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To cite this article: J. M. Mancini (19 Sep 2022): 'Children from these communities': unequal school provision, segregation, and the Irish educational landscape, Irish Educational Studies, DOI: [10.1080/03323315.2022.2118152](https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2022.2118152)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2022.2118152>



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Published online: 19 Sep 2022.



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‘Children from these communities’: unequal school provision, segregation, and the Irish educational landscape

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses equality in Irish post-primary education, focusing on the provision of state-funded education and specifically on the provision of schools not segregated by religion, gender, or the charging of fees. Using the concept of the educational landscape, it integrates a macro-micro perspective that combines an analysis of national data generated by the Central Statistics Office and the Department of Education and Skills with a case study in Dublin. It shows that educational provision is far from equal in Ireland. Outside of Irish cities, it is largely the norm for the state to provide schools that do not separate or exclude children on the basis of religion, gender, or ability to pay. However, within Ireland’s cities, such provision is much lower, and the educational landscape remains highly segregated. Moreover, within Dublin, it is not only the provision of inclusive (i.e. not segregated) post-primary facilities that is unequal, but the provision of post-primary education more generally. This spatially unequal educational investment may be linked to other inequalities experienced by Dublin’s teenagers, with children in areas of low and segregated school provision spending a disproportionately large share of their time travelling to school compared to children in areas of higher state investment.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 June 2021
Accepted 26 July 2022

KEYWORDS

Equality; segregation;
gender; religion; education

Introduction

In 2018, the Dublin South City Educate Together Secondary School (DSCETSS) opened, following its establishment by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2016 (<https://sandymountparketss.ie/>, DES 2016a). Although not commemorated as such, the establishment of DSCETSS – also known as Sandymount Park – was a landmark event in the history of Irish education. At the time, the Dublin City Council (DCC) area had 74 state-funded post-primary schools. Of these, 63 either charged fees and/or were segregated on the basis of religion and/or gender.¹ Of the remaining 11 schools that were free and not segregated by gender or religion (described in the paper as ‘inclusive schools’), only three were located south of the River Liffey. All three were vocational schools, two attached to Further Education colleges teaching adults and a third which did

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not have the physical infrastructure to teach Chemistry and Physics. Thus before the establishment of DSCETSS, the part of DCC south of the River Liffey lacked a single post-primary school that was exclusively dedicated to the education of children, that taught the full academic curriculum required to matriculate in all university subjects, and that was not segregated by religion, gender, or the ability to pay.

The opening of DSCETSS thus represented a victory for equal and inclusive education in Dublin – but one that was late and partial. Late, because it occurred 50 years into a process, first promulgated in 1966, that by 2016 had made free, non-segregated academic post-primary education available as a norm in many parts of Ireland (see below); and that saw the completion of 31 new inclusive schools between 2011 and 2016, none of which were in DCC (see table ‘New Post-Primary Schools completed 2011–2018’ in Minister for Education and Skills 2019, 80–83). Partial, because the DES’s decision to locate DSCETSS at the very eastern edge of the ‘Dublin South City school planning area (serving Dublin 2, 4, 6 and 8)’ the school was supposed to represent (DES 2016a, 23; Figure 1), effectively excluded students from other parts of that planning area (here referred to as DSCSPA). This was particularly the case for children in DSCSPA’s westernmost Electoral Divisions (EDs), such as Dublin 8’s Inchicore A (see Figure 2), for whom access to DSCETSS’s temporary and permanent locations in Pembroke East E and B required an 8.5-km cross-city journey without a direct public transport link. Moreover, the school’s chosen location was as socioeconomically exclusive as it was geographically remote. Unlike the socially-mixed EDs of Dublin 8, which with one exception all had at least one Small Area (SA) characterised by Pobal as ‘marginally below average’ or ‘disadvantaged’, Pembroke East E and B were EDs of extreme, homogeneous affluence, with both ranking in the bottom one percent for deprivation nationwide (Pobal 2016a, 2016b). Thus, while DSCETSS brought desegregated education to one of Dublin’s most privileged areas, it failed to fulfil the promise of equal and inclusive education for children

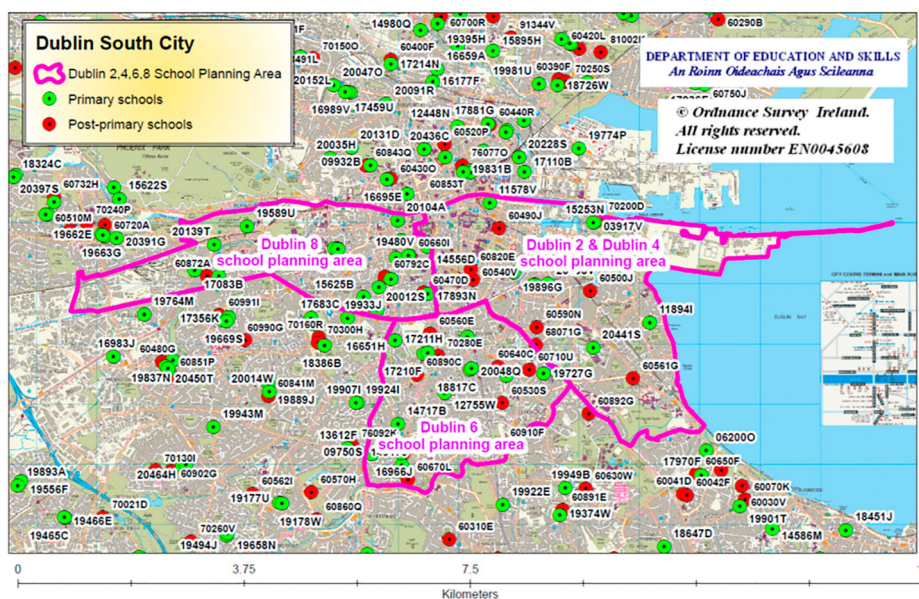


Figure 1. Dublin South City School Planning Area (DSCSPA). Source: DES (2016a, 23).

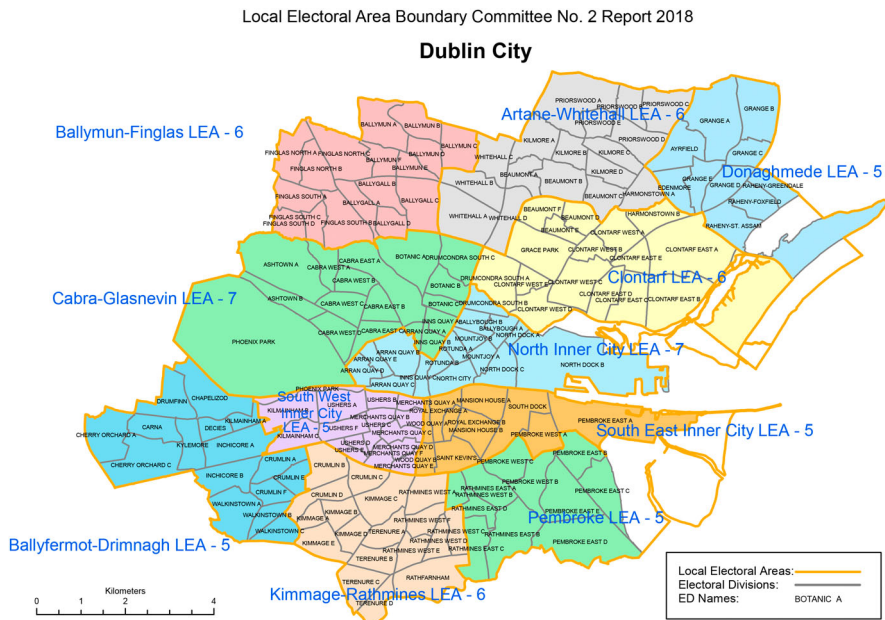


Figure 2. Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) and Electoral Divisions (EDs) in Dublin City Council (DCC) area. Source: Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No. 2 Report 2018.

in less-advantaged Dublin 8. Rather, as this article will argue, the decision-making process underpinning the location of DSCETSS perpetuated systemic inequality in the provision of education.

Recent years have seen the growth of a lively interdisciplinary debate on post-primary education in Ireland, much of which has focused on equality and inclusion – and inequality and exclusion (see, e.g. Conaty 2002; Fleming 2016; Harford 2018; Lynch & Lodge 2002). Due in large part to the diligence of educators in highlighting persistent inequality and exclusion, decision-makers have needed to recognise some uncomfortable facts about Irish education. One is the presence of enduring spatial disparities in educational outcomes, whereby 84% and 99% of children in Dublin 4 and 6 (and 60% or more of children in counties Galway, Leitrim, and Mayo) attend higher education, but only 28% of children in Dublin 8 do (HEA 2015, 44). As a 2019 Oireachtas report put it, ‘there are Dublin communities where progression to Higher Education has remained below 20% despite 20 years of investment in activities to raise the educational aspirations and outcomes for children from these communities’ (JCES 2019, 6). Another is that these differences map onto socioeconomic inequality. As the Higher Education Authority (HEA) argued in its *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019*,

Young people who experience social disadvantage are at a higher risk of being exposed to factors that impact on their opportunity to progress successfully through first and second-level education – for example, low family income levels, early alcohol consumption, requirement to work part-time, history of poor school attendance, and so on. (HEA 2015, 16)

Thus, there is a broad consensus in Ireland that educational equality has not been achieved. However, while decision-makers have recognised the existence of spatial

disparities in educational outcomes, they have less readily considered whether spatial inequalities in educational *provision* have contributed to these disparities. Instead, as is suggested by the quotations above, they have tended to attribute poor outcomes to cultural or social factors beyond the educational system *per se*. Indeed, as the quotations above also indicate, decision-makers insist that stratification persists in Dublin ‘despite’ educational investment in ‘these communities’ that is equal to and perhaps even greater than investment in areas with better educational outcomes.

This paper challenges these perspectives by directly and critically assessing post-primary provision and the decision-making process that determines how that provision is distributed. Is educational provision egalitarian in Ireland? And if it is not, are there some places that are, to use a colloquialism, more equal than others?

In taking the establishment of DSCETSS as its departure point, and in seeking to develop a deep contextualisation of that event within a national and local frame, the paper employs a novel conceptual and methodological approach. In Ireland, analyses of inequality within post-primary education (and of the sector generally, such as Smyth, McCoy, and Darmody 2004 and Smyth 1999) often adopt a perspective inside pre-existing schools (e.g. Cahill and Hall, 2014; Lynch & Lodge 2002; Scanlon et al. 2019); or, alternatively, that is based on national socioeconomic data (e.g. McCoy and Byrne, 2011). Both approaches have merit, but both overlook the spatial (and historically-rooted) dimensions of inequality and exclusion. Scholars who employ national data on class and occupation generally do not pin their results specifically to place. And by definition, school-based scholars do not study communities without schools. Moreover, in looking at the experiences of children within particular schools or communities, scholars rarely describe the overall suite of educational facilities the state provides to those communities or compare facilities in one community to those provided elsewhere. And because school-based analysts generally conduct interviews and thus must anonymise their informants and hide their locations, it is virtually impossible for others to contextualise their research in this way.

In contrast to these approaches, this paper will contextualise the establishment of DSCETSS – and the DES’s decision *not* to establish a school in Dublin 8 – within a frame that is larger than the individual school (and is, indeed, national in scope) but that is, at the same time, geographically legible. This frame will be called the *educational landscape*. This concept is both spatial and historical. Spatially, the educational landscape may be thought of as the built environment composed not only of Ireland’s post-primary schools (that themselves vary in level of segregation and capacity to accomplish educational goals such as carrying students into third-level education) – but also and as importantly of the places *between* schools or certain types of schools; and, as a corollary, of the transport mechanisms linking children to education. By thus approaching educational provision, the paper seeks to ascertain where it is thick and where it is thin, depending upon levels of historic and contemporary investment in school-building, in teacher salaries, and in school transport. As this suggests, the paper will propose a direct relationship between the educational landscape’s spatial and historical dimensions, arguing that (like all built environments) the educational landscape is not ‘natural’ but is made by decision-makers – notably the DES, which in Ireland controls school establishment, location, and capital expenditure (see, e.g. DES 2021) as well as school transport, on which it spent €149 million in 2015 (CAG 2017, 15–16).

Thus while the paper's approach differs from much Irish analysis, it is in line with international educational research after the 'spatial turn'. Such research emphasises that 'spatial injustices are the result of human activity' and calls upon 'education researchers ... to imagine justice, by rejecting the concept of space as a natural backdrop, and recognizing space as consequential' (Waitoller and Annamma 2017, 38). Moreover, educational research after the 'spatial turn' specifically recognises enduring legacies of educational underinvestment on historically working-class city neighbourhoods (Butler and Hamnett 2007).

To pursue these aims, the paper adopts a composite methodology. First, it integrates DES data on school provision with Census 2016 population and commuting data. Here the purpose is to situate the DES's decision to establish DSCETSS in both a national context (by generating an overall view of the educational landscape that compares educational provision in cities to provision in towns and rural areas); and in a Dublin-specific context (by comparing educational provision in the parts of DSCSPA nearest to and farthest from DSCETSS). The two main findings of this part of the paper challenge the notion of standardised educational investment in Ireland. The first is that the state's investment in inclusive post-primary schools was highly unequal in 2016, in a way that disfavoured city children. Indeed in Ireland in 2016, there was an inverse relationship between urbanisation and the provision of inclusive schools, such that educational provision was least segregated at its rural edge and most segregated in its largest urban centres – and such that there were two, separate educational landscapes: a 'country' landscape in which it was the norm for the state to provide inclusive schools and a city landscape in which it was not. The second finding is that within Dublin the state also invested unequally in education overall, with radically lower provision in Dublin 8 than in other parts of DSCSPA.

The paper then moves to its second mode of analysis, setting a careful reading of DES documentation regarding the provision of new schools against the context of Dublin's unequal educational landscape, to assess the efficacy of DES methodology in promoting equality and countering exclusion. Here the paper finds that, far from promoting standardisation of educational provision, DES methodology instead encouraged the continuation and widening of inequality, to the detriment of children in Dublin 8.

Background

The establishment of DSCETSS occurred at an important milestone in the history of Irish education: the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement of universal post-primary education. The post-1966 period is often interpreted as the 'big bang' of Irish educational development. Before this era, only a minority of Irish children completed post-primary education and a third left education after primary school (Harford 2018, 1), owing to the lack of educational facilities or transport in many areas and the charging of fees by post-primary schools (the overwhelming majority of which were denominational and gender-segregated). Thus, the implementation of the programme announced by then-Minister for Education Donogh O'Malley transformed the educational landscape, particularly in rural areas. In addition to the abolition of fees in most (but not all) schools, it initiated a boom in school construction and the introduction of the state-run rural School Transport Scheme (STS); in Harford and Fleming's view, the

latter ‘probably contributed more to opening up access to post-primary education’ than the abolition of fees (Harford and Fleming 2018, 77). The post-1966 era also ushered in profound institutional shifts essential to the development of equality and the lessening of exclusion. As Sugrue notes, it initiated some ‘parity of esteem’ for students in vocational schools by ending the ban that prohibited their access to state examinations (and hence to higher education) in 1970 (Sugrue 2018, 211). Moreover, Sugrue further argues that the post-1966 era marked the beginning of a newly secularised post-primary sphere no longer dominated by Catholic religious orders.

It is worth dwelling on this final claim to underscore how, historically, the state’s reluctance to provide schools not segregated by religion, gender, and the charging of fees intersected with a more broadly exclusive and anti-egalitarian educational ethos. The work of Fleming (2016) unequivocally demonstrates this point. Before 1966, decision-makers adhered to three positions that undercut equality and inclusion in Irish education: a pervasive anti-statism that viewed public social expenditure as abhorrent; a commitment to Church control over the provision and administration of schools; and a corollary adherence to the view that a post-primary system based around privatised, denominational schools sufficed because the majority of the population was too intellectually deficient to benefit from universal education. Indeed some of the state’s founders feared the state provision of free, universal secondary education and associated it with dangerous radicalism: as Fleming observes, Eoin MacNeill – a proponent of denominational schooling and the first Minister for Education (1922–1925) – wrote that,

I entertain no doubt that to bring the whole direction of the education of the young under political control would be a more radical and penetrating form of state socialism than the political control of the material needs of economic production. (quoted in Fleming 2016, 107)

Thus as Fleming outlines, efforts before 1966 to reduce educational exclusion through state intervention, including campaigns for free schools in the Gaeltacht, or for school transport, repeatedly met with opposition from decision-makers who did not wish to interfere with the existing educational model. This model, as noted, was not only privatised and denominational, but also overwhelmingly gender-segregated.

Thus to assess equality and inclusion in the provision of education in Ireland, it is necessary not only to evaluate the distribution of schools generally, but also specifically to determine where the state has intervened to desegregate education by providing schools in which pupils are not separated or excluded by religion, gender, or the ability to pay – and, as a corollary, to identify where the state has failed to take that step and instead has left in place a version of the pre-1966 *status quo ante*.² In this context, the state’s establishment between 1966 and 2016 of hundreds of inclusive schools and transport to them embodied a transformational remaking of the educational landscape requiring colossal public investment. But did this transformation, and the investment underpinning it, reach children in all parts of the country? Or, to the contrary, did it stop at the gates of Ireland’s cities?

The rural tilt

To assess these questions, let us turn to the educational landscape. The most comprehensive datasets on school location in Ireland are the DES’s annual Post-Primary Schools

Lists (PPSLs), which also record enrolment figures and school types (fee-charging/free; girls'/boys'/mixed; denominational status).³ By matching schools included in the PPSLs to their ED and settlement (or nearest settlement) using Census 2016's Small Area Population Map (SAPMAP), and by noting the population of each city, town or rural settlement, it is possible to assess post-primary provision by level of urbanisation (CSO 2017a, 2017c).

In order to synchronise DES data with Census 2016, the paper focuses primarily on the 2015–2016 PPSL (DES 2016b). However, the paper takes a critical approach to this source because it (unlike later PPSLs) includes Further Education (FE) institutions serving adults only among 735 'Post Primary Schools'. Because many of these adult-only FEs are in cities, the DES's failure to disaggregate them in 2015–2016 presented a distorted picture of the educational landscape – particularly in Dublin, where post-primary provision appears denser and more uniform in the PPSL than was actually the case. Thus to avoid reproducing this error, the paper omits 31 adult-only FE institutions (identified by cross-checking the 2015–2016 PPSL against subsequent years and the websites of individual institutions).

An assessment of overall levels of provision (Table 1) shows that, nationwide, the state provided one post-primary school per 507.74 pupils, that the level of provision in cities (including three schools just outside the Dublin city and suburbs settlement boundary and a school in Waterford city and suburbs located in Co. Kilkenny) was close to the national standard, and that provision in DCC was somewhat higher. However, the highest overall level of provision (one school per 359.63 pupils) was in rural areas, where 146 schools served 52,506 children and where some villages had more than one school. Examples included Mount Bellew, Co. Galway (pop. 774), which had both an inclusive school (defined, as noted, as free and not segregated by gender or religion) and a free, mixed-gender Catholic school – both of which were within 5.5 km of another free, mixed-gender Catholic school in Castleblakeney (pop. 528). This level of educational provision helps to explain why, when surveyed in 2007 about 'issues affecting rural areas', 60% of rural dwellers stated that 'access to local schools, colleges and adult education' was 'not a problem', and only 12% said it was a 'major problem' (Brereton et al. 2011, 219).

Rural areas also enjoyed the highest level of provision of integrated schools (Table 2). In rural areas, more than two-thirds of post-primary schools were inclusive, and gender-mixed schools were virtually universal. Indeed, in rural Ireland in 2016, only 3.42% of schools were segregated by gender and, among the five gender-segregated rural schools, three were boarding schools and two were in a settlement that also had an inclusive school (Ennistymon, Co. Clare, pop. 1045). Overall, the state provided 100 inclusive

Table 1. Post-primary provision (children per school) 2016.

	All schools	Free schools only
State	507.74	548.23
Rural <1500	359.63	369.76
Towns 1500-<50,000	576.74	592.57
Cities ≥50,000	500.36	607.58
DCC	422.23	520.75

Source: Author's tabulation based on CSO (2017a) and DES (2016b).

Table 2. School provision, segregation, and urbanisation.

Schools	Gender-mixed		Inter- or multi-denominational		Inclusive		Children per school provided		
	No.	Proportion	No.	Proportion	No.	Proportion	All schools	Inclusive schools	
DCC	74	30	40.54%	14	18.92%	11	14.86%	422.23	2840.46
Cities	221	100	45.25%	67	30.32%	62	28.05%	500.36	1783.53
Towns	337	218	64.69%	160	47.48%	159	47.18%	576.74	1222.40
Rural	146	141	96.58%	100	68.49%	100	68.49%	359.63	525.06

Source: Author's tabulation based on CSO (2017a), CSO (2017c) and DES (2016b).

schools in rural areas in 2016: a sufficient number to accommodate rural adolescents at a level of provision (one per 525.06 pupils) similar to the level at which it accommodated adolescents in *all* schools nationally. Moreover, in Ireland's most rural county, Leitrim (one school per 372.57 pupils), 100% of post-primary schools were free, mixed-gender, and inter-denominational.

The provision of inclusive education was also the norm in Irish towns in 2016, with 87.65% of larger towns (5000 to less than 50,000) and 69.74% of all towns having an inclusive school. Moreover, as with rural villages, several small towns (1500 to less than 5000) had both an inclusive school and a school/schools of another type, as in Killorglin, Co. Kerry (pop. 2199; inclusive and mixed-gender Catholic) and Kanturk, Co. Cork (pop. 2350; inclusive and mixed-gender Catholic). Taking rural areas and towns together, the most common (and majority) school type was the inclusive school.

At the other extreme, DCC's educational landscape was characterised by segregation and exclusion: 81.08% of schools were segregated by religion and 59.46% by gender, and 18.92% of state-subsidised schools charged fees. In all of DCC, the state provided only 11 inclusive schools for 31,245 pupils – one per 2840.46 children. Moreover, in Ireland's five cities taken together, the most common school type was girls'-only and Catholic (67 schools), and there were only 62 inclusive schools – one per 1783.53 pupils. Indeed in all categories of exclusion (gender, religion, and ability to pay), city schools were much more likely to be segregated than those in less-urbanised areas (Table 3).

The state's provision of inclusive schools in cities also compared unfavourably in all cases to provision in their surrounding counties (Table 4). In Dublin, this pattern of diminishing provision by urbanisation characterised all three levels of urbanisation: the area outside Dublin city and suburbs⁴ but within the suburban Dublin counties of Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin (one school per 977.83 children), Dublin city and suburbs outside DCC (one per 1336.30 children) and DCC (one per 2840.46 children). Here such inequality may be linked to spatially-unequal investment in the immediately preceding period of 2011–2016 – when the state built 31 new, inclusive post-primary schools of which seven were in Dublin's three suburban counties but none were in DCC

Table 3. Segregation in post-primary schools.

Schools		Fee-charging		Segregated by gender		Segregated by religion	
		No.	Proportion	No.	Proportion	No.	Proportion
Outside cities	483	13	2.69%	124	25.67%	223	46.17%
Cities	221	39	17.65%	120	54.30%	154	69.68%

Source: Author's tabulation based on CSO (2017a) and DES (2016b).

Table 4. School segregation cities vs. counties.

	Schools	Segregated by gender		Segregated by religion		
		No.	Proportion	No.	Proportion	
Cork	Outside city and suburbs	52	18	34.62%	28	53.85%
	City and suburbs	31	19	61.29%	21	67.74%
Dublin	Outside city and suburbs	18	4	22.22%	6	33.33%
	City and suburbs	152	80	52.63%	104	68.42%
Galway	Outside city and suburbs	35	5	14.29%	16	45.71%
	City and suburbs	11	6	54.55%	8	72.73%
Limerick	Outside city and suburbs	14	1	7.14%	5	35.71%
	City and suburbs	14	9	64.29%	11	78.57%
Waterford	Outside city and suburbs	8	2	25.00%	4	50.00%
	City and suburbs	10	5	50.00%	8	80.00%

Source: Author's tabulation based on CSO (2017a) and DES (2016b).

(Minister for Education 2019, 80–83; DES 2016b). Indeed of the 47 new post-primary buildings completed in Ireland in 2011–2016, the only one in DCC was a new building for the relocation of an already-existing (Catholic, mixed-gender) school.

In summary, by 2016, it was the norm for children in Ireland to have access in principle to inclusive schools. However, this norm only applied outside cities. In Dublin and other Irish cities, a lack of state investment in inclusive education meant that the educational landscape remained segregated and exclusive.

Community and centrifuge

In 2016, DCC was one of the most segregated parts of an Irish educational landscape characterised by unequal provision. As such, in a national context, the DES's decision to establish a new, inclusive school there was long overdue. However, the establishment of DSCETSS also took place within the local context of DCC itself and more specifically within the Dublin South City Planning Area (DSCSPA) – an area that, as noted, encompassed localities with starkly divergent educational outcomes. With this in mind, the paper turns next to assessing post-primary provision within DSCSPA. Was DSCSPA, like Ireland as a whole, characterised by unevenness in educational provision? And more particularly, given the siting of DSCETSS in a location that was all but inaccessible to some children in the planning area, how did post-primary provision near DSCETSS compare to provision in the part of DSCSPA farthest from the school?

To address this, it is first necessary to address factors that complicate the making of such a comparison, beginning with the DES's use of Dublin postal codes as the basis for planning areas and for the 'demographic' analysis on which it allocates investment. This usage is unhelpful from an analytical and policy perspective because Dublin postal codes – unlike EDs or Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) – align neither to CSO boundaries (nor, thus, to publicly available CSO/Pobal data) nor to political boundaries. In light of this, the paper seeks to offer a more legible approach by using ED-level data to generate provision profiles in larger, politically meaningful areas – specifically, by LEA. However, this approach is itself complicated because of the 2019 redrawing of LEA (but not ED) boundaries. Thus to avoid making comparisons between LEAs that are now politically obsolete, the paper uses 2016 ED-level data to generate provision profiles by 2019 (i.e. current) LEA (Figure 2). For the area surrounding DSCETSS, this is straightforward,

as Pembroke East B and East E are both in the (2019) Pembroke LEA (which includes Dublin 4 and parts of Dublin 6). However, for the area farthest from DSCETSS, this is more complex. There, the majority of EDs are in the South West Inner City (SWIC), which (along with small parts of the South East Inner City and Ballyfermot-Drimmagh LEAs) comprise most of Dublin 8. However, the westernmost DSCSPA ED (Inchicore A) is in Ballyfermot-Drimmagh (but still in Dublin 8). Hence the paper focuses on a direct comparison between Pembroke and SWIC – but also (as will be noted) makes comparisons that include Inchicore A.⁵

To begin this comparison of educational provision in Pembroke and SWIC, let us begin in SWIC. Here, all three schools were free. However, in other respects, SWIC's educational landscape – which lacked any schools established more recently than the nineteenth century – closely resembled Ireland's 1966 *status quo ante*. All of its schools were Catholic, and two of the three were also gender-segregated; the third, only recently gender-desegregated, had an enrolment of greater than 95% boys. Moreover, due to the lack of provision of the School Transport Scheme (STS) in cities, it goes without saying that pupils in SWIC lacked access to it.

This high level of educational segregation had the potential to exclude many local children. Although Census 2016 reported that 78.31% of respondents in Ireland identified as Catholic and only 9.84% affiliated with 'no religion', in SWIC, these figures were 52.53% and 24.09%, respectively. Thus the state's non-provision of schools other than Catholic schools compelled nearly half of local children to attend a school that did not represent their beliefs – or to commute outside their communities. Similarly, although SWIC did have schools for boys and girls, their geographical distribution was such that some areas had no provision for boys.

Notably, this was the case in the part of DSCSPA farthest from DSCETSS: the five contiguous EDs of Kilmainham B and C, Inchicore A, and Ushers A and F (see [Figure 2](#)). In this area (Inchicore-Kilmainham), the state provided no post-primary facilities for boys. This was despite a primary-school cohort large enough to support four mixed-gender primary schools and a population of 13–18-year-old students (524) comparable to that of Portmarnock, Co. Dublin (536) and exceeding that of all but 61 of 195 Irish towns (CSO 2017d). Of the towns with a student population equal to or greater than Inchicore-Kilmainham's, all had post-primary provision for boys and girls in 2016.

The state's overall provision of post-primary facilities was also deficient for SWIC's population. Although Census 2016 recorded 1356 students aged 13–18 years (CSO 2020a), the PPSL showed only 576 school places – a deficit of 780 places (or a provision ratio of 0.42 school places per child). Moreover, in Inchicore-Kilmainham, 169 enrolments in the only school left a local deficit of 355 places, and a provision ratio of 0.32 places per child.

In sharp contrast, Pembroke's educational landscape was characterised by high levels of provision. There, Census 2016 recorded 1782 students aged 13–18 (CSO 2020a), but the PPSL showed 3639 pupils enrolled in nine schools: 1132 in two free schools, and 2507 in seven state-funded fee-charging schools. Thus Pembroke had an overall surplus of 1857 school places (or, adjusting for fee-charging schools, a surplus of 1421 places funded by the state) and a provision ratio of 2.04 places per child (1.79 adjusted).⁶ Even omitting all state-funded fee-charging schools, Pembroke's ratio of post-primary places in free schools (0.64 places per child) was 50% higher than in SWIC.

Pembroke's educational landscape was also more inclusive, with inter-denominational schools and with more mixed-gender schools. Thus unlike in SWIC, in Pembroke, the state did invest in schools that did not segregate or exclude by religion or gender – for those local families who could buy into them by paying fees. However, given Pembroke's unbroken affluence, and given that there were only half as many children in Pembroke as there were post-primary enrolments, such fees appear not to have posed a significant access barrier to local children.

This point – that before DSCETSS's establishment in 2016 the state already invested much more heavily in education in Pembroke than in it did in SWIC, including in schools that did not segregate by religion or gender – is further borne out by Census 2016 commuting data for 13- to 18-year-old students (CSO 2020a) revealing significant inequalities in the duration of student commutes (Table 5).⁷ In DCC, only 29.97% of 13- to 18-year-olds in DCC lived in EDs with average commute times at or below the state average (19 min). However, in Pembroke, this figure was 85.02% and included children in Pembroke East E and B (17.9 and 17.2 min). Moreover, among DCC's 162 EDs as a whole, Pembroke LEA had the most EDs in the top 10 for shortest commutes – and, in hyper-affluent Rathmines East B (Figure 3), the shortest average commute of all (13.5 min).

In sharp contrast, children in the more socioeconomically-mixed EDs of SWIC spent a much larger share of their time accessing post-primary education (see Table 5). Unlike in Pembroke, in SWIC, only 6.12% of children lived in EDs with commutes at or below the state average, and no SWIC EDs ranked in DCC's top 10 for shortest commutes. However, six SWIC EDs did possess average commute times among the 10 *longest* in DCC, including the longest average commute of all in Kilmainham B (29.7 min). This not only exceeded the state average for 13- to 18-year olds by 50% (and was two, three, or even four times higher than the average commute in many rural villages and towns) but also surpassed the average for *adult* commutes nationally (28.2 min) and in a large majority of counties (where the longest average adult commute, in Meath, was 34.6 min). Moreover although nationally only 20.6% of 13- to 18-year-old students reported commute times over 30 min – associated even among adults with 'a negative effect on social satisfaction' (Delmelle, Haslauer, and Prinz 2013) – in Kilmainham B (where students reported commutes as long as 90 min), this figure was 53.62%. This was again the worst outcome in DCC – and also exceeded figures for *adult* commuters (39.43%) nationally and even in the suburban 'commuter' counties of Kildare, Laois, Meath, Westmeath and Wicklow (CSO 2017b). In contrast, even before the establishment of DSCETSS only 14% of adolescents in Pembroke East B experienced commutes greater than 30 min.

Such excessive commuting also placed a harshly unequal cumulative time burden on SWIC's adolescents (Table 5). To attend school every day in 2015–2016, every child in Kilmainham B would on average have had to spend 90.18 more hours commuting than children in Rathmines B. And given that 2016 commute times in both EDs were virtually unchanged from Census 2011 (13 and 29 min; CSO 2020b), they would have needed to do so throughout post-primary school. Thus over six years, children in Kilmainham B spent 534 more hours accessing post-primary education than their peers in Rathmines B did – the exact equivalent of half a year of instruction time.

Unequal investment also imposed additional burdens on the children of SWIC, notably the need to bear the cost of commuting in the absence of the state-supported STS. In addition to having the longest average commute time in DCC, children in

Table 5. Time privilege and time poverty, 2016.

Electoral Division	AIRO visualised drivetime to secondary schools (max. min)	Census 2016 reported average commute time, students 13–18 (min)	Census 2016 students 13–18	Census 2016 students 13– 18 commute >30 min		Excess time vs. shortest average commute in DCC	
				Number	Proportion	Per journey (min)	Per annum (hours)
Kilmainham B	7	29.7	69	37	53.62%	16.2	90.18
Ushers A	7	25.4	54	19	35.19%	11.9	66.24
Kilmainham C	6	24.9	220	74	33.64%	11.4	63.46
Ushers F	6	24.2	97	29	29.90%	10.7	59.56
Inchicore A	5	23.9	84	23	27.38%	10.4	57.89
Rathmines B	6	13.5	248	25	10.08%	–	–
Pembroke East B	7	17.2	200	28	14%	3.7	20.6
Carnew	8	11.7	127	8	6.30%	–	–
Ennistimon	8	8.5	121	<6	<4.96%	–	–
Kanturk	12	11.3	138	8	5.80%	–	–
Killorglin	20	13	317	32	10.09%	–	–
Mount Bellew	12	9.9	176	12	6.82%	–	–
Mountmellick Rural	12	15.6	97	16	16.49%	2.1	11.69
Mountmellick Urban	6	14.2	147	11	7.48%	0.7	3.90
Portmarnock North	6	15.2	318	44	13.84%	1.7	9.46
Portmarnock South	8	17.9	187	34	18.18%	4.4	24.29

Source: Author's tabulation based on CSO (2020a) and AIRO (n.d.).



Figure 3. Streetscapes of Rathmines B (L), the Electoral Division with the shortest average commute time for 13- to 18-year-old students in the Dublin City Council Area in 2016 and 2011, and Kilmainham B (R), the Electoral Division with the longest average commute time. Compared to their peers in Rathmines B, adolescents in Kilmainham B spent 90 h more per year accessing education. Image: author.

Kilmainham B were also the heaviest public transport users, followed by adjacent EDs Phoenix Park and Kilmainham C (with Ushers B and Inchicore A also in the top 10). Yet once again, this burden fell less heavily in Pembroke, where no EDs made the top 10 for student commuting by public transport (CSO 2020a).

In a context in which high-stakes examinations determine progression to third-level education, and in which ‘voluntary contributions’, school supplies, and other educational costs have been associated with absenteeism and early school leaving, long, costly commutes may adversely affect educational outcomes. However, in SWIC and Inchicore A long school commutes may also have contributed to a deeper process of social fragmentation propelled by the lack of local educational investment. Unlike in rural areas where STS-coordinated commuting gathers children from dispersed dwellings into a single or small group of schools, long city commutes tend instead to take children from dense local communities and fling them outwards towards dozens of disconnected schools. This was certainly the case in Inchicore-Kilmainham, where for a cohort of approximately 50 pupils, one primary school facilitated progression activities with at least 14 different post-primary schools (including outside DCC), and reported the enrolment of some children in additional schools beyond those 14.⁸ Thus at the moment of transition from primary to post-primary school – historically the dividing line between the educationally privileged and the educationally deprived in Ireland – the state did not nurture Dublin 8’s children in their local communities. Instead, it dropped them into an educational centrifuge.

DES methodology in context

As this indicates, Dublin’s educational landscape was neither standardised nor equal in 2016. Although state investment in education was thick in DSCSPA’s uniformly affluent eastern reaches, it was much thinner towards the planning area’s socioeconomically mixed (and historically working-class) western edge. Nonetheless, when the DES

established a new school in DSCSPA in 2016, it located it in Dublin 4 rather than in the area of greater need in Dublin 8 – before announcing in 2018 that it would establish a *second* new school in Dublin 2/4 in 2021 (DES 2018). Moreover, when in 2019, the DES decided to establish a *further* school with the name DSCETSS (following the renaming of the original), it did not site it in Dublin 8, either. Thus the paper’s final aim is to identify the DES’s methodology for making these decisions and to evaluate its suitability for promoting educational equality.

Between 2011 and 2021, stated DES policy mandated the establishment of new schools ‘only where warranted by increased demographics’.⁹ However, the DES published neither reviews of CSO data nor annualised national accounts of where it planned to establish new schools. Rather, it announced school-establishment decisions on an ad-hoc basis and often published the ‘demographic’ analysis underpinning such decisions as an adjunct to documents reporting the awarding of patronage – documents that became less accessible with the 2021 replacement of the DES’s website.

This was the case with DSCETSS, where the DES presented ‘demographic details’ in the patronage-assessment document *Attachment No. 8* (DES 2016b). These clearly depicted Dublin 8 as experiencing both population growth (potentially ‘2135 extra pupils’ by 2026) and a deficit of school places – while showing that in Dublin 2/4 and Dublin 6 enrolments (of 2707 and 4060 pupils) were ‘projected to continue’ at the same level. However, *Attachment No. 8* also contained a second set of figures, embedded into the same text, whereby the DES reduced the projected deficit in Dublin 8 from 2135 school places to only 651 while transforming projected demographic stasis in Dublin 2/4 and Dublin 6 into *deficits* of 2075 and 722 places. To quote (bold in original):

Dublin 2/4

Demographic analysis shows that the enrolment figure for the Dublin 2/4 school planning area, based on 100% intake, is projected to continue at the current high level of **2,707** for a number of years to come. The actual intake at post-primary level in the Dublin 2/4 school planning area is currently **205%**. At the current level of intake, enrolments would increase to approximately **4,782** pupils by 2025. **This is a potential 2,075 extra pupils.**

Dublin 6/Clonskeagh

Demographic analysis shows that the enrolment figure for the Dublin 6/Clonskeagh school planning area, based on 100% intake, is projected to continue at the current high level of **4,060** pupils for a number of years to come. The actual intake at post-primary level in the Dublin 6/Clonskeagh school planning area is currently **178%**. At the current level of intake, enrolments would increase to approximately **4,782** pupils by 2025. **This is a potential 722 extra pupils.**

Dublin 8

Demographic analysis shows that the enrolment figure for the Dublin 8 school planning area is projected to grow to approximately **3,116** pupils by the year 2026 based on an average intake across the school planning area of 100%. **This is a potential 2,135 extra pupils requiring school places compared to the 2015/2016 enrolment of 981 pupils.** However, the actual intake at post-primary level in the Dublin 8 school planning area is currently **56%**. At the current level of intake, enrolments would increase to approximately **1,632** pupils by 2026. **This is a potential 651 extra pupils.**

What, then, accounted for the DES's radical amendments to its own figures – amendments that effectively excluded Dublin 8 from receiving a new school? Despite the importance of the decision, *Attachment No. 8* offered no explanation. However its references to 'actual intakes' did point to the general design of DES methodology elaborated elsewhere, wherein 'intake patterns' (also called 'transfer rates') are ratios the DES generates by comparing the number of children enrolled in an area's post-primary schools to primary school enrolments. Thus as it explained (DES 2019, 4), if 'the intake pattern is less than 100% ... some children are travelling to school outside the school planning area. If the intake pattern is greater than 100% ... children are travelling into schools ... from other school planning areas'.

DES 'intake patterns' thus resembled the provision-per-child ratios presented in this paper – but with an important difference. This paper uses such ratios to identify inequalities in educational provision, and proposes the principle that areas with fewer school places than children need investment more than areas where provision is greater than 100%. In contrast, the DES treated the *maintenance* of 'intake patterns' as a policy imperative, using 'the average intake pattern over a number of years ... to project the likely demand over the coming years *assuming a continuation of the same pattern*' (DES 2019). By this logic, Dublin 2/4 'needed' two school places per child because its 'actual intake' was 205% – whereas in Dublin 8, only half of children required local school provision because the 'actual intake' was 56%.

Thus in 2016, the DES explicitly accepted and planned for the outward migration of 2135 children from Dublin 8 for post-primary education. Moreover, its decision not to establish a new school in Dublin 8 also had harmful long-term implications. In the context of rising student numbers, the non-establishment of a school in Dublin 8 effectively reset its 'intake pattern' to 31% – thus further reducing the likelihood that a new school would *ever* be established there.

As damningly, the DES did not even apply this alchemical methodology consistently. Hence in 2019, having decided to establish a second DSCETSS, it published another set of 'Demographic Details' (DES 2019). This new analysis reduced the 2016 projection of '722 extra pupils' in Dublin 6 to a requirement for 549 new places – a figure below the deflated calculation of need on which Dublin 8 had been excluded. However, the DES did not reconsider that decision. Instead, it reached beyond DCC into the suburbs, joining Dublin 6 to Dublin 6W in a 'regional solution'. What problem that 'regional solution' solved is anyone's guess, given that the DES itself estimated that Dublin 6W (where average commutes were as short as 16.5 min in Terenure C) would only need 236 temporary post-primary places before a 'subsequent projected reduction of 567 (pupils) by 2029' (DES 2019). Nonetheless, the DES determined that the need in Dublin 6/6W was sufficiently pressing to mandate the location of DSCETSS2 in Rathmines West A (19.3 min) – an ED which was not even in DSCSPA.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the provision of post-primary education is not equal in Ireland. Rather, unequal state investment disadvantages children in cities by providing them with lesser access to inclusive schools than in rural areas and towns. Moreover, within Dublin, the state invests unequally in post-primary provision overall – and does so

according to a DES decision-making process that exacerbates, rather than remedies, inequality.

By developing and applying the concept of the educational landscape, the paper offers a way of seeing these inequalities and the real-world consequences of underinvestment in places where school provision is absent, low or segregated. For children in Dublin 8 – where children are less than half as likely as children in Leitrim and less than a third as likely as children in Dublin 4 and 6 to attend third-level education – these consequences included disproportionately long commutes, higher commuting costs, and social dispersal if not fragmentation.

But this approach also provides insight into how the state might begin to address the seemingly intractable problem of educational disadvantage in Ireland's cities. Here, an obvious step that has not been taken is to invest equally in educational provision in all communities. This means investing not only in 'aspirations', but also and more importantly, in schools: schools that are local, that are inclusive, and furthermore, that provide children with the 'parity of esteem' noted by Sugrue by offering all parts of the curriculum required to matriculate in any university course in Ireland.

This has been tried in disadvantaged communities in rural areas and small towns. For example both Carnew, Co. Wicklow (pop. 1052) and Mountmellick, Co. Laois (pop. 4777) have inclusive schools teaching the full academic curriculum, which in turn have exceptionally high third-level progression (87% and 95% in 2016 according to the Irish Times 2022), including into high-points courses such as Pharmacy in University College Cork (Mountmellick Community School 2017). However, the state has never made such investment in Dublin 8 or adjacent Dublin 10, whose only inclusive school offers neither Chemistry nor Physics and where students are thus barred even from aspiring to certain university courses. Until it does, we cannot expect 'children from these communities' to make up the difference on their own.

Notes

1. In Ireland, the state heavily subsidises fee-charging schools through capital expenditure and teacher salaries. However, it allocates teacher-salary funding to fee-charging schools at a slightly lesser rate based on a pupil-teacher ratio of 23:1 versus 19:1 for free schools (DES 2010).
2. For a useful related discussion regarding primary education, see Kearns and Meredith (2014).
3. In 2016, approximately 53% of Ireland's state-funded post-primary schools were denominational institutions 'under the patronage of a named religion' and with the 'power ... to refuse to admit students ... on grounds of religion' (IHREC 2016, 5, 8), designated by PPSLs as Catholic, Church of Ireland, Jewish, Methodist, or Quaker; PPSLs designate remaining schools as 'inter-denominational' or 'multi-denominational'. This paper collectively describes the former as 'denominational' but in all other cases follows PPSL designations.
4. Dublin city and suburbs as per SAPMAP.
5. As an additional complication, Phoenix Park ED is divided between SWIC and Cabra-Glasnevin. Here it is included in SWIC.
6. Based on the state's reduced salary allocations to fee-charging schools (see note 1 above), funded places in fee-charging schools are counted in adjusted figures as 82.61% of places in free schools.

7. Both decision-makers and scholars neglect this data. For example, the All-Ireland Research Observatory purports to depict travel times as an aspect of post-primary accessibility in its ‘Drive-Time Accessibility’ graphic (AIRO, n.d.), but its visualised journey times for Dublin bear little relation to those actually reported by adolescents (see Table 5).
8. Author’s correspondence 2.11.2020. The DES does not publish school-by-school data on primary-to-post-primary progression.
9. Quotation from defunct DES website (formerly <https://www.education.ie/en/schools-colleges/information/establishing-a-new-school/new-post-primary-schools.html>) archived on <https://wayback.archive-it.org/11501/20210722061406/https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Establishing-a-New-School/>. In 2021, the DES website was deleted and replaced by a semi-functional beta site (<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/>) omitting many previously-available files. As confirmed with the DES webmaster (04.03.2022), the archived site lacks a functional search engine.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully thanks the Central Statistics Office for providing special tabulations and technical support.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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