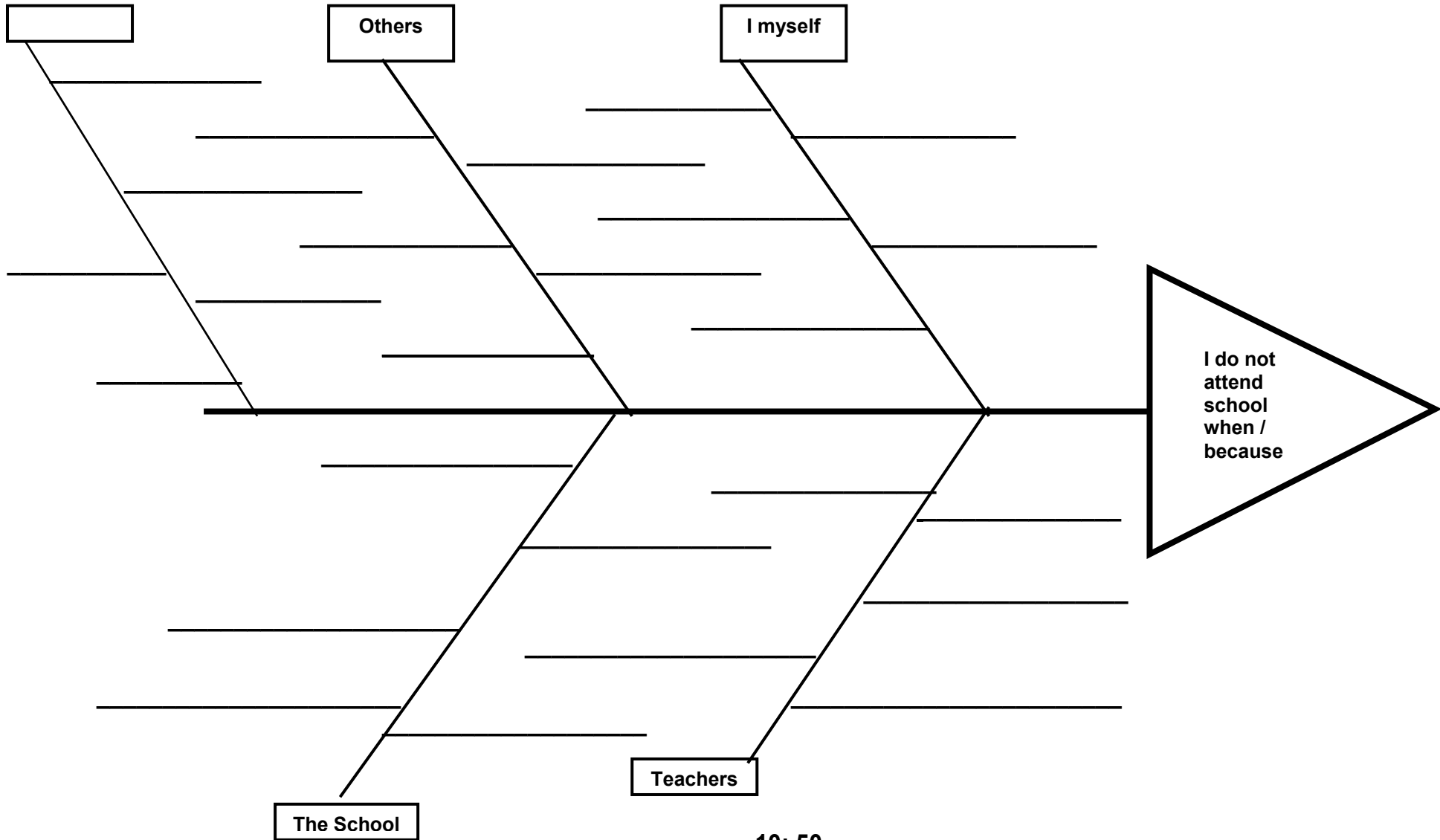
Collating the findings of the Fish Bone Survey

Factors Governing Attendance

I ATTEND SCHOOL WHEN.... List of factors relating to:	I DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL WHEN.... List of factors relating to:
1. MYSELF	1. MYSELF
2. TEACHERS	2. TEACHERS
3. OTHERS	3. OTHERS
4. SCHOOL	4. SCHOOLS
5. DAY / TIME	5. DAY / TIME

Following through on the findings of the Fish Bone analysis: Suggested strategies

➢ The collated findings of the Fish Bone analysis provide data that can inform the design of action plans and policies to promote students' attendance and participation.

➢ A check on attendance on different days for each year group can be carried out to see if a pattern emerges. Information on patterns can help to provide a clear focus for action plans.

➢ Excuses for absences can also be listed.

➢ As a collaborative project involving teachers and parents' representatives, a leaflet addressing the issue of attendance can be designed for parents.

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Personnel and Support Services

ADM (List of different Partnerships)   Tel: 01 2400700
Holbrook House
Holles Street
Dublin 2

Combat Poverty Agency
Bridgewater Centre   Tel: 01 6706745
Conyngham Road   Fax: 01 6706760
Islandbridge   email: info@cpa.ie
Dublin 6

Irish Learning Support Association
c/o Drumcondra Education Centre   Tel: 087 6674599
Drumcondra   email: info@ilsa.ie
Dublin 9

Junior Certificate School Programme
Curriculum Development Unit   Tel: 01 4535487
Sundrive Road   email: jcsp@iol.ie
Crumlin
Dublin 12

Leaving Certificate Applied
Curriculum Development Centre   Curriculum Development Unit
St. Patrick's Comprehensive School   Sundrive Road
Shannon, Co. Clare   Crumlin, Dublin 12
Tel: 061 361993   Tel: 01 4535487
email: lca@shanncdc.ie   email: lcapplied@cdu.cdvec.ie

National Disability Authority
25 Clyde Road   Tel: 01 6080400
Dublin 4   Fax: 01 6609935

National Education Office for Travellers
Department of Education and Science   Tel: 091 500011
Ross House
Merchants Road
Galway

Second Level Support Service (including support for Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Vocational, and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes)
Blackrock Education Centre   Tel. 01 2301673
Kill Avenue   email: slss@blackrock-edu.ie
Dún Laoghaire
Co. Dublin

Stay in School Retention Initiative (School Completion Programme)
Curriculum Development Unit   Tel: 01 4535487
Sundrive Road
Crumlin
Dublin 12

V.   Notes