

**Impact Analysis of the St. John's JNS & St.
Paul's SNS Breakfast Club,
Rathmullen, Drogheda**

**Final Report
27th October 2006**

**Helen Fitzgerald
Social Research Consultant**

Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	5
Section 1 Introduction	8
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Research Objectives	8
1.3 Research Approach and Methodology	9
1.4 Structure of Report	12
Section 2 Demographic Profile of Drogheda	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Deprivation and Affluence in the Drogheda Area	14
2.3 Small Area Population Statistics	16
2.3.1 Population	16
2.3.2 Education	16
2.3.3 Unemployment	17
2.3.4 Social Class	18
2.3.5 Lone Parents	19
2.3.6 Local Authority Housing	19
2.4 In Summary	19
Section 3 The St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Breakfast Club	21
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Origins of the Breakfast Club	24
3.3 Management, Staffing, Operation and Funding of the Breakfast Club	24
3.3.1 Management Structure	24
3.3.2 Staffing Structure	25
3.3.3 Day-to-Day Operation	26
3.3.4 Funding and Support Structures	28

Section 4	Impact of the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club	31
4.1	Introduction	31
4.2	Impact on Pupils of the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club	31
4.2.1	Educational Achievement	32
4.2.2	Attendance and Punctuality	33
4.2.3	Classroom Behaviour	34
4.2.4	Pupil/Teacher Relations	35
4.2.5	Improved Eating Habits	35
4.2.6	Personal and Social Development	36
4.2.7	Support Structure	37
4.2.8	Sense of Pride	38
4.3	Impact on Parents and Families	38
4.3.1	Financial Support	38
4.3.2	Peace of Mind	38
4.3.3	Family Time	38
4.3.4	Improved Eating Habits	39
4.3.5	Friendships	39
4.4	Impact on the Whole School Community	39
4.4.1	Teaching and Learning	39
4.4.2	School/Parent Relations	40
4.4.3	Teacher/Pupil Relations	41
4.4.4	School Morale	41
4.4.5	School Status	41
4.5	Impact on the Wider Community	42
4.5.1	Community Training and Employment	42
4.5.2	Community Health	43
4.5.3	Reducing Educational Disadvantage and Social Exclusion	43
4.5.4	Decline in Anti-Social Behaviour	44
4.5.5	Improved Community Morale	44
4.5.6	Community Resource	44
4.5.7	Increased Awareness of the Community Sector	45
4.5.8	Enhanced Inter-Agency Co-operation	45
4.6	Issues Arising	46
4.6.1	Role of Project Co-ordinator	46

4.6.2	Nutritional Value	46
4.6.3	Who can use the Breakfast Club?	46
4.6.4	Sustainability	47
Section 5 Conclusion and Recommendation		49
5.1	Conclusion	49
5.2	Recommendations	50
Appendix		52
Appendix 1	Sample Menu (week of Monday 25 th September 2006)	52
Appendix 2	Sample Price List	52
List of Tables		
Table 1.1	Profile of Pupils who Participated in Research Consultation Process	12
Table 2.1	Deprivation Indicators (2002)	15
Table 2.2	Population and Population Change (1991-2002)	16
Table 2.3	Highest Level of Education for all Persons Aged 15+ (2002)	17
Table 2.4	Unemployment Rate (2002)	17
Table 2.5	Percentage Unemployment Change (1996 – 2002)	18
Table 2.6	Social Class (2002)	18
Table 2.7	Lone Parents (% of all Households) (2002)	19
Table 2.8	Percentage of Local Authority Housing	19
Table 3.1	Average Daily Meal Count	28
Table 3.2	Sources of Funding	28
List of Figures		
Figure 3.1	Management and Staffing Structure of the Breakfast Club	26
Figure 3.2	Value of Contribution from Funders	29
Figure 5.1	Impact of the St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Breakfast Club	50

Executive Summary

Introduction

St. John's Junior National School (JNS) and St. Paul's Senior National School (SNS) Breakfast Club has been operating on the school grounds of the St. Paul's National School in Rathmullen, Drogheda since 1998, serving over 500 hot breakfasts and lunches every day. The Breakfast Club is managed by a Co-ordinator and a Community Employment Catering Supervisor on a day-to-day basis. It is staffed by 20 Catering Assistants, employed on a Community Employment (CE) Scheme, by Drogheda Youth Development. The Co-ordinator is supported by an Assistant Co-ordinator. Four Monitors are employed to supervise the children in the Dining Room as well as en route to and from their classrooms and Dining Room. The Breakfast Club is funded and supported by a variety of sources including: the Department of Education and Science, FÁS, Drogheda Partnership, Drogheda Youth Development, Drogheda Borough Council/RAPID, the Department of Family and Social Affairs, the Dormant Accounts Fund, the School Boards of Management and the Parents' Council.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To document the history of the Breakfast Club since its inception in 1998.
2. To establish the impact the Breakfast Club has had on pupils, their parents and families, the schools and the wider community.

Research Methodology

The approach taken to achieve the research objectives was primarily qualitative in nature, but involved a combination of techniques, including:

- A review of programme documentation;
- A review of Census Data for the area;
- Semi-structured interviews with members of the Inter-Agency Committee, with the Breakfast Club Co-ordinator, Assistant Co-ordinator and Breakfast Club CE Catering Supervisor;

- Focus groups with the Breakfast Club Catering Assistants and Monitors, with parents, with the St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Principals and teachers;
- Observation and consultation with pupils of St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS,
- A questionnaire survey of parents.

Socio-economic and Demographic Context

Drogheda's rate of deprivation or disadvantage was, in 2002, greater than both the county and the national average. Drogheda's population however has increased at a faster rate over the past fifteen years compared to increases for County Louth and the country as a whole, but there is still considerable disparity in population changes between individual Electoral Divisions. For example, St. Mary's has experienced a population increase of 61.1% since 1991, while West Gate's population has increased by just 15% over the same period. The rate of early school leaving for all persons aged fifteen and over was higher in Drogheda, while the percentage of people with a third level education was lower. However, again there was disparity between individual Electoral Divisions with West Gate experiencing much higher levels of early school leaving and lower rates of people with third level education, compared to St. Mary's. The rate of unemployment in Drogheda was greater than the national average. Drogheda also had higher levels of people in the semi-skilled and unskilled social class categories; of lone parent households; and of local authority housing. It is within this social, economic and demographic context that the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club has been operating.

Impact

The pupils, school staff, Breakfast Club staff, parents and stakeholders who participated in this research were unanimous in their verdict that the Breakfast Club has had a wide-ranging and positive impact on the school pupils, their parents and families, the whole school community as well as the wider community. This impact can largely be categorised into two broad overlapping categories – educational impact and community impact. The Breakfast Club is helping to overcome educational underachievement and disadvantage by improving classroom behaviour and punctuality; teaching and learning abilities; the transference rate to secondary

school; teacher/student relations; school/parent relations; eating habits; personal and social development; and school morale. By helping to reduce the pattern of early school leaving, the Breakfast Club is also providing a valuable service to the community by reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour, long-term unemployment, and social disadvantage. The Breakfast Club has been instrumental in bringing parents into the school community and back into an educational arena. Furthermore, it is providing employment, educational and training opportunities to community residents. It is helping to improve public health in the area. It has enhanced inter-agency co-operation. It is raising awareness of the role of the community sector and is providing a much need boost to the moral and spirit of the local community.

Recommendations

1. The Breakfast Club is providing a much needed and effective service in both the school and the wider community. This service must be continued if educational disadvantage and social exclusion are to be reduced in the long run.
2. The role of the Project Co-ordinator must be secured in the long run if the Breakfast Club is to continue providing an effective service.
3. There is an urgent need to secure long-term funding for the Breakfast Club so that the service and the employment it provides in the area can be maintained on a permanent basis.
4. The number of funding organisations should be reduced to, if possible, one or two organisations. A decision needs to be made on whether to continue operating as it does, in two sectors, or to mainstream it within one sector. To mainstream it within one sector has implications for both sectors. A period of debate must now take place between all stakeholders as to which path the Breakfast Club should take.
5. In conjunction with Recommendation 4, a decision also needs to be made as to who can avail of the Breakfast Club service.
6. An audit of the nutritional content of the food provided by the Breakfast Club needs to be undertaken by a suitably qualified individual, i.e., a nutritionist.
7. A full review of the 2006 Census of Population for the area should be undertaken, as soon as it becomes available, in order to identify the exact change in employment and educational attainment statistics for the area since 2002.

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

St. John's Junior National School (JNS) and St. Paul's Senior National School (SNS) Breakfast Club has been operating on the school grounds of the St. Paul's National School in Rathmullen, Drogheda since 1998, serving over 500 hot breakfasts and lunches every day. St. John's Junior National School and St. Paul's Senior National School are situated beside each other in Rathmullen. Both have Designated Disadvantage Area Status and cater for 595 pupils, boys and girls, from the Rathmullen area (St. John's has a population of 329 pupils; St. Paul's has a population of 266 pupils). The Breakfast Club is managed by an inter-agency committee comprising a number of stakeholders, namely:

- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Drogheda Borough Council/RAPID
- Drogheda Partnership
- Drogheda Youth Development
- FÁS
- Holy Family Parish School Completion Programme
- St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Parents' Councils.
- St. John's JNS Board of Management
- St. Paul's SNS Board of Management.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To document the history of the Breakfast Club since its inception in 1998.
2. To establish the impact the Breakfast Club has had on pupils, their parents and families, the schools and the wider community.

1.3 Research Approach and Methodology

The approach taken to achieve the research objectives was primarily qualitative in nature, but involved a combination of techniques:

Review of Programme Documentation

A number of documents and reports were reviewed in order to identify the inputs, objectives, outputs and anticipated outcomes of the Programme. Documentation reviewed included:

- Funding applications forms
- Minutes of Inter-Agency Meetings
- Drogheda Partnership Youth & Education Committee, 2002, *Case Study of the Breakfast Club*
- Breakfast Club Attendance Records.

Demographic Profile

The Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) for the Drogheda/Rathmullen area were reviewed. This provided demographic data from the 2002 Census of population, and where available, from the 2006 Census of Population, for the Drogheda area. Deprivation Indicators for the area were also reviewed.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Members of the Inter-Agency Committee

Semi-structured interviews¹ were conducted with members of the Inter-Agency Committee in order to review the development, implementation and impact of the Programme. Face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of each of the following organisations/stakeholders:

- Department of Education and Science
- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Drogheda Borough Council
- RAPID
- Drogheda Partnership
- Drogheda Youth Development

¹ A semi-structured interview involves the use of an Interview Guide, containing a list of pre-determined questions and topics to be covered during the interview. The use of such a Guide ensures consistency in the themes and issues covered in each interview, but questions are open-ended and allow room for further probing by the interviewer should new themes and issues arise during the course of the discussion.

- FÁS
- St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Board of Management
- St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Parent's Councils.

The interview discussions focused on the key strengths and weaknesses of the Programme in terms of implementation, achievement of objectives, impact and key learning.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Breakfast Club Co-ordinator, Assistant Co-ordinator and Breakfast Club Catering Supervisor

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Breakfast Club Co-ordinator, Assistant Co-ordinator and the Breakfast Club Catering Supervisor in order to assess the strengths and weakness of the Project, again in terms of achievement of objectives, impact and key learning, and suggestions for the future development of the Programme.

Focus Group with Breakfast Club Catering Assistants and Monitors

An informal focus group discussion with six Breakfast Club Catering Assistants. The discussion focused on what impact the Breakfast Club has had on their lives and that of their families.

Focus Group with Parents

An informal focus group discussion was held with parents of children who attended the Breakfast Club. A letter was issued by the school inviting all interested parents to attend an informal focus group discussion on the impact of the Breakfast Club. The focus group discussion took place in the Breakfast Club one morning following breakfast, and was attended by four parents (all mothers). The focus group participants discussed the reasons for attending the Breakfast Club; their experience of the Breakfast Club; and the impact and the expected impact on their lives and on the lives and educational experiences of their children as a result of attending the Breakfast Club.

Questionnaire Survey of Parents

As four parents was regarded as too small a number to be considered a sufficient representation of parents' views, it was decided to supplement the parental focus group with a brief questionnaire to parents. Each child in St. Paul's School was given a copy of a one-page questionnaire or feedback form to bring home to their parents. The questionnaire asked parents why they used the Breakfast Club and the impact it has had on their child and family. Approximately, 400 questionnaires were issued, of which 40 were returned, representing a return rate of 10%. Although, this rate may appear low, it was not unexpected given that some parents may have more than one child in the school (and hence may have received more than one copy of the questionnaire), not all parents use the Breakfast Club, and parents were given a relatively short time-frame to complete and return the feedback form. Nevertheless, the 40 returned feedback forms provided valuable information on the perspectives and experiences of parents.

Focus Group with St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Principals

A focus group discussion was held with the two Principals of St. John's Junior National School and St. Paul's Senior National School. The discussion focused on the difference the Breakfast Club has made for pupils, teachers, and the whole school community.

Focus Group with St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Teachers

A focus group with five teachers (two from St. John's JNS and three from St. Paul's SNS) was held in order to gain an insight into the personal, social and educational development of children who attend the Breakfast Club. The discussion focused on the difference the Breakfast Club has made to teaching and learning in the classroom, and explored issues such as classroom engagement, behaviour and attitude to learning among the children

Observation and Consultation with Pupils of St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS

Finally, the Researcher observed two Breakfast Club sessions. In each session, the Researcher observed activity that took place at Breakfast and at Little Lunch. After the second observation session, informal conversations took place with four separate class groups as follows:

Table 1.1 Profile of Pupils who Participated in Research Consultation Process

School	Class	Age	Number of Students	No. of Boys	No. of Girls
St. Paul's SNS	6 th Class 1	11-12 yrs	15	8	7
St. Paul's SNS	6 th Class 2	11-12 yrs	21	9	12
St. Paul's SNS	6 th Class 3	11-12 yrs	16	8	8
St. John's JNS	2 nd Class	7-8 yrs	20	12	8
Total			72	37	35

The pupils talked about how often they use the Breakfast Club, whether they liked it, why they liked it, and what they would do if it wasn't there.

1.4 Structure of Report

This report details the key findings and recommendations arising from the impact analysis of the St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Breakfast Club.

The report is broken down into a number of sections. This first section contained an overview of the aims and objectives of the research, and the approach and methodology used to achieve the research objectives. The following section presents a demographic and socio-economic profile of the area in which the Breakfast Club is located and so provides an overview of the context in which the Club is operating. The third section outlines the development of the Breakfast Club in 1998 and details how the Club is currently being funded, managed, and operated on a day-to-day basis. Section four examines the impact of the project. It is divided into five sections:

1. Impact on Pupils of St. John's and St. Paul's National Schools
2. Impact on Parents and Families
3. Impact on the Whole School Community
4. Impact on the Wider Community
5. Issues Arising.

The final section of the report outlines the research conclusions and identifies a number of recommendations for the future development and sustainability of the Project.

Section 2 Demographic Profile of Drogheda

2.1 Introduction

The St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club is located in the Greater Rathmullen area, on the west side of Drogheda, Co. Louth. The area is a designated RAPID area, which means that it has been identified by the Government as an urban area of concentrated disadvantage. It contains a high percentage of local authority housing across a number of housing estates, including St. Finian's Park, Ballsgrove, Rathmullen Park, Beechwood Drive, Rowan Heights and Marley Court. This section sets out in more detail the demographic, social and economic context in which the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club is located. Statistical data drawn from the 2002 Census of Population and preliminary data from the 2006 Census of Population² were used for this purpose.

Two types of statistical data were reviewed:

- i. **Deprivation/Affluence Indicators** which provided valuable information on the levels of deprivation/affluence in the Drogheda area.

- ii. **Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS)** which provided information in relation to:
 1. Population
 2. Education
 3. Unemployment
 4. Social Class
 5. Percentage of Lone Parent Households
 6. Percentage of Local Authority Housing.

Statistics for Drogheda are presented under each of the above categories and comparisons made with statistics for County Louth and the State as a whole. Statistics are also presented for the two Electoral Divisions in Drogheda (West Gate

² Preliminary data from the 2006 Census of Population was only available in relation to population and population change.

and St. Mary's) in which the Rathmullen area is largely located. However, these areas also contain residential areas that lie outside the catchment area of the St. John's and St. Paul's Schools.

2.2 Deprivation and Affluence in the Drogheda Area

A popular method of measuring disadvantage is the Haase and Pratschke's (2005) 'Deprivation Indicator'. Haase and Pratschke (2005) developed a single, numeric figure which represents the level of 'affluence or deprivation' that exists during a Census year in any given Electoral Division, town, city or county in the country. This single, numeric figure is called an '**Affluence/Deprivation Indicator**'. It is calculated by combining the following three categories of statistics, obtained from the Census, into one single figure:

Demographic Decline

- Percentage of population aged under 16 or over 65.
- Percentage of population with primary school education only.
- Percentage of population with a third level education.
- Percentage of households with children aged 15 and under headed by a single parent.
- Percentage change in population over the previous 5 years.

Social Class Disadvantage

- Percentage of population with primary school education only.
- Percentage of population with a third level education.
- Percentage of households headed by professionals, or managerial and technical employees, including farmers with 100 acres or more.
- Mean number of persons per room.
- Percentage of households headed by semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers, including farmers with less than 30 acres.

Labour Market Deprivation

- Percentage of households headed by semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers, including farmers with less than 30 acres.

- Percentage of households with children aged 15 and under headed by a single parent.
- Male employment rate.
- Female employment rate.

The Affluence/Deprivation Indicator is a number on a scale that ranges from: –50 to +50. –50 represents the lowest possible level of deprivation or poverty/disadvantage, while +50 represents the highest possible level of affluence.

Table 2.1 below shows the Deprivation Indicators for Drogheda, West Gate and St. Mary's and compares them to the Indicators for County Louth and the State as a whole. As the Table shows, the level of affluence for West Gate and St. Mary's in 2002 equalled the rate for Drogheda, but this rate was lower than that for Louth and the country. Put another way, the level of deprivation or disadvantage in the Rathmullen area and Drogheda was greater than the county and the national average. However, on a positive note, the rate of improvement in the area, in terms of deprivation/affluence, since 1991 has been greater than the county and national rate of improvement, indicating that the various initiatives that have been put in place in Drogheda to combat disadvantage (such as the Breakfast Club) are making a difference.

Table 2.1 Deprivation Indicators (2002)

Area	Absolute Affluence/Deprivation Score 2002	Change in Deprivation Score 1991 - 2002
West Gate	10.6	18.3
St. Mary's	10.6	18.3
Drogheda	10.6	18.3
Louth	11.0	16.1
State	17.4	15.4

2.3 Small Area Population Statistics

This section details some key demographic statistics for Drogheda and the Rathmullen area, as drawn from the 2002 Census of Population, and where available, from the 2006 Census of Population.

2.3.1 Population

In 2006, Drogheda's population was 32,831³ having increased by 6% since 2002. While this increase in population is slightly lower than the county and national average increases of 8.9% and 8.1% respectively, the population in some parts of Drogheda has increased dramatically. For example, the population in St. Mary's Electoral Division on the south side of Drogheda has increased by 27.7% since 2002 and 61% since 1991. However, on the other hand, West Gate's population has decreased by just over 8% since 2002 (although it has still increased by 15% since 1991). Overall, Drogheda's population rose by just over 33% between 1991 and 2006, compared to a change of 23.7% for County Louth and 20.1% for the State. These changes of population are shown in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2 Population and Population Change (1991-2002)

Area	Population 2006	Population Change 2002 – 2006	Population Change 1991 - 2006
West Gate	5,880	-8.3%	15%
St. Mary's	6,052	27.7%	61%
Drogheda	32,831	6.0%	33.7%
Louth	110,894	8.9%	23.7%
State	4,234,925	8.1%	20.1%

2.3.2 Education

In 2002, the rate of early school leaving in Drogheda was higher than the national average. Table 2.3 shows the highest level of education for all people aged fifteen and over in the Drogheda area. If the figures for percentage of people who have left school with no formal education/primary education only and lower secondary are combined (i.e. the percentage of people who have left school early), it shows that the rate of early school leaving in Drogheda was 49.5% compared to 44.9% for the State. In West Gate, it was as high as 58.2%. The percentage of people with third level

³This figure includes the 3,937 people who live in the St. Peter's Electoral Division but who are counted separately under 'Louth Rural Area' in the CSO 2006 Preliminary Census Report. However, the 2002 GAMMA report on the 2002 Census statistics includes them under 'Drogheda'. Therefore, for consistency purposes, they are included in the statistics for Drogheda in this report.

education in Drogheda was also lower than the national average (22.4% compared to 26%). In West Gate, it was just 17.1%. This high level of early school leaving and the low rate of third level education would clearly have had implications for employment levels in the area.

Table 2.3 Highest Level of Education for all Persons Aged 15+ (2002)

Area	No Formal Education/Primary Education Only	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary and/or Technical/Vocational Qualification	3 rd Level/ Further Education
West Gate	32.6%	25.6%	24.7%	17.1%
St. Mary's	15.2%	25.7%	30.1%	29.9%
Drogheda	25.5%	24.0%	28.0%	22.4%
Louth	25.4%	25.8%	27.4%	21.4%
State	22.2%	22.7%	29.1%	26.0%

2.3.3 Unemployment

As Table 2.4 below shows, the rates of unemployment in West Gate, St. Mary's, Drogheda and County Louth in 2002 were higher than the national average. This was true for both men and women.

Table 2.4 Unemployment Rate (2002)

Area	Unemployment Rate	Unemployment Rate Males	Unemployment Rate Females
West Gate	14.2	15.9	11.8
St. Mary's	12.6	12.1	13.3
Drogheda	12.8	13.3	12.0
Louth	13.2	13.7	12.6
State	8.8	9.4	8.0

However, as Table 2.5 shows, while unemployment had fallen by 11% in Drogheda since 1996, this change considerably lagged behind the improvement in unemployment figures experienced by the State as a whole. In fact, the fall in the level of unemployment in Drogheda and County Louth was almost three times less than what was experienced by the country as a whole between 1996 and 2002.

Table 2.5 Percentage Unemployment Change (1996 – 2002)

Area	Percentage Unemployment Change 1996 - 2002
West Gate	-12%
St. Mary's	-8.2%
Drogheda	-11.0%
Louth	-13.2%
State	-30.6%

2.3.4 Social Class

The Census provides information on the percentage of people in seven different social classes, namely:

1 = Professional workers

2 = Managerial and technical

3 = Non-manual

4 = Skilled manual

5 = Semi-skilled

6 = Unskilled.

A 7th category covers "all others gainfully employed".

As Table 2.6 shows, the percentage of people in the Professional Workers and Managerial and Technical Social Classes in Drogheda in 2002 was slightly lower than the national average (4.1% and 22.2% v. 6.1% and 25.5% respectively). The percentages were even lower again in West Gate where only 2.5% and 17.7% of the population were in the Professional Workers and Managerial and Technical Social Classes. Meanwhile, the percentages of people in the Semi-skilled and Unskilled categories in Drogheda as a whole, but particularly in West Gate, were higher than the national averages.

Table 2.6 Social Class (2002)

Area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
West Gate	2.5%	17.4%	15.4%	19.9%	17.7%	9.4%	17.7%	100%
St. Mary's	5.3%	28.4%	15.4%	15.4%	13.1%	5.7%	16.6%	100%
Drogheda	4.1%	22.2%	16.4%	18.5%	14.6%	7.3%	16.9%	100%
Louth	4.7%	22.7%	16.3%	19.3%	13.3%	6.7%	17.0%	100%
State	6.1%	25.5%	16.5%	17.2%	10.9%	5.6%	18.2%	100%

2.3.5 Lone Parents

The percentage of lone parent households in 2002 was also higher in Drogheda, compared to the county and national averages, as highlighted in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Lone Parents (% of all Households) (2002)

Area	Lone Parents	Lone Parents where at least one child is under 15
West Gate	14.6%	6.8%
St. Mary's	17.4%	12.7%
Drogheda	14.0%	7.7%
Louth	13.7%	7.0%
State	11.9%	5.3%

2.3.6 Local Authority Housing

Finally, Drogheda had a higher concentration of local authority housing in 2002 compared to County Louth and the state as a whole, as shown in Table 2.8 below.

Table 2.8 Percentage of Local Authority Housing

Area	Percentage Rented from Local Authority
West Gate	9.4%
St. Mary's	15.5%
Drogheda	8.0%
Louth	6.7%
State	6.9%

2.4 In Summary

According to 2002 Census Data, the rate of deprivation or disadvantage in the Drogheda and specifically the Rathmullen area was greater than both the county and the national average. Drogheda's population however has increased at a faster rate over the past fifteen years compared to increases for County Louth and the country as a whole, but there is still considerable disparity in population changes between individual Electoral Divisions. For example, St. Mary's has experienced a population increase of 61.1% since 1991, while West Gate's population has increased by just 15% over the same period.

The rate of early school leaving for all persons aged fifteen and over was higher in Drogheda, while the percentage of people with a third level education was lower.

However, again there was disparity between individual Electoral Divisions with West Gate experiencing much higher levels of early school leaving and lower rates of people with third level education, compared to St. Mary's. The rate of unemployment in Drogheda was greater than the national average. Drogheda also had higher levels of people in the semi-skilled and unskilled social class categories; of lone parent households; and of local authority housing. It is within this social, economic and demographic context that the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club has been operating. The origins, management, operation and funding structure of the Breakfast Club is described in greater detail in the following section.

Section 3 The St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report outlines the origins, management, operation and funding of the St. John's Junior National School and St. Paul's Senior National School Breakfast Club.

3.2 Origins of the Breakfast Club

Section 2 outlined the socio-economic and demographic profile of Drogheda, which showed that the rates of early school leaving and unemployment in Drogheda, in 2002, were higher than the national averages. However, in the mid-1990s, the situation was worse. According to the 1996 Census, 35.6% of the population in Drogheda had left school with no formal education, a rate that was 6% higher than the national figure, while 22.5% left school before completing the Leaving Certificate. Only 15% of the population had a third level qualification. Drogheda, and in particular, Rathmullen, was facing rising educational disadvantage, unemployment and social deprivation.

In 1997, Drogheda Partnership undertook a Needs Analysis of the Rathmullen area in conjunction with the Principals, Home School Liaison Co-ordinators, teaching staff and parents of the three schools in the area (St. John's JNS, St. Paul's SNS, and St. Oliver's Community College). This Needs Analysis identified a number of key issues, namely:

- There was a high level of educational underachievement among the pupils in the three schools. Children were coming to school late and often hungry. Many came without lunches and those that did have lunches, it often comprised of unhealthy "junk" food. As a result, teachers reported poor levels of concentration and attention among children, as well as low levels of energy in the mornings, and high levels of hyper-activity in the afternoon. Teaching and learning in the school was therefore a challenging task.

- For a variety of reasons (of which lack of nutrition was one), many children were falling behind in their school work, and it was felt that a structured intervention after school to help children with their homework and general education would be very welcome and beneficial.
- The schools did not have a high standing in the community and many parents in the area were choosing to send their children to other schools outside the local area. The schools therefore were experiencing a significant drop in pupil numbers. All these crises led the schools, but in particular St. John's and St. Paul's National Schools, to a point where they faced a serious threat of being closed down.
- There was a need for parents in the community to play a more active role in the education of their children.
- Problems of poor nutrition, poor attendance and poor discipline urgently needed to be addressed.

A series of meetings was subsequently held between the parents, the school staff, the Boards of Management and Drogheda Partnership to try and find a way to address the above issues. It was from this consultation process that the Drogheda Community Schools Programme was established in 1998. While the Community Schools Programme is not the focus of this report, it is important to review how, when, and why it was established, and how it operated, as it is out of this Programme that the Breakfast Club as it exists today was born. The goal of the Drogheda Community Schools Programme was to:

“Provide additional supports to facilitate participation in and benefit from education including primary level, for those at risk of early school leaving”.
(Drogheda Partnership Youth and Education Committee, 2002).

The Programme specifically aimed to:

- Provide healthy meals to children attending the three schools, through the establishment of a Breakfast Club.
- Provide homework support to children attending St. Paul's SNS, through the establishment of an after-school Homework Club.

- Provide employment, training and career progression opportunities for members (ideally parents of school children) of the local community through the Community Employment Scheme.
- Raise parental awareness and knowledge in relation to healthy-eating and homework supervision.
- Empower parents to become actively involved in their children's education.
- Promote a positive attitude towards education among children, parents and the wider community.

The Drogheda Community Schools Programme, which was led by Drogheda Partnership and the school Principals, was initially awarded £150,000 under the first Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, and in conjunction with a grant of £80,000 from Drogheda Partnership, three unused classrooms in St. Paul's School were converted into a fully-equipped, CERT-approved working kitchen, and two dining-rooms, to be used as a Breakfast Club. Parents were employed through the FÁS Community Employment Scheme to operate the Breakfast Club. The Club began serving three meals a day, five days a week, to the children of all three schools – breakfast, 'little lunch' and a hot meal at lunch time. The Breakfast Club was also open in the mornings to parents and pre-school siblings of pupils. A Homework Club operated on four afternoons a week, providing homework assistance to approximately fifteen children, selected from Fourth Class in St. Paul's SNS on the basis of need. Snacks were also provided for the Homework Club participants.

In addition to the Breakfast Club and the Homework Club, the Community Schools Programme was also responsible for initiating a number of other projects aimed at combating early school leaving and educational disadvantage in the area. While it is outside the scope of this report to review each one, it is useful to mention them here. They were:

- The Froebel College Initiative. This project, between Froebel College of Education and the Transition Year Programme in St. Oliver's Community College, was aimed at encouraging students to stay in school and participate in higher level education.

- Literacy through Information Technology Programme, which aimed to support the transition of students from St. Paul's SNS to St. Oliver's Community College.
- The St. John's Book Start Programme which aimed to improve family literacy by providing book packs, library information and advice for parents on how to develop the language skills of their children.

Since its establishment, the Drogheda Community Schools Programme has evolved and transformed over the years, depending on funding available at the time. Only the Breakfast Club and the St. John's Book Start Programme have remained in existence to this day. The remainder of this report focuses on the impact of this Breakfast Club. The funding, organisational structure and operation of the Breakfast Club, as it exists today, is described in detail now.

3.3 Management, Staffing, Operation and Funding of the Breakfast Club

3.3.1 Management Structure

The Breakfast Club is managed by an Inter-Agency Committee comprising of representatives of the following funding organisations and stakeholders:

- Breakfast Club Staff (Project Co-ordinator)
- Department of Education and Science
- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Drogheda Borough Council
- Drogheda Partnership
- Drogheda Youth Development
- FÁS
- RAPID Area Implementation Team (AIT)
- St. John's and St. Paul's Parents' Council
- St. John's JNS Board of Management
- St. Paul's SNS Board of Management.

The Inter-Agency Committee meet approximately every 3 months during school term time and are responsible for the overall strategic management of the Breakfast Club.

One of the primary tasks of the Inter-Agency Committee is to ensure that sufficient funding is in place to maintain the day-to-day operation of the Breakfast Club. In fact, this has represented the most time-consuming task of the Inter-Agency Committee since the establishment of the Breakfast Club.

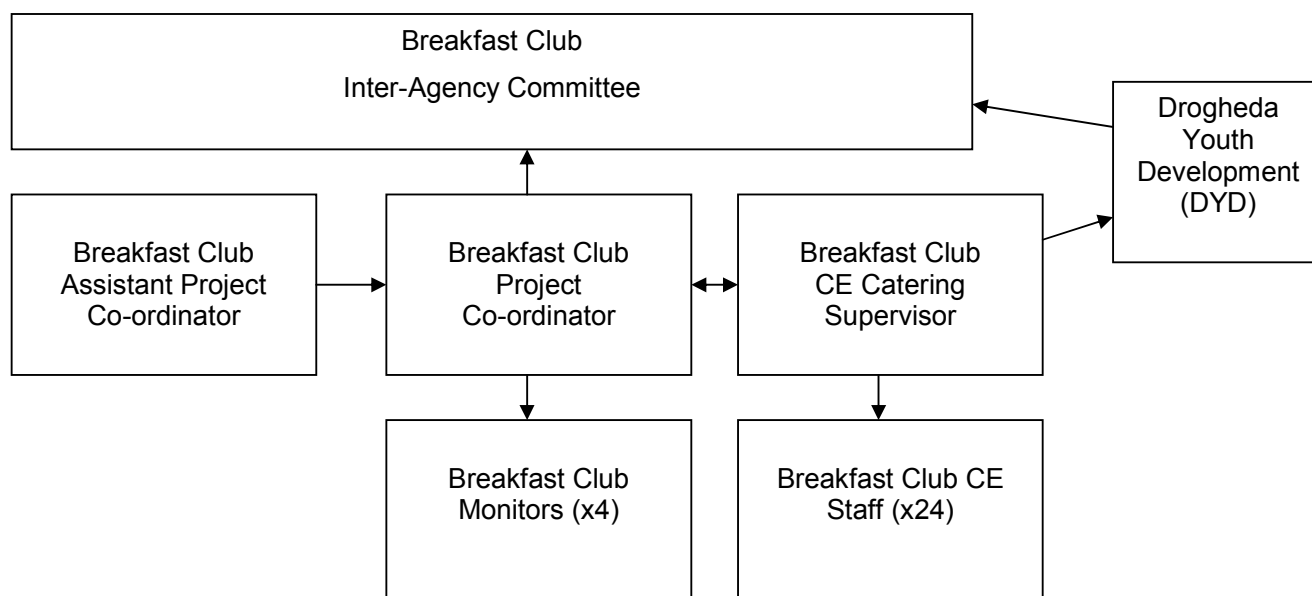
3.3.2 Staffing Structure

The Breakfast Club is operated on a day-to-day basis by a Community Scheme Catering Supervisor and 24 Catering Assistants, employed by Drogheda Youth Development, on a FÁS Community Employment Scheme. The Catering Supervisor has a dual role 1) as a Community Employment Supervisor with responsibility for the training of the 24 Community Employment Scheme Workers and 2) as a Catering Supervisor with responsibility for the preparation and delivery of meals, and management of the Kitchen and Dining Room, and the 24 Catering Assistants.

Since November 2005, a Project-Co-ordinator has been employed to manage the administration of the Breakfast Club and to co-ordinate the work of the various organisations involved in the Club. Prior to this, much of this work fell to the schools. The Project Co-ordinator, funded from Dormant Account funds, effectively acts as the interface between the Breakfast Club, the school and the community sector. The Project Co-ordinator is based in the Breakfast Club in St. Paul's School, and is supported by an Assistant Project Co-ordinator.

Four Monitors, funded by Drogheda Partnership, are employed to supervise the children in the Breakfast Club and to accompany the pupils of St. John's JNS to and from their classrooms and the Breakfast Club.

An overview of the management and staffing structure of the Breakfast Club is provided in Figure 3.1. It is the policy of the Breakfast Club to try to recruit staff, at whatever position, from the parent population of the school. Hence, most of the staff in the Breakfast Club have or have had children or grandchildren attending the school.

Figure 3.1 Management and Staffing Structure of the Breakfast Club

3.3.3 Day-to-day Operation

Staff commence work in the Breakfast Club at 7.45am. The first task is to prepare breakfast. Breakfast normally includes a choice of cereal, bacon, sausage, scrambled egg, toast, juice, tea etc. The Breakfast Club opens at 8.15am. The pupils⁴, many accompanied by their parents and pre-school siblings queue at the food counter, choose their breakfast, and pay at the cash till. They then take a seat at a table in the adjoining dining room and eat their breakfast. The Breakfast Club closes at 9am, at which point classes in the school commence. The Breakfast Club staff clean up after breakfast and prepare for 'Little Lunch' and 'Lunch'.

The Breakfast Club opens again from 11am to 11.15am for 'Little Lunch' for the pupils of St. Paul's Senior National School only. 'Little Lunch' generally consists of a choice of soup and a roll and a sausage roll. The Breakfast Club opens again from 12.10pm to 12.45pm for 'Lunch' for the pupils of St. John's Junior National School, and from 12.40pm to 1.15pm for the pupils of St. Paul's Senior National School. Lunch in the Breakfast Club comprises of a choice of two hot meals and a salad dish. An example of the range of food available in the Breakfast Club over a sample five-

⁴ Since February 2005, funding restrictions have meant that the Breakfast Club is no longer available to pupils of St. Oliver's Community School. However, an exception is made for children of Breakfast Club staff who attend St. Oliver's, who are allowed to attend for Breakfast in the mornings.

day period, as well as the price list, is included in the Appendix. The CE Staff rotate the different tasks involved in running the Breakfast Club so that every staff member gets experience in every part of the job.

Entry into the Breakfast Club is staggered to avoid over-crowding at the food counter and in the Dining Room. As stated above, Breakfast Club Monitors are employed to accompany the pupils of St. John's Junior National School to and from their classrooms to the Breakfast Club at lunch time. (The Breakfast Club is located in St. Paul's school building). The Monitors are also responsible for supervising the pupils as they queue to enter the Breakfast Club, as they queue at the food counter and cash till and as they eat their breakfast/lunch in the Dining Room. The Monitors are assisted by the Project Co-ordinator and the Assistant Co-ordinator in this task.

The food in the Breakfast Club is not free. Each item has a price, albeit a low price. This prevents the Breakfast Club from gaining a reputation as being a "soup kitchen". If this were to happen those who would be most in need of the food may not avail of the service for fear of being stigmatised. However, because of the fact that the food is not free, but has a price that is the same for all people, using the Breakfast Club does not differentiate anyone as being 'in need'.

As the Breakfast Club was set up to provide a support to those most in need, the Club does however make an effort to 'target' those children which have been identified as being in need of food and whose families may not be able to afford the price of the food in the Breakfast Club. In such a case, the cost of the food is waived for the children, who are told that their parents have already paid for the food "on the book". This way, no child is made to feel any different from any one else, while the target children receive the support and food that they need.

In the 2005-2006 school year, the Breakfast Club provided an average of 557 meals a day. This can be broken down as follows:

Table 3.1 Average Daily Meal Count

Meal	Breakfast	Little Lunch (St. Paul's SNS only)		Lunch			Total
		Pupils	Adults	Pupils	St. John's Pupils	St. Paul's Pupils	
Daily Average	124	13	136	161	107	16	557

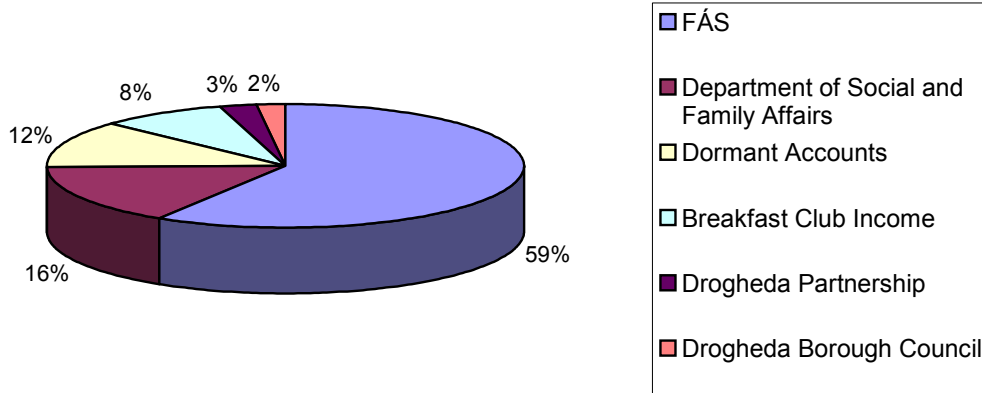
These figures show that on average almost 50% of the pupils in St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS are using the Breakfast Club on a daily basis. A survey of St. Paul's SNS pupils however, conducted in May 2006, revealed that only 3% of pupils have never attended the Breakfast Club. Stated another way, 97% of St. Paul's pupils have attended the Breakfast Club at least once.

3.3.4 Funding and Support Structures

Sourcing and maintaining funding for the Breakfast Club has proven to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Breakfast Club. Currently, the Breakfast Club is funded by 6 different sources, as outlined in Table 3.2 and Figure 3.1 below:

Table 3.2 Sources of Funding

Source	Amount	Percentage of Total Project Cost	Purpose
FÁS	€250,000	59%	Employment of Breakfast Club staff, on CE Scheme with Drogheda Youth Development
Department of Social and Family Affairs	€67,560	16%	Provision of Food
Dormant Accounts	€52,350	12%	Employment of Project Co-ordinator and Assistant Co-ordinator
Breakfast Club Income	€36,000	8%	
Drogheda Partnership	€11,000	3%	Employment of Monitors
Drogheda Borough Council	€8,150	2%	Provision of Food
Total	€425,060	100%	

Figure 3.2**Value of Contribution from Funders**

However, it is important to state that while they do not provide any direct funding to the Breakfast Club, the Breakfast Club could not survive without the support provided by the Department of Education and Science, Drogheda Youth Development, and the schools' Parents' Councils.

By providing three classrooms to be used exclusively by the Breakfast Club and by covering the cost of related insurance, the Department of Education & Science is a key support structure of the Breakfast Club. Without this assistance, the Breakfast Club would not be able to operate in its current format.

Meanwhile, Drogheda Youth Development (DYD) plays a key role in maintaining the Breakfast Club's current funding structure through FÁS. DYD initially got involved in the Breakfast Club in 2004 when the Club faced a serious risk of closing down due to lack of funding. A problem had arisen when FÁS, (a significant funder of the Breakfast Club through the employment of staff on CE schemes), could no longer participate in the Project because, due to a change in its own funding regulations, its direct involvement in the school sector was no longer possible. It should be noted here that the primary objective of the FÁS CE Scheme is to prepare/train people to return or enter the work force on a full-time (or part-time) basis. However, it is

charged with providing these opportunities within the community sector, not the school sector (which is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science). For FÁS to remain involved with the Breakfast Club, it had to do so through the community sector. This is where Drogheda Youth Development (DYD) became involved. Breakfast Club staff are now employed on a FÁS CE Scheme sponsored by Drogheda Youth Development, rather than by the school, thereby facilitating continued financial support by FÁS in the Breakfast Club.

The Parents' Councils play a key role in maintaining the current structure of the Breakfast Club by providing the entryway for Drogheda Youth Development to be involved in the Breakfast Club (and hence FÁS). By becoming an active member of the Breakfast Club's Inter-Agency Committee, the Parents' Councils are a driving force in the Breakfast Club and act as the link between the school sector and the community sector (i.e., Drogheda Youth Development and FÁS).

The Breakfast Club is currently dependent on each of the above funding and support organisations to remain in operation. Should any one of the above organisations withdraw from the Project, the Breakfast Club's ability to continue in its present form is put at risk. It is therefore not surprising that various stakeholders and staff of the Breakfast Club devote a considerable amount of time and effort to maintaining the relationships between the Breakfast Club and existing and potential funding organisations. This is something that cannot be sustained in the long run, and is an issue that is discussed in further detail in Section 4.

Section 4 Impact of St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report reviews the impact that the Breakfast Club has had on:

- i) The pupil's of St. John's Junior and St. Paul's Senior National Schools;
- ii) The parents and families of the school pupils;
- iii) The whole school community;
- iv) The wider community.

The findings presented below are drawn from, and informed by, the consultations held with pupils, parents, Breakfast Club staff, school staff and members of the Inter-Agency Committee. As this section will show, the impact that the Breakfast Club has had is quite wide-ranging but was illuminated very clearly and with considerable consensus by all those who participated in the consultation process for this report.

While the scope of this report is to assess the impact of the Breakfast Club since 2004, the Breakfast Club has been in existence in some format since 1998, and so in many cases, the impact arising from it stems from it being in existence since 1998, and is not just confined to what the Breakfast Club has achieved over the last two years.

4.2 Impact on Pupils of St. John's and St. Paul's National Schools

For some pupils, the food provided by the Breakfast Club represent the only substantive meals that they will receive all day. Indeed, some members of the Breakfast Club staff have observed that, for a small number of pupils arriving in for breakfast in the morning, this is their first substantial meal they have eaten since lunch in the Breakfast Club the day before. Teachers reported that occasionally, some pupils arrive into school at 9am, without having had a breakfast at home or in the Club. For these children, the food provided at 'little lunch' is even more valuable.

In the case of some ‘target’ children, who arrive into the classroom hungry, the teacher can bring them to the Breakfast Club outside of normal opening hours so as to ensure that the child is not starving in the classroom. It is not surprising then that the Breakfast Club has made a significant difference to the lives of many of the pupils of St. John’s and St. Paul’s National Schools in a number of different areas, including: educational achievement; attendance and punctuality; classroom behaviour; student/teacher relations; eating habits; personal and social development, and self-esteem. These are now explored in more detail.

4.2.1 Educational Achievement

Those members of the school staff who have worked in St. John’s and St. Paul’s schools since before the Breakfast Club was established most vividly identified the difference that the Breakfast Club has made to the educational achievement of pupils of both schools.

Teachers and Principals recalled how, in the years before the Breakfast Club, many children were coming to school in the mornings visibly hungry and under-nourished. As such, many students suffered from poor concentration and tiredness in the classroom, were quickly falling behind in their schoolwork, and were not reaching their potential academically. As more than one teacher stated, “*a hungry child cannot learn*”. Principals and teachers also reported that because many students did not bring packed lunches to school with them, they would often leave the school grounds at lunch time to go to the local shop to buy junk food, returning in a ‘hyper’ or aggressive state as a result of the type of food they were eating at lunch time. This further affected their ability and willingness to concentrate in the classroom in the afternoons, and so further reduced their educational performance.

Since the Breakfast Club came into operation however, this has changed considerably, as the Club has provided a facility to ensure that the children’s education is not being adversely affected due to hunger and/or poor diet. Principals and teachers of both schools have noticed a marked improvement in literacy and numeracy skills in the school, and there is now a 100% transfer rate from St. Paul’s Senior National School to the local secondary schools. It is not possible however to state how much of this improvement is attributable to the Breakfast Club alone.

Rather, the overall improvement in educational achievement within the school is the result of a number of successful initiatives, but the Breakfast Club was widely recognised by the school staff as being one of those initiatives. (Other factors which are contributing to improved educational performance in the school include: lower student-teacher ratios; the Early Start Programme; additional Learning Support Teachers; and the implementation of the Revised Primary School Curriculum).

Parents also reported that because their children are not so hungry and tired when they arrive home from school, having had a hot dinner at lunchtime, their children are better able to complete their homework as soon as they come home from school. Furthermore, a number of parents reported that because they are not under as much pressure to cook a dinner immediately after the children come home from school, they have more time to help their children with their homework if needed.

Therefore, while the Breakfast Club alone does not and cannot remove all the factors that may be adversely affecting a child's educational performance in school, it does however make a vital contribution, as one barrier to educational achievement – lack of concentration, attention and ability to learn due to lack of food – is removed.

4.2.2 Attendance and Punctuality

The Breakfast Club has had more of an impact on the punctuality of pupils than on attendance. According to the school Principals, neither school had a serious problem with non-attendance, rather the problem lay with poor punctuality, with students coming in late in the morning, or late in the afternoon, or not returning after lunch. However, since the Breakfast Club was set up, punctuality has improved “*enormously*” according to the Principals and the teachers. This is due to a number of reasons.

Parents, school staff, the Breakfast Club staff, and even the pupils, all acknowledged that the Breakfast Club has provided a key incentive for pupils to come to school on time in the mornings. As the Breakfast Club is open, and serving hot food, between 8.15am and 9am each morning, it has encouraged children to get up out of bed, out the door of their homes, and down to the school, before 9am in order to avail of the breakfast. As one teacher stated,

“It gets children up out of bed because they know they’ll be fed”.

According to the school Principals, since the establishment of the Breakfast Club, the number of children arriving late in the morning has dropped dramatically, to such an extent that it is no longer an issue in the two schools.

Before the Breakfast Club was set up, St. Paul’s had a problem with some children leaving the school grounds at lunch time to go to the shop, but not returning to school in the afternoon, having being distracted by other activities or people they encountered while out of the school grounds. However, since the provision of hot meals at lunch time, pupils are no longer leaving the school grounds to go to the shop, and so the problem of children not returning to school in the afternoon has reduced dramatically.

4.2.3 Classroom Behaviour

Poor discipline and aggressive behaviour, particularly among older boys in St. Paul’s, was a particularly serious problem in the time before the Breakfast Club. One of the primary reasons for this was hunger and poor diet. The behaviour of some pupils, due to hunger and poor diet, was not only disruptive to their own ability to learn, but it also adversely affected the ability of the teacher to teach effectively, and of other children to learn. The problem was particularly acute in the afternoons when the effects of a diet of high sugar foods took hold.

However, when the junk food diet at lunch time was replaced by hot, healthy meals from the Breakfast Club, the school staff observed a noticeable improvement in behaviour, attitude, concentration levels and willingness to learn among the pupils. According to the Principals and teachers, the behaviour of children has become *“significantly better”* in the afternoons, there are fewer *“outbursts”* in the classrooms, and the classrooms are in general much *“calmer”*. While this change is attributed primarily to the pupils having a junk-free lunch, the calm atmosphere in the Breakfast Club, where students queue in an orderly fashion, sit down, eat and talk to each other in a calm and non-threatening and non-competitive manner, has also helped, as, according to members of the school staff, this calmness is brought back into the classrooms, in place of the aggressive, competitive atmosphere that may have built up in the school yard.

4.2.4 Pupil/Teacher Relations

The atmosphere in the classrooms, particularly in the afternoons, was described by a number of teachers, as being “*no longer tense*”, since the establishment of the Breakfast Club. Teachers and pupils have built positive, friendly relationships when once this would have been unheard of. While this is undoubtedly a factor of a changing ethos within the educational system in general, the absence of aggression and disruptive behaviour in the afternoons, particularly among older boys, as a result of the absence of high sugar lunches, is equally a factor in this change.

4.2.5 Improved Eating Habits

It was acknowledged by Breakfast Club staff, and even by some parents, that the Club provides a wider range of food than many of the pupils would receive at home. The Breakfast Club staff have observed that, as is often the case with many children, some pupils are initially reluctant to eat some food items, particularly when a new dish is provided for the first time. However, the staff and parents have noticed that children who are initially unwilling to try something new, or would be unwilling to eat it at home, are more inclined to eat the food when they see their peers eating it (or even indeed their teachers!).

Peer pressure is clearly helping to ensure that the children eat well. Indeed, there was a strong consensus among parents that the children eat more (in terms of amount and variety of food) in the Breakfast Club than they would ever do at home. The Breakfast Club staff have even observed pupils asking for more fruit, vegetables, milk and juices, particularly in the summer months when they are involved in more outdoor activities and sports. A number of parents also remarked that because their children are eating regular, substantial meals during the day, their appetites in general have improved, many are eating another dinner in the evening, and they are requesting junk food less often. This has had the effect that the pupils in the school are becoming physically healthier, bigger and stronger – something which was observed by a number of the stakeholders who participated in this consultation process.

4.2.6 Personal and Social Development

The Breakfast Club has played a significant role in the development of the pupils' personal and social skills, as noted by the Breakfast Club staff, school staff and parents.

The development of social skills through interaction with new and existing friends, in a safe, calm and warm environment, was identified by many parents as one of the key impacts of the Breakfast Club. Indeed, one of the primary reasons why the Breakfast Club was so popular among the children was the fact that it was a place to meet their friends, a fact highlighted by both the children and the parents.

Several participants in the consultation process also highlighted the fact that the Breakfast Club re-instates the idea that meal times are social occasions, where people sit down and talk to each other – something which may not be happening in some children's homes. In fact, several parents stated that that the Breakfast Club in the mornings provides one of the few times in the day when the family can spend time together.

The Breakfast Club is also responsible for teaching pupils, from a very young age, how to form an orderly queue, how to review the food on offer, make a decision on what they want to eat, place the food on a tray, pay for the food at the cash till, and take a seat at a table in the dining room. While this may seem a very ordinary task, it is in fact quite an achievement for children as young as five and six to perform by themselves, and is something that was highlighted as a particular achievement by parents and the Breakfast Club staff. While a parent may assist them at breakfast time, and the Breakfast Club Monitors are available to assist the pupils if needed, the whole process of selecting, purchasing and eating food in the company of others is a social skill that many of the pupils may not be supported to develop elsewhere. The Breakfast Club staff reported that they have observed the pupils take great pride in the fact that they have developed this skill, and so along with the fact that the pupils are building friendships in a positive, fun and safe environment, the Breakfast Club is providing a valuable boost to their confidence and self-esteem.

4.2.7 Support Structure

As many of the pupils attend the Breakfast Club on a daily basis, they have built up strong relationships with the Breakfast Club staff. Many are either related to staff members, or know them from their community. The Breakfast Club staff represent familiar, friendly faces from home, and the pupils chat comfortably with them. Some pupils confide in them if they have a problem and don't feel comfortable talking to a teacher. If a serious problem regarding a child becomes known to the Breakfast Club staff, channels of communication are open between the Breakfast Club staff and the school to ensure that the child receives whatever support is necessary. In this way, the Breakfast Club offers an additional source of support for both the pupils and the school.

4.2.8 Sense of Pride

Principals, teaching staff, the Breakfast Club staff and parents all reported that the students have developed a sense of pride in the Breakfast Club and in their school as a result. Instead of being identified as being from an area suffering from social disadvantage, many students are aware that they have a facility in their school that does not exist in most other schools. In other words, it gives them a feeling of advantage rather than disadvantage for a change. Students have been observed by their parents, school staff and Breakfast Club staff bringing their friends, who are not students in the school, into the Breakfast Club to "show it off", such is their sense of pride in the facility.

According to the parents, school staff, Breakfast Club staff and the pupils themselves, the pupils clearly enjoy the Breakfast Club. As the pupils stated, they go to the Breakfast Club simply because they like the food and their friends are there. It has now become so much a part of their daily routine that, according to the school staff, on occasions when St. Paul's was closed to pupils for a school in-service or planning day for example, some children still got out of bed and came down to the school for breakfast even though they had no classes that day. In fact, the Breakfast Club is so popular among some students that the Home School Community Liaison Officer had to ask some parents to ensure that their children did not arrive at the school until 8.15am when the Club officially opens. Some children were arriving at 7.45am as the staff arrived. Such is the drawing power of the Breakfast Club. This

certainly makes a pleasant change from the days when, for the children, the school was a negative place to be.

4.3 Impact on Parents and Families

The Breakfast Club has had a very positive and direct impact, in a number of ways, on the parents and families of the pupils of the two schools.

4.3.1 Financial Support

Some families simply do not have the money to provide a decent hot breakfast and a hot dinner for their children every day. Children in this situation are being disadvantaged within the educational system. For parents, the low costs of the different items on the Breakfast Club menu means that the Club provides an extremely cost-effective way of feeding their children and so removes one extra 'risk factor' for children within the educational system. An example of the low cost of food items in the Breakfast Club is provided in Appendix 1.

4.3.2 Peace-of-Mind

One of the key impacts for parents that emerged during the consultation process was that the Breakfast Club provides 'peace-of-mind' for parents who previously would have been concerned about the eating habits of their children, both at home and at school. Many parents reported that the Breakfast Club has eliminated the daily struggle to get their children to eat a breakfast in the mornings. They no longer worry about their children eating junk food at lunch-time. They have found that their children are eating more as well as eating healthier food (even if it is only because their peers are eating the food!). Several parents reported that they no longer worry about their children coming home from school hungry and having waiting for them to come home from work before they eat.

4.3.3 Family Time

Several parents highlighted the fact that the Breakfast Club has enabled the family to spend more time together. This was happening in two ways. Firstly, as one parent explained, the fact that she does not have to prepare a breakfast or an evening meal

(because her children had a hot dinner at lunch time), it provides her with more time to do other things during the day, such as helping her children with their homework. Secondly, several parents reported that the Breakfast Club provides an opportunity in the mornings to sit down and have a meal with their children. For some families, this may be the only time in the day that this is possible.

4.3.4 Improved Family Eating Habits

The improved eating habits of the children is, in some cases, extending to the entire family, as according to a Breakfast Club staff member, some parents have approached her looking for recipes for dishes that their children have eaten at the Breakfast Club and are now looking for at home. In this way, the healthy eating policy of the Breakfast Club is impacting on the entire family. Furthermore, most of the Breakfast Club staff are parents or grandparents of pupils in the school. They have received training in (among other skills) food preparation, food and kitchen hygiene and nutrition. These skills and knowledge are being brought home to their own families.

4.3.5 Friendships

Not only is the Breakfast Club a place for children to make friends and socialise, but also the parents. By coming to the Breakfast Club every morning with their children, parents have come to know one another and have become friends. This has proven to be particularly valuable to parents who are new to the area.

4.4 Impact on the Whole School Community

The whole-school community in this case refers to the teaching and administration staff of St. John's and St. Paul's National Schools.

4.4.1 Improved Teaching and Learning

All the teachers who participated in the consultation process agreed that it is much easier to teach a pupil that is well nourished, in comparison to a hungry pupil. As one teacher reported, there has been more than one occasion when a pupil has informed her that she/he is hungry. Where once she could do nothing about the

situation, now at least she can take the child to the Breakfast Club to be fed, and the challenge of trying to teach a hungry child is overcome.

Another teacher reported that she finds the Breakfast Club a useful resource when teaching SPHE in the classroom as she can use the Breakfast Club as an example of how people should or should not behave towards each other. Discussion of the menu at the Breakfast Club has also helped her to teach the children about healthy eating and nutrition.

4.4.2 School/Parent Relations

The Breakfast Club has been particularly instrumental in building and strengthening relationships between the school and parents. For many parents, schools and school buildings represent negative experiences and memories. They represent a place of fear. Relations between parents and the school can be poor, with parents often having little trust in school authorities. However, by providing employment to parents within the school buildings, and by allowing parents to use the facilities, the Breakfast Club has helped to break down barriers between parents, the local community, and the school, and has enabled a positive and trusting relationship to be developed between them. The feeling of “them versus us” has dissipated and parents are now much more a part of the school community, with the result that parents have developed a greater sense of pride and ownership in the school, and have indeed, it was reported by several research participants, become very quick to act if the school or the Breakfast Club faces any sort of crisis.

Because of this improvement in relationships between parents and the school community, communication between the school and parents has improved significantly. Parents are more familiar with school staff and events (both good and bad) that occur within the school walls. Likewise, problems that may be occurring with some children either in the school or at home are identified sooner, and communicated to the school or to the parent, so that an intervention can be put in place sooner rather than later. As one Principal stated, parents and school staff are now “*all on the same page*”, working together for the benefit of the child. As another participant stated, the Breakfast Club “*gives practical meaning to parents in education*”.

4.4.3 Teacher/Pupil Relations

The Breakfast Club is open to all staff in the school to use, including the teachers. And indeed the teaching staff use it quite frequently. Therefore, the Breakfast Club provides a venue whereby teachers and pupils intermingle in a social and relaxed way, all of which contributes to building a positive ambience in the school between pupils and staff.

4.4.4 School Morale

Members of the school staff who participated in the consultation process reported how, in the early days of the Breakfast Club, some members of the teaching staff were reported to be sceptical about the Breakfast Club and what it was trying to achieve. Some reportedly thought the whole idea was “*mad*” and that it was more work than it was worth. However, very quickly that viewpoint disappeared as teachers began to see the impact that the Breakfast Club was having in the school. According to all who participated in the consultation process, this had the effect of significantly increasing the morale of the entire school community.

4.4.5 School Status

As the positive vibe that emanated from the Breakfast Club and the school began to reach the wider community, the image and the reputation of the school has been greatly enhanced. As a result, the school has become the first choice for parents in the area to send their children to school. And so, over time, the school has gone from being one with falling student numbers, at risk of being closed down, to one with a high demand for places and an ever-increasing student number.

Not only has the Breakfast Club raised the profile and reputation of the school in the eyes of parents of potential school pupils, but also in the eyes of potential teachers. The school Principals reported that in the time before the Breakfast Club, the school had difficulty attracting good quality teachers. However, since the Breakfast Club was established, the school has gained a reputation for having a very positive atmosphere and for being progressive. This reputation has been recognised, according to the school Principals, within the Department of Education and Science, and within the various Colleges of Education who are keen to send student teachers

to the school to observe the good work being done in the school. As a result, it has become an attractive school for would-be staff.

4.5 Impact on the Wider Community

The Breakfast Club has had a positive impact on the wider community in terms of providing employment, training and educational opportunities, promoting community health, reducing anti-social behaviour, educational disadvantage and unemployment, boosting community morale and inter-agency co-operation and raising awareness of the work of the community sector in the area.

4.5.1 Community Training and Employment

Probably one of the key impacts of the Breakfast Club is that it provides valuable employment and educational opportunities for the community. In total, thirty people are currently employed either as catering assistants, monitors, kitchen supervisor, project co-ordinator, project co-ordinator's assistant.

In particular, the Breakfast Club, through Drogheda Youth Development (DYD), currently employs 24 people as Catering Assistants as part of a FÁS Community Employment (CE) Scheme. It provides employment to people from the local community, who have experienced long-term employment and facilitates them, by providing valuable work experience, education and training, to return to education and/or work on a more permanent basis.

As is a key feature of the Community Employment (CE) Scheme, CE participants receive not only training for their current CE position, but are also supported by their CE Sponsor (in this case Drogheda Youth Development) to develop a career plan. Each CE staff member of the Breakfast Club participates in a consultation process with their CE Supervisor in which they discuss current skills, training needs, and where they would like to go in terms of their education and career. Between them they develop an education and training plan. The CE staff then receives support and funding from the sponsor (DYD/FÁS) to embark on their chosen education and training path.

The CE Breakfast Club staff have completed a range of training and educational courses which, according to the staff who participated in the consultation process, most of them would not have had the ability or opportunity to do elsewhere. Some of the courses that the staff have undertaken, include: Food Hygiene; Health and Safety; Manual Handling; and First Aid. These particular courses are required for the positions of Catering Assistant in the Breakfast Club and so are completed by all CE Staff in the Club. The choice of other courses and training opportunities to take depend on each person's individual career plan, but to date have included: ECDL; Back to Education; Money Management; and Personal Grooming and Development.

Not only are the staff acquiring valuable skills that will increase their employability, but also the experience of working in the Breakfast Club has been vital to their own personal and social development. For some staff, the Breakfast Club is their first experience of employment and education for many years. It may even be their first ever experience of employment. The experience has thought them how to work in a team and has encouraged them to be decision-makers. It has significantly boosted their self-confidence and belief in their own abilities, so much so that many of the staff have returned to education, with several of the staff stating that, before the Breakfast Club, they would never have thought that that would have been possible. Indeed, in 2005, 33% of the CE staff embarked on a Return to Education course.

4.5.2 Community Health

By helping to overcome the problem of under-nourished children, and by promoting healthy eating habits among children, their families, staff and their families, the Breakfast Club is playing a vital role in improving overall public health in the area. This will have the long-term effect of reducing pressure on public health services in the area.

4.5.3 Reducing Educational Disadvantage and Social Exclusion

In long run, it is hoped that by helping to overcome one contributing factor of educational disadvantage (that of under-nourishment), the children's educational experience will be enhanced, their risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving will be reduced, which will have positive long-term effects not just for the

children later in life, but for the community in general in terms of reduced rates of long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

4.5.4 Decline in Anti-Social Behaviour

By keeping children on school grounds, who before would have left the school at lunch time “*to hang around street corners*”, and by helping to reduce early-school leaving and educational disadvantage, the Breakfast Club is playing a valuable role in reducing anti-social behaviour in the community.

4.5.5 Improved Community Morale

To understand the impact that the Breakfast Club has had on the wider community, it is necessary to look back at the community in the years immediately preceding the Breakfast Club. As outlined in Sections 2 and 3, the Rathmullen area was experiencing a number of social and economic problems, with unemployment and anti-social behaviour particularly acute. According to a number of the participants in the consultation process, there was an air of anger, apathy and abandonment in the area. Media coverage of activity or events taking place in Rathmullen tended to be negative, and focused on the social and economic problems. Community spirit was low. The Breakfast Club, however, has been instrumental in promoting a strong sense of community spirit and pride, particularly among parents, as has been evidenced on a number of occasions when the Club was in danger of closing down due to lack of funding. In each case, the push to locate funding has been led by the Parents’ Council, who have recognised the difference it has made to their children, their families, the school and the community. The Breakfast Club has been recognised by the wider community as a valuable resource, bringing a sense of pride and a much-needed boost to the morale of the local community.

4.5.6 Community Resource

Not only is the Breakfast Club a valuable facility for the school, but also for the wider community. School and community groups such as the Parents Council and the local Southside Development Group often use the Breakfast Club as a venue for meetings. The Breakfast Club has the capacity to cater for these community meetings, if requested. The Breakfast Club is also an ideal venue for adult education classes, and has on occasion being used for holding cookery classes.

4.5.7 Increased Awareness of the Community Sector

The Breakfast Club represents a partnership of the school and community sectors, and has succeeded in bringing the two closer together to the benefit of both sectors. For example, as a result of CE workers being employed in a school facility, they have become more familiar with the educational sector, and the opportunities it provides, and are now more likely to return to education. Furthermore, Drogheda Youth Development have observed that as a result of the Breakfast Club staff coming into their offices on training days etc, they have become aware of the service that Drogheda Youth Development provides, and have often subsequently sent their own sons and daughters to their offices to avail of their services. Drogheda Youth Development's Outreach Officer has also given talks in the school about the services they provide. In other words, the Breakfast Club has helped to raise the profile of Drogheda Youth Development's services in the community. Similarly, the Breakfast Club has increased awareness, among the local community, of CE schemes and the benefits and opportunities they provide. As such, the Breakfast Club is helping to bring the schools and the community sector closer together.

4.5.8 Enhanced Inter-Agency Co-operation

The Breakfast Club has inspired a considerable amount of inter-agency co-operation between the many different groups involved in the Breakfast Club. This co-operation and partnership has occurred both between and within the community and education sectors. There is considerable goodwill towards the Breakfast Club. Every stakeholder/funding organisation openly recognises its value and wants to see it continue. Any time one source of funding is at risk of being pulled, and the Breakfast Club is at risk of closing or down-sizing, the key stakeholders, similar to the parents, have pulled together and worked to find a way to keep it going, such is the desire for it to continue.

4.6 Issues Arising

While the focus of this report is the impact of the Breakfast Club, certain issues were identified during the consultation process. It is prudent to review them briefly here as they may pose a risk to the efficacy of the Breakfast Club and therefore to the potential impact of the Breakfast Club in the long run.

4.6.1 Role of Project Co-ordinator

The role of Project Co-ordinator is crucial. Before this position was funded, the responsibility for the administration of the Breakfast Club fell to the school Principals. However, Breakfast Club related work was taking up between 60% and 80% of the Principals time. In the long run this could not have been sustained given the already significant workload school Principals have. Consequently, the role of Project Co-ordinator needs to continue, and be funded on a permanent basis, if the Breakfast Club is to continue and be effective in the long run.

4.6.2 Nutritional Value

As discussed in Section 3, the Breakfast Club in general operates a healthy-eating policy, providing a balanced menu for the children, which includes meat, vegetables and fruit. However, opinions were expressed by a minority of participants in the consultation process (mainly parents) that, while in general, the food provided by the Breakfast Club was reasonably healthy, there was still room for improvement, such as including more fruit, and that there was a need now to review the nutritional value of the food provided.

4.6.3 Who can use the Breakfast Club?

Previously funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs allowed for the pupils of the neighbouring St. Oliver's Community School to attend the Breakfast Club. However, since February 2005, funding from the Department restricted the use of the Breakfast Club to pupils of St. John's or St. Paul's Schools. Exceptions have been made for children of Breakfast Club staff who attend St. Oliver's Community School, for two former pupils of St. John's JNS who now attend St. Ita's Special School and who have siblings attending St. John's and St. Paul's Schools, and for pre-school siblings of pupils of St. John's and St. Paul's Schools (provided they are

under the supervision of a parent/guardian). The issue of who can attend the Breakfast Club has been the focus of considerable debate among Breakfast Club staff and parents. However, the solution to the debate of who has a right to access the Breakfast Club is inherently linked with the next issue – who is funding the Club in the long run?

4.6.4 Sustainability

The key challenge facing the Breakfast Club, as identified by almost all stakeholders, is its sustainability in the long run. The Breakfast Club is currently being kept alive by a handful of different funding organisations and sources, each with different funding requirements and hence different aims and objectives for the funding. The Breakfast Club cannot survive in the long run being funded on such an ad-hoc or piece-meal basis, where if one funding source is pulled, the Breakfast Club is at risk of closing down. When this has happened in previous years, a significant amount of manhours (often voluntary) have been used up sourcing and applying for new sources of funding in order to keep the Breakfast Club going. As one participant in the consultation process stated, there is now an urgent need for the Breakfast Club “*to be funded from one source which has a clear and central focus*”. This would free up Breakfast Club staff and stakeholders from devoting a majority of their time engaged in sourcing funding, to instead, managing the strategic development of the Breakfast Club.

Both the educational sector and the community sector currently play a key role in the funding of the Breakfast Club (the community sector through the funding of staff, and provision of food, and the educational sector through the provision of capital infrastructure). Suggestions were made by many participants during the consultation process that the Breakfast Club should now be mainstreamed within one of these sectors. A decision needs to be taken on whether to take the path of mainstreaming it within the educational system, in which case, the Department of Education and Science would fund the Breakfast Club, or to take it out of the arena of the Department of Education, and make it a community facility, (albeit operating on the grounds of the school), available for use by the entire community as a community canteen/restaurant, meeting point, and/or training facility, which is owned and

managed by the community sector, with funding and support from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

As stated above, the Breakfast Club is indeed having a significant impact in both the educational and community sectors – a fact that is recognised by all stakeholders. As one stakeholder stated,

“The Breakfast Club is one of the things I’m most proud of”.

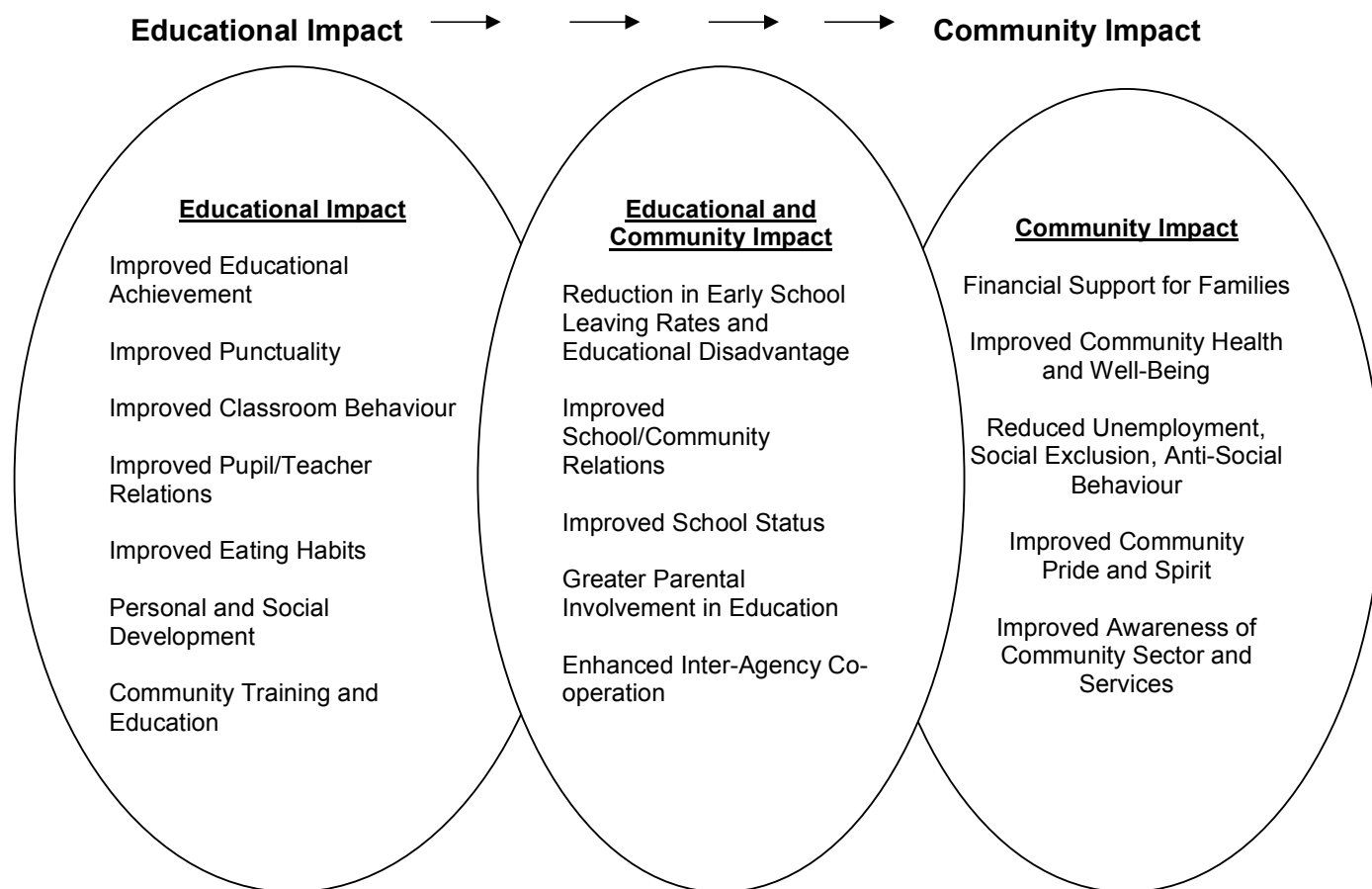
Everyone wants it to continue. The fact that the Breakfast Club has survived despite the fact that it is funded from so many sources, and has faced numerous challenges to its existence is a key achievement of the Breakfast Club. It is also a testament to the goodwill towards the Breakfast Club and recognition of the good work that it is doing. Now is the time for someone to take complete ownership of it. However, no one has been willing to do so yet. It is outside the scope of this report to decide which impact is greater and therefore within which sector the Breakfast Club should be mainstreamed. Using the findings of this report, the various stakeholders in the Breakfast Club must now engage in a consultation and debate process as to which path to take.

Section 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The pupils, school staff, Breakfast Club staff, parents and stakeholders who participated in this research were unanimous in their verdict that the Breakfast Club has made a vital difference to the lives of the children in the school and to the community in general. This report has outlined the wide-ranging and positive impact the St. John's and St. Paul's Breakfast Club has had on the school pupils, their parents and families, the whole school community as well as the wider community. This impact can largely be categorised into two broad overlapping categories – educational impact and community impact.

The Breakfast Club is helping to overcome educational underachievement and disadvantage by improving classroom behaviour and punctuality; teaching and learning abilities; the transference rate to secondary school; teacher/student relations; school/parent relations; eating habits; personal and social development; and school morale. By helping to reduce the pattern of early school leaving, the Breakfast Club is also providing a valuable service to the community by reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour, long-term unemployment, and social disadvantage. The Breakfast Club has been instrumental in bringing parents into the school community and back into an educational arena. Furthermore, it is providing employment, educational and training opportunities to community residents. It is helping to improve public health in the area. It has enhanced inter-agency co-operation. It is raising awareness of the role of the community sector and is providing a much need boost to the moral and spirit of the local community. The overall impact of the Breakfast Club is depicted in Figure 5.1 below:

Figure 5.1 Impact of the St. John's JNS and St. Paul's SNS Breakfast Club

5.2 Recommendations

1. The Breakfast Club is providing a much needed and effective service in both the school and the wider community. This service must be continued if educational disadvantage and social exclusion are to be reduced in the long run.
2. The role of the Project Co-ordinator must be secured in the long run if the Breakfast Club is to continue providing an effective service.

3. There is an urgent need to secure long-term funding for the Breakfast Club so that the service and the employment it provides in the area can be maintained on a permanent basis.

4. The number of funding organisations should be reduced to, if possible, one or two organisations. A decision needs to be made on whether to continue operating as it does, in two sectors, or to mainstream it within one sector. It is recognised that the Breakfast Club serves both an educational and community need and is currently being funded and supported by both sectors. To mainstream it within one sector has implications for both sectors. A period of debate must now take place between all stakeholders as to which path the Breakfast Club should take.

5. In conjunction with Recommendation 4, a decision also needs to be made as to who can avail of the Breakfast Club service. If it is to be mainstreamed within the Department of Education, and funded as a support structure for the school community, then the Breakfast Club should be limited to pupils of the school. If, on the other hand, the Breakfast Club becomes a community facility rather than a school facility, then it needs to be expanded in order to allow access to a wider section of the community.

6. An audit of the nutritional content of the food provided by the Breakfast Club needs to be undertaken by a suitably qualified individual, i.e., a nutritionist.

7. A full review of the 2006 Census of Population for the area should be undertaken, as soon as it becomes available, in order to identify the exact change in employment and educational attainment statistics for the area since 2002. This will provide a fuller picture of the impact of the Breakfast Club in the area.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Sample Menu (week of Monday 25th September 2006)

	Monday, 25 th Sept 2006	Tuesday, 26 th Sept 2006	Wednesday, 27 th Sept 2006	Thursday, 28 th Sept 2006	Friday, 29 th Sept 2006
Breakfast	Bacon, Sausage, Scrambled Egg, Toast	Bacon, Sausage, Scrambled Egg, Toast	Bacon, Sausage, Scrambled Egg, Toast	Bacon, Sausage, Scrambled Egg, Toast	Bacon, Sausage, Scrambled Egg, Toast
Little Lunch	Chicken Soup & Bread Roll/Bread, Sausage Roll	Chicken Soup & Bread Roll/Bread, Sausage Roll	Vegetable Soup & Bread Roll/Bread, Sausage Roll	Vegetable Soup & Bread Roll/Bread, Sausage Roll	Chicken Soup & Bread Roll/Bread, Sausage Roll
Lunch	Chicken Curry, Beef Stew, Carrots, Broccoli, Potatoes, Turkey Salad	Beef Stir-Fry, Meat Balls & Rice, Turnip, Sweet-Corn, Potatoes, Ham Salad	Spagetti Bolognaise, Chicken Tikka & Rice, Peas, Beans, Potato Wedges, Chicken Salad	Beef Burgers, Hot Dogs, Peas, Cabbage, Potatoes, Chicken Salad	Chicken Fillet, Macaroni Cheese, Chips, Chicken Salad

Appendix 2 Sample Price List

Breakfast

Two items + two slices of toast = 20 cent

Each additional item = 10 cent

Croissants = 10 cent

Sausage in a roll = 20 cent

Cereal = 10 cent

Fruit = 10 cent

Scones = 10 cent

Little Lunch

Soup and bread roll = 20 cent

Sausage roll = 10 cent

Each additional item = 10 cent

Sausage in a roll = 20 cent

Bun = 10 cent

Fruit = 10 cent

Scones = 10 cent

Lunch

Meal including vegetables and drink = 50 cent

