



**Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
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Tithe an Oireachtais

An Comhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna

**Tuarascáil maidir le hOiliúint agus Tacaíochtaí do
Sholáthraithe Oideachais Riachtanas Speisialta agus do
Sholáthraithe Oideachais i Scoileanna DEIS**

Deireadh Fómhair 2018

Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

**Report on Training and Supports for Providers
of Special Needs Education and Education in**

DEIS Schools

October 2018

32/ES/12

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Contents

1. Chairman’s Foreword	2
2. Engagement with Stakeholders	4
3. Training and Supports for Providers of Special Needs Education and Education in DEIS Schools	5
4. Recommendations	10
5. Appendices	12

1. Chairman's Foreword

The Joint Committee on Education and Skills identified the topic of training and supports for providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools as one of its priorities and invited a number of stakeholders to make a written submission on this topic. Following an examination of these submissions, it was decided to hold a public engagement to examine the matter in more detail.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, puts in place legislation to give children with special educational needs the right to graduate from school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives. Parts of the law have been brought into effect, but not those which would give a statutory entitlement to provide students with a full assessment of the supports needed to allow them participate in education and to have the necessary resources provided in accordance with an individual education plan, have not been.

The Committee recognises the need for further inclusion and diversity within the educational system for all children, based on their individual strengths. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in May 2005. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school age through post-primary education. There were 825 schools included in this programme in 2016/17. The Committee believes that a more pupil-centred approach should be taken so that those students who are in need, receive the supports they

require, to give them an equal chance to have best educational outcome for them.

The Committee acknowledges the tremendous commitment of those involved in the provision of education for children with special educational needs and for those who teach and provide support in a DEIS school. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the Committee to assist us in our examination of this matter.

Fiona O'Loughlin

Fiona O'Loughlin T.D.

Chairman

October 2018



2. Engagement with Stakeholders

The Joint Committee on Education and Skills requested written submissions from various stakeholders, identified by the Committee. Arising from the submissions received on this matter from the stakeholders, a public meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills was held, on 27th June 2017, to further explore points made in submissions.

At this meeting the Committee heard from the following witnesses:

Witness	Organisation
Ms Deirbhile Nic Craith	Director of Education and Research, Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
Dr Anne Ryan	Senior Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education
Dr Gene Mehigan	Principal Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education
Ms Noreen Duggan	Principal, Scoil na Naomh Uilig
Ms Pauline Dempsey	Principal, St. Anne's Special School
Ms Breda Corr	General Secretary, National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE)
Ms Teresa Griffin	CEO, National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
Ms Madeline Hickey	Director of the Special Education Support Service, National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
Dr Áine Hyland	Emeritus Professor of Education, University College Cork

3. Training and Supports for Providers of Special Needs Education and Education in DEIS Schools

i.) Marino Institute of Education

The Committee was advised that Marino Institute of Education (MIE) have approximately 1,000 students across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate who are currently undertaking degree programmes in education. The focus of the MIE is mainly on the education of future primary teachers, of which there are 600 students. Practitioner preparation for teaching children with a variety of strengths and needs in mainstream schools, special education contexts and DEIS schools is a central element of the MIE's work. In addition to the wide range of courses offered, there are year-long core modules relevant to inclusive and special education, together with a range of school placement experiences in each of the school settings.

In 2016 the MIE was granted funding under the EU Erasmus+ KA2 Education Programme of the European Commission to lead a five-country study over three-years. The remit of the study, which is being carried out by a cross-sectoral, international project team of practising teachers and teacher educators, is to identify best practice in inclusive education in institutions and schools. On conclusion of the report, the MIE will make recommendations in relation to what specific approaches could advance the practice of inclusivity. The Committee was advised that even in the early stages of the project that the team recognise the potential of co-teaching for advancing inclusion in schools, which could be applied to both teacher education and school practice.

The Committee was asked to give consideration to the merits of establishing a two-year pilot co-teaching for inclusion project at primary level.

ii.) The National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

The National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) is the management voice of special education in Ireland and represents boards of management of special schools and mainstream primary and post-primary schools, usually with special classes.

NABMSE raised many issues with the Committee and these included the lack of training for staff involved in the support of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in schools. They identified issues in respect of the training needs and associated costs for the initial and continuous provision of this training. Concerns were voiced regarding the insufficiency of the Capitation Grant, which is paid at an enhanced rate to SEN schools. The witness advised that many schools were experiencing financial difficulties as a result. The lack of substitutes to cover absences; the provision of specialist teachers for children over the age of 12; issues relating to posts of responsibility; future planning for special educational needs; ICT and assistive technology were also discussed.

The NCSE told the Committee that in 2013, it had published a policy advice paper, *'Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Schools,'*¹ which contains 28 recommendations and that it wishes for the findings and recommendations of this report to be examined and implemented without delay.

iii.) Scoil na Naomh Uilig

Scoil na Naomh Uilig caters for children of all abilities and has 565 students from 31 different ethnicities. The school has five special educational needs classes, three for children with Autism and two for children with profound

¹ Available at: http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Supporting_14_05_13_web.pdf. Last accessed 31 July, 2018.

learning disabilities. The school also has a large number of children with moderate and multiple disabilities in mainstream classes.

The Committee was advised that the challenges facing the school include: access to education for children with special educational needs; nursing and clinical support; the provision of training; how to deal with challenging behaviour and access to DEIS status. The most pressing issue for the school was said to be access to education for children with special needs.

The Committee was told that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) needs to adopt a proactive approach to providing education for children with special needs at all levels because there is a lack of suitable places for children with special educational needs. The witness made recommendations surrounding clinical support, asserting that the nurse on staff was initially employed for 26.5 hours for three children, with this being reduced to 24 hours, despite the fact that she now cares for 24 children, is unable to take a lunch break and works an average of nine further hours for which she is not paid.

The witness called for the DES to examine the standardisation of nursing support throughout the system, comprehensive training for all teachers to be made mandatory in a number of fields including: for teachers who teach children with autism; dealing with challenging behaviour and training for bus escorts. The witness asserted that training should be paid for by the DES and advised that a scale could be used for the roll-out of the benefits of DEIS, to all students who actually need them.

iv.) St Anne's School

St. Anne's is a co-educational school for pupils between the ages of 4 and 18 who have been assessed as having either a moderate or severe/profound general learning disability. The school is staffed by 14 teachers, 30 SNA's and has 80 pupils.

The Committee was informed that challenges affecting the school, include: shortage of school places; inadequate provisions to teach children with challenging behavioural issues; injuries to staff and other pupils as a result; staff to pupils ratio's, substitute cover; nursing cover and the provision of and expense of training.

The witness insisted that class sizes need to be reduced and behaviours that challenge need to be addressed in order for the school to achieve its goals.

v.) National Council for Special Education

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The Council was first established as an independent statutory body by order of the Minister for Education and Science in December 2003.

The Committee was advised that €1.7 billion, or over just 17% of the total Department of Education and Skills budget, is spent on supporting special education. The funding provides for 13,000 special needs posts, specialist equipment, assistive technology, specialist transport arrangements etc.

The NCSE is currently carrying out a review of the SNA scheme which receives funding of €428 million. They identified the need to improve the effectiveness of the SNA posts with the provision of general and bespoke training and stated that it had been raised by those consulted; including school management; parents and the SNA's themselves.

vi.) Dr Áine Hyland

Dr Áine Hyland is an Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President of University College Cork. Dr Hyland welcomed the Committees report on the *Education (Admissions to Schools Bill) 2016* and in particular highlighted the need to grant statutory footing to the NCSE to enable them

to compel schools to establish special classes for children with special educational needs and autism where such classes are required.

Dr Hyland also highlighted the fact that almost half the children who come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are not in DEIS schools and asserted that there are other schools who need support. "DEIS band 1 schools have a more favourable teacher-pupil ratio than non-DEIS schools but DEIS band 2 schools do not. It is the view of the INTO that the pupil-teacher ratio that applied in Breaking the Cycle of 15:1 in junior classes should continue to apply to the most disadvantaged schools. The current DEIS band 1 ratio of 20:1 in junior classes and 24:1 in senior classes should apply to all other DEIS schools."²

She indicated that there is a need for a whole-school and whole-community approach, with a rights based-approach to ensure equality and inclusion of diversity, in the educational system.

² Available at:

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debateRecord/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/2017-07-11/debate/mul@/main.pdf.

4. Recommendations

- 1.** The Committee recommends that ESPEN Act 2004 be fully enacted.
- 2.** The Committee asks the Minister for Education and Skills to give consideration to the merits of establishing a two-year pilot co-teaching for inclusion project at primary level.
- 3.** The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education and Skills puts in place measures to address issues affecting schools which were raised in the course of the discussion, including the shortage of school places; facilitating children with challenging behavioural issues; injuries to staff and other pupils; staff to pupils ratio's and substitute cover.
- 4.** The Committee recommends that the shortage of specialised school places for post-primary children with autism and other special educational needs, be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 5.** The Committee recommends that the whole area of training for staff, from teachers to bus escorts be made compulsory and that consideration be given to the provision of a separate fund for the this training be made available by the DES so as not to impact further on the funding of schools.
- 6.** The Committee recommends the standardisation of nursing and clinical supports throughout the educational system be put in place.
- 7.** The Committee recommends that the the findings and recommendations of *'Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Schools'*, be examined and implemented where practicable.
- 8.** The Committee recommends that an update on the implementation of the five goals identified in the DES *'DEIS Plan 2017'*, prior to the publication of the report be provided to the Committee. The Committee also believes that supports should be pupil-centred and be made available to students who are disadvantaged, rather than only providing for children who attend a DEIS school.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1

Committee Membership

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Deputies: Thomas Byrne (FF)
Kathleen Funchion (SF)
Catherine Martin (GP)
Tony McLoughlin (FG)
Hildegarde Naughton (FG)
Fiona O'Loughlin (FF) [Chair]
Jan O'Sullivan (Lab)

Senators: Maria Byrne (FG)
Robbie Gallagher (FF)
Paul Gavan (SF)
Lynn Ruane (Ind)

Notes:

1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil on 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 22 July 2016.
3. Deputies Carol Nolan, Ciaran Cannon, Joan Burton, and Jim Daly discharged and Deputies Kathleen Funchion, Tony McLoughlin, Jan O'Sullivan, and Josepha Madigan nominated to serve in their stead by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 3 October 2017.
4. Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh resigned with effect from 27 February 2018.
5. Senator Paul Gavan nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 8 March 2018.

6. Deputy Josepha Madigan discharged and Deputy Hildegarde Naughton nominated to serve in her stead by the Twentieth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 1 May 2018.

Appendix 2

Orders of Reference

(1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—

(a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and

(b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.

(2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—

(a) Bills,

(b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,

(c) Estimates for Public Services, and

(d) other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and

(e) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and

(f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.

(4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:

- (a) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,
- (b) public affairs administered by the Department,
- (c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,
- (d) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,
- (e) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,
- (f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,
- (g) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,
- (h) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,
- (i) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,
- (j) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and
- (k) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint

Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—

- (a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
 - (b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
 - (c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and
 - (d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.
- (6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.
- (7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:
- (a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,
 - (b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and
 - (c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]

- (1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.
- (2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.
- (3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—

a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State,

b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.

(5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.

Appendix 3

List of Stakeholders

Marino Institute of Education

National Association of Boards of Management in
Special Education (NABMSE)

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)

St. Anne's School, The Curragh, Co. Kildare

National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Dr. Áine Hyland

Scoil na Naomh Uilig, Newbridge, Co. Kildare

Appendix 4

Submissions by Stakeholders

Written Submission on behalf of Marino Institute of Education to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills

1. Marino Institute of Education

Marino Institute of Education (MIE) is a Higher Education Institution involved in teaching, learning and research. Located in Dublin, it is an associated college of the University of Dublin (Trinity). MIE's mission is focused on promoting 'Inclusion and Excellence in Education'. For over one hundred years MIE has been involved with education, and specifically with initial teacher education. During the last decade the vision and scope of the institute's activities have been re-envisioned and extended to incorporate the full continuum of teacher education at primary and further education levels (initial, in-service and continuing professional development to doctoral degree level) as well as degree programmes in education studies and early childhood education.

1.1 Inclusive Education Course

- Inclusive Education, comprising the course components of **Special Educational Needs (learning difficulties and disabilities), Educational Disadvantage and Development Education & Intercultural Education**, is a key aspect of MIE's undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes for prospective teachers. All student teachers registered on the four-year B.Ed. degree (approx. 110 annually) and the two-year Professional Master of Education degree (approx. 60 annually) undertake a one-year programme in Inclusive Education. They also undertake a two-week school placement in a special education setting, in addition to a range of mainstream school placements for teaching practice, including placements in designated areas of educational disadvantage. A Master's degree in Education Studies (Intercultural Education) has been offered at MIE since 2012. Graduates of this programme have undertaken critical examinations of a wide range of intercultural issues, including those related to Traveller and other ethnic minority groups.

1.2 School Placement Experience for Student Teachers

- While the course work and special education placement referred to above are designed to enhance students' specific learning regarding inclusion policy and practice, they have the concomitant intention of advancing relevant learning in all other areas of their teacher education programmes. Students are ultimately required to demonstrate their commitment and abilities with regard to inclusive practice in the course of several compulsory school placement periods in a range of primary school settings, such as mainstream schools, special units in mainstream schools, special schools and DEIS schools. To that end, as students progress through their Inclusive Education course and other courses at MIE, they are supported in learning to plan and enact approaches for differentiating their teaching and hence pupils' learning from an inclusive perspective.

- During their two-week placement in a special educational needs context, MIE students work daily with pupils in small groups and on a one-to-one basis. Students report that by doing so they significantly enhance their understandings of primary-level pupils' very varied academic strengths, needs, learning difficulties and disabilities. Each student on placement is also visited by a member of the academic staff who reports in a formative manner on the student's development and learning during the period of placement. This placement experience is invariably described by almost all students as one of the most valuable learning opportunities of their entire teacher education course in MIE. They find it 'highly informative', 'professionally challenging' and often 'transformative'. Significantly, students report that it affords them a heightened appreciation of the knowledge, skills and above all, attitudes required to work more inclusively with all children in mainstream school settings, and following this placement they appear to be far more committed to, and confident about, doing so.

Please see Table 1 in attached Appendix

- *The attached table outlines MIE's commitment to Inclusive Education from theoretical, practical, CPD and research perspectives. Information is provided on the discrete Inclusive Education module taken by all B.Ed. and Postgraduate students, followed by an outline of complementary areas addressed in other modules. The Inclusive Education module is designed to develop future teachers' knowledge and skills about the range of factors underlying, as well as manifestations of, children's learning difficulties and disabilities. As such, it incorporates preparation for teaching children from varied home backgrounds, including contexts designated disadvantaged.*

1.3 Inclusive Education is Challenging

- Students who have successfully completed their teacher education courses at MIE are qualified to teach in both mainstream and special schools. However, their development as 'inclusive practitioners' in mainstream school contexts is a key focus. This accords with wider EU and national policy which favours 'mainstreaming' over more specialised schooling provision for students with special educational needs. Such 'inclusive education' refers to access to good quality mainstream education for all learners, including those with special needs (disabilities); those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and persons with a migrant background. As the effective implementation of such a policy inevitably rests on teacher commitment and capability (Meijer, 2011), in light of the challenges experienced by schools in seeking to be inclusive of all learners, much research in recent years has focused on probable 'inadequacies' in initial teacher preparation, and the need for better pre- and in-service teacher education in this regard. As a teacher education institution, MIE acknowledges its key responsibilities in this respect, and recognises that high quality teacher education is a pre-requisite for inclusion in schools.

Nonetheless, as academic staff who are also highly experienced classroom practitioners, we recognise that the practice of differentiation for effective inclusive practice can be a particularly challenging, even overwhelming undertaking for

student and beginning teachers, as indeed is endorsed in feedback we receive from our students and beginning teachers. We concur with the view therefore, that in seeking to meet the urgent need to increase the capacity of Ireland's schools to respond to diversity, teacher education is a fundamental but insufficient requirement. 'Teacher education cannot work in isolation' (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). Beginning teachers' incoming attitudes to diversity and inclusion, no matter how favourable, will not easily be sustained in increasingly complex classroom contexts. Even the most committed and capable of beginning teachers is challenged by the process of learning to be a 'teacher' while concomitantly learning how to manage a class. The increasing diversity of learners in mainstream classrooms greatly heightens this challenge. These difficulties are likely to negatively impact teacher attitudes as a vicious cycle becomes established whereby relatively ineffective 'coping' strategies may quickly become embedded and normalised as acceptable classroom practice, and the potential to develop the skills necessary to the creation of inclusive learning environments is lost. In order to address this limitation we feel that a dual approach is necessary. In tandem with appropriate pre-service and in-service teacher education, we believe that there is need for provision of in-class and whole-school structures that can support teachers' inclusive endeavours.

1.4 EU Funding for MIE Project

- Based on this view, in 2016, MIE, in consultation with partners in teacher education institutions and schools in four other EU countries (Finland, Belgium Cyprus and Latvia), submitted a proposal for EU Commission funding to investigate how the inclusive policy agenda might best be advanced in practice in our mainstream schools. The application was successful and Erasmus+ funding of €186,000 was granted for a three-year project ('Empowering Inclusive Teachers for Today and Tomorrow' [EITTT] www.mie.ie/eittt). This project which commenced in October 2016 is being **coordinated by MIE**. The project group comprises three schools (two primary and one secondary) and three Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). All of the teacher partners involved are working in mainstream classes of considerable learner diversity. Each of the teacher educators involved has responsibility for Inclusive Education (pre- and in-service teacher education) in their respective TEIs. As an experienced, international cross-sectoral group of educational practitioners we share an understanding of the key challenges involved in advancing the inclusive agenda in schools. We aim to address these in the first instance by learning about, and where appropriate and possible, implementing both teacher education and school practices that are deemed to be most effective in each of our institutions and schools. The EITTT project is adding a valuable international dimension to our work in Inclusive Education at MIE. It is providing opportunity to explore different approaches that have been found to be very effective in other jurisdictions and to re-visit and reflect upon our own understandings of, and approaches to, inclusion. To date, we have observed two initiatives, one in a teacher education institution and the other a school-based undertaking, which we deem to be especially beneficial for advancing inclusive learning in schools.

1.5 Co-Teaching in Teacher Education

- During a study week at the teacher education department of University College, Leuven-Limburg (UCLL) in Flanders, Belgium, the project team learned that following recent legislation, 'Inclusive Education' is also at the forefront of Flemish educational discourse. This development has seen 'mainstream' education promoted over special schooling, which remains an option for students, but must now be very well justified. In response, the teacher education faculty at UCLL has introduced **Co-teaching in Teacher Education** as a student teacher preparation strategy for inclusive educational practice. Having been introduced to co-teaching concepts during course work, student teachers there are then encouraged and at some points required to engage in co-teaching with host teachers during teaching practice in schools. This strategy involves a student teacher teaching alongside (rather than instead of) an experienced host teacher in a mainstream class. It is considered to be a valuable means of developing inclusive capabilities in future teachers, as the host teacher will have intrinsic knowledge of all students in the class as well as more advanced pedagogical skills. S/he can therefore cooperate or take the lead where necessary in managing the class. This more gradual initiation into class management can afford the student teacher more opportunity to develop / enhance inclusive teaching skills (Friend and Cook, 2004; Murphy and Scantlebury, 2010). An emerging body of research literature is pointing to the invaluable potential of such a strategy for developing future teachers' inclusive education skills at an early stage of their professional development.

MIE strongly recommends that such a co-teaching strategy be instituted in Ireland's teacher education courses, alongside more traditional approaches to teaching practice. With the strong links already established through **MIE's School Partnership Programme** to an extensive network of partner schools, we would be well placed to develop a state-funded pilot programme of this nature.

1.6 Co-Teaching in School Practice

- Our EiTtT project partner school in Finland has had particular success with an **in-school co-teaching** strategy. This initiative, which is fully supported by government, has seen mainstream and suitably qualified special education teachers working together in mainstream classes in the school on a full-time basis. Following re-organisation of structures and resources in the school, each co-taught mainstream class now comprises approximately 25 children, up to 10 of whom have special educational needs. As observed by the project team during a week-long visit to the school, the strategy seems to highly beneficial for both the pupils and the teachers involved – a view endorsed by parents of children in the school. With two teachers and a classroom assistant in situ, children with mild / moderate special educational needs arising from assessed conditions and / or home background factors, are being taught very successfully in mainstream classes alongside children without these additional needs. An emerging body of research findings is also drawing attention to the value of such co-teaching for significantly advancing the learning of all children involved.

MIE strongly recommends that such a strategy be instituted in Ireland's primary schools. This would call for little additional resourcing, and ultimately would be cost effective given the new model for allocating special education resources to be introduced in 2017-18. It would also fit very appropriately with the DES recommendation that additional supports to students be provided, where feasible, within classes rather than on a withdrawal basis. With well-established and very positive links to a wide variety of stakeholders and, as outlined above, an extensive network of partner schools across the country, MIE would be well placed to support a pilot programme of this nature. Such a programme would in turn establish training programmes for, and networks of, teachers who would continue to develop, share and promote best practice.

1.7 Summary and Recommendations:

- The philosophy of Inclusive Education underpins all aspects of our teacher preparation activities at Marino Institute of Education. This philosophy accords with current EU and national education priorities.
- In preparing teachers to work with a diversity of learners including those with learning difficulties, those with special educational needs and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, MIE aspires to excellence in its discrete and general course provision.
- Well-prepared, committed future teachers need supportive school environments to realise their inclusive potential with their students.
- The development of effective inclusive practice in schools calls for a coherent, whole-system approach. There is a dual obligation on teacher educators and the school system to put appropriate structures and supports in place to facilitate such development.
- MIE has been granted significant funding from the EU Commission to lead a transnational project aimed at **identifying** effective teacher education- and school-based strategies for advancing inclusive education in the school system – strategies that could enhance the learning of all students including those with learning difficulties, those with disabilities and students from migrant backgrounds.
- **Co-teaching in Teacher Education has emerged as one such strategy. MIE recommends that such a strategy be instituted in teacher education courses in Ireland. With strong links already established to an extensive network of schools through MIE's School Partnership Programme, MIE is well placed to develop such a state-funded pilot programme.**

- **Co-teaching in School Practice has equally emerged as a highly effective strategy for inclusive education in school. MIE recommends that such a strategy be instituted in Ireland's primary schools on a pilot basis; a strategy that would fit well with the forthcoming additional allocation of special education resources to schools in 2017-18. As outlined above, with its extensive network of links to partner schools and a variety of stakeholders, MIE would be well positioned to lead such a pilot programme.**

Appendix: Table A

Inclusive Education in Marino Institute of Education

Marino’s culture and ethos reflect the mission of Edmund Ignatius Rice whose central philosophical tenet was that education is a prerequisite to the attainment of full human dignity.

This table outlines Marino Institute of Education’s commitment to Inclusive Education (Special Education; Educational Disadvantage; Development & Intercultural Education) from theoretical, practical, CPD and research perspectives. Information is provided on the discrete Inclusive Education module taken by all B.Ed. and Postgraduate students followed by an outline of complementary areas addressed in other modules

		Inclusive Education				
		SEN	Educational Disadvantage	EAL	Development Education	Intercultural Education
Theory		B.Ed. Year 2 and PME Year 1				
		<p>Module: Inclusive Education (5 ECTS)</p> <p>Course contact time (Lectures): 20 hours (14 Special Ed. + 6 Development Ed. and Intercultural Ed.) Course contact time (Tutorials): 7 (4 Special Ed. + 3 Development Ed. and Intercultural Ed.) Directed study and reading: 33 hours Personal study: 40 hours Assessment tasks: 20 hours</p> <p>Rationale The rationale for this module is to introduce students to an understanding of difference and diversity from a human rights perspective. It includes Special Educational Needs, and Development Education and Intercultural Education. There is now a strong emphasis on creating inclusive learning environments that can cater for pupil diversity (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). This is reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Education Act (1998), the EPSEN Act (2004), the Irish Aid White Paper (2006), and the Intercultural Education Strategy (2010). Consequently all teachers are expected to become capable in the design and delivery of a broad balanced curriculum that includes all pupils and which incorporates a social justice and global perspective.</p>				

Aims

- To promote an understanding and acceptance of difference and diversity
 - To enable students to develop their skills and competence with a view to working in inclusive environments
 - To promote an understanding of inclusion and the inclusive school
-
- To raise students' awareness of global and social justice issues as they pertain to primary education

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Critically examine the concept of inclusion from a human rights perspective Demonstrate the attitudes necessary for successful engagement with inclusive practice Demonstrate understanding of the wide spectrum of learning difficulties and Special Educational Needs, and the range of in-school provision (personnel, strategies, resources) available to cater for pupils' diverse learning needs
 - Identify a range of opportunities for integration of a social justice perspective into the primary school and classroom
 - Explain and critically analyse some of the causes of global poverty (2008) and incorporate an awareness of development education and intercultural education into their classroom planning and practice Appraise a range of models for differentiated classroom practice
- Employ a limited number of differentiation interventions for enhancing learning in the classroom

Course Content and Syllabus

a) Learning difficulties and special educational needs:

- Development of concept, policy, legislation and provision re inclusive education in Ireland
- 'Disability' – how to define. The experience of people with disabilities
- Marginalisation, rights, labels
- Disability in Ireland (NDA findings) and insights on children's experiences
- Segregation-integration-inclusion: core issues
- Identification and assessment (Mild, Moderate, Severe-Profound categories) and learning implications
- NCCA guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities
- School-based provision – general allocation model and roles in school
- 'DEIS' – perspective and practice
- External supports – NCSE, SESS, NEPS, etc.
- Most or all of the following areas will be addressed:
 - Teaching Children with Literacy Difficulties / Dyslexia / Dysgraphia
 - Teaching Children with Dyscalculia / Numeracy Difficulties
 - Teaching Children with Dyspraxia

- Teaching Children with Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties and ADHD
- Teaching Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Teaching Children with Down's Syndrome
- Teaching Exceptionally Able Children
- Students will also be encouraged and facilitated to read widely on other areas / conditions of interest to them
- Differentiation (concept and practice)
- Individual Education Planning (IEPs)

b) Development education and intercultural education:

- Looking at the relevance of development education and intercultural education in the Irish primary classroom.
- Analysing current demographic trends in Irish society.
- Development education on the primary school curriculum – why a global perspective?
- An exploration of 'culture' – definitions and models of analysing culture. Defining and exploring key terms such as multiculturalism, assimilationism, integration, interculturalism. Defining an intercultural approach to education. Introducing the Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 (DES, 2010).
- An exploration of 'development'. Complexity of measuring development. State of the world ("If the world had 100 people..."). The language of development. The 'balance sheet' of development. Why do some countries remain poor?
- What is 'development education'? Key principles for the classroom. Teaching about distant localities. Choosing a locality – criteria to consider. Critique of a 'locality pack'. Using teaching 'packs': some guidelines and criteria for analysing suitability for the primary classroom.
- Citizenship education: teaching about sensitive issues in the classroom – how to approach topics such as teaching about 'natural' disasters. Media education: use of images of the developing world in the classroom, 'questioning' photographs. Introducing resources for using imagery appropriately in primary school classrooms. Teaching about the Holocaust: guidelines for using novels, films and teaching packs about the Holocaust.
- Setting up an inclusive intercultural classroom. Examining suggestions from the NCCA Intercultural Guidelines – school planning; classroom planning; social environment; resources. Reflection on students' own experiences in diverse classrooms.
- 'Story' in the curriculum – English, SESE History and Geography, SPHE. 'The child, the book and the multi-cultural world'. Examples of storybooks for use in the classroom; approaching cultural diversity and issues of race and difference through the use of story.
- Human rights and human rights education. What is a right? Characteristics of human rights. Key points in HR history. What is HR education? Why teach about rights? HRE at primary level – headings and curricular links. Lesson ideas – distinguishing between 'needs' and 'wants'. Resources for HRE, including Amnesty teaching packs. Human Rights Day, December 10th and associated activities for the classroom.

An outline of complementary areas addressed in other modules

B.Ed. Year 2 and PME Year 2

Modules: Sociology/Psychology in Education

- Critically analyse the implications of specific psychological and sociological theoretical perspectives for education
- Articulate, from an informed perspective, concepts of ability / knowledge / learning and how these might impact on practice as a teacher
- Identify the multitude of psychological and sociological factors interacting with, and impacting on, motivation and learning
- Draw on psychological and sociological insights gained with respect to the dynamics and issues of school and classroom life, to develop an understanding of potentially successful pedagogical strategies

B.Ed. Year 2 and PME Year 1

Modules: Language Study/Teaching English as an Additional Language/Teaching through Medium of Irish

- Demonstrate understanding of and reflection on models of language education.
- Describe and critically analyse major theories on how language acquisition and additional language learning take place and apply theoretical perspectives to the practice of teaching in English, as Gaeilge and with EAL
- Examine a range of approaches to literacy education and oral language development for use in the multi-ethnic / multilingual classroom
- Analyse the place of minority and heritage languages in the multi-ethnic / multilingual primary school from different perspectives along the assimilationism / multiculturalism continuum

B.Ed. Year 3 and PME Year 2

Module: Curriculum & Assessment and Sociology

- Draw on understandings of micro- and macro-level psycho-social dynamics in schools, to offer explanations for educational achievement and / or underachievement The lecturer reserves the right to alter the course at any stage during the year
- Critically examine the problems and possibilities pertaining to the concept of education as a social equaliser, with particular reference to the role of the teacher and the role of various approaches to, and conceptions of, curriculum and assessment
- Critically explore the socio-political nature of 'curriculum' and assessment with regard to issues of inclusion and social justice
- Critically explore Irish approaches to curriculum development and implementation, and locate them within an international and theoretical context
- Identify a range of potential assessment strategies, and explore the circumstances under which each could be effectively used in the classroom context
- Draw on psychological and sociological insights gained with respect to the dynamics and issues of school and classroom life, to understand and employ successful pedagogical strategies

B.Ed. Year 3 and PME Year 1

Module: Teaching & Learning 2

- Compare, contrast and critically analyse major psychological approaches to behaviour management
- Describe a range of interventions - individual, classroom and whole-school - to meet the needs of children with challenging behaviour
- Use relevant research and theory to enhance students' practice in facilitating children's learning

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate knowledge of system-level influences on child and teacher behaviour (Toshalis, 2010) and an understanding of the "child in context" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) • Integrate theoretical concepts around social justice and inclusion with day-today practice at classroom level (Bryan, 2010) <p style="text-align: center;">+ specific curricular areas each year with focused content on inclusive teaching practices</p>
Practice	<p style="text-align: center;">School Placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>During the four years on the B.Ed. programme and the two years of the PME programme, students are provided with a variety of school placement experiences. The aim is that all students will have the opportunity to engage in school placements in urban and rural schools, single sex and co-educational schools, multi-grade and single class situations, DEIS schools and Gaelscoileanna n�o Scoileanna Gaeltachta. All students will also engage in a Special Education placement in the second year of their programme. This provides student teachers with the opportunity to experience school life in a variety of contexts.</i> • <i>In Year 3 of the B.Ed. every effort is made to place a student in a DEIS school for either Autumn or Spring placement.</i> • <i>All students take a dedicated Learning Support/ Resource week as part of their final School Placement.</i> • <i>Students should demonstrate a commitment to incorporating Inclusive Practices (Special Education, Educational Disadvantage and DICE) in their classrooms. Where appropriate, students should plan for and practise differentiated methodologies.</i> • <i>MIE School Partnership Programme – developing links with our partner schools</i>
CPD + Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research clusters areas for B.Ed. final year dissertations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive Education: <i>Special Education</i> - Inclusive Education: Intercultural Education - Inclusive Education: Educational Disadvantage - Literacy: Early Literacy Interventions - Literacy: Specific Learning Difficulties - Mathematics: Educational Disadvantage • PME Year 2 (final year) Research Dissertations: Students are required to write a 10,000 word dissertation on an aspect of their practice related to their 10-week Advanced School Placement. A significant number of students choose to investigate topics in the field of socio-economic inequality, Special Educational Needs and issues of concern to minority ethnic communities. • Recent conferences at MIE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) annual conference, May 2017 - <i>'Educaring' for Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children and Young People, May 2017</i> - <i>Minority language pupils and the curriculum: closing the achievement gap, April 2017</i>

- CPD Summer Courses for teachers at MIE

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES – LITERACY This course focuses on children who experience problems in literacy. Participants will be guided in diagnosing children’s difficulties and will receive practical strategies and ideas to ameliorate difficulties in oral language, reading and writing.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING CHILDREN WITH A RANGE OF ABILITIES IN LITERACY This course aims to equip teachers with practical strategies and a clear direction on how they can best cater for a wide range of needs and abilities in language and literacy. It offers practical supports for teachers to enable them to build inclusive classrooms in an effective and stress-free manner.

FROM COCOA BEAN TO CHOCOLATE BAR: TEACHING TRADE JUSTICE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL This summer course offers an opportunity to examine trade from a fresh perspective, based on a new teaching pack for 5th / 6th classes: Just Trade – a teaching resource about Africa. Concepts such as interdependence, globalisation, and ethical consumerism will be examined through practical classroom games and activities.

Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

From: National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education(NABMSE)

Date: 12th June 2017

On: Adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special education and education in DEIS school, including suggesting any reforms

Who is the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education(NABMSE)?

NABMSE is the management voice of special education in Ireland. We are a school management organisation recognised by the Minister for Education and Skills and provide countrywide representation for Boards of Management of special schools and mainstream primary and post primary schools providing education for pupils with special educational needs. NABMSE represents over 200 schools.

The core purpose of NABMSE is to unite Boards of Management in special education in the Republic by providing a means for the expression of their individual and collective experience on matters affecting the education of children with special needs. Our core objectives are:

- ☐ *To promote the highest standard of education for persons with special needs.*
- ☐ *To achieve adequate deployment of resources to support education for persons with special needs.*
- ☐ *To encourage and facilitate communication and co-operation between persons engaged in the education of persons with special needs.*
- ☐ *To arrange or assist in arranging and providing conferences, discussions and meetings on subjects of general or special interest in the field of management in special education.*
- ☐ *To promote the study of best practices with regard to their impact on enhancing the abilities of persons with special needs.*

Introduction:

NABMSE has been requested to make this submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS Schools including suggestions for reform.

NABMSE will be focusing this report on the adequacy of training and supports for providers of special needs education as follows:

1. Training
2. Supports
 - 2.1. Capitation funding
 - 2.2. Staffing
 - 2.3. Curriculum
 - 2.4. Planning
 - 2.5. Support Staff
 - 2.6. Health and Education
 - 2.7. ICT and Assistive Technology

1. Training:

Current training provision:

Teachers:

While there is some training available for teachers of pupils with special educational needs at initial teacher education level, most training is undertaken in this area as continuous professional development(CPD) and through induction in most special schools. A combined CPD post graduate diploma for Learning Support and Special Educational needs is provided at post graduate diploma level by :

Dublin City University, Mary Immaculate College, National University of Ireland, Galway, St. Angela's College, Sligo, University College, Cork and University College Dublin.

In addition post graduate certificate/diploma are provided by DCU and St Angela's College for teachers working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD). Places on these programmes are limited and most are directly funded by the Department of Education and Skills(DES) or teachers can claim the fees through the Teacher Refund scheme.

It should also be noted that in order to attend these courses, teachers must have experience of special education. Whilst the majority of schools display good leadership in the area of 'settling in' teachers in special education settings, in some schools the 'new entrant' to teaching may be asked to establish a special class.

Special Needs Assistants(SNAs):

SNAs are required to have a Level Three qualification under the National Framework of Qualifications or three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate. However, many SNAs have a higher qualification or are undertaking a qualification above this level but there is no requirement to do so.

There are many courses undertaken by those who wish to be employed as an SNA. However, there is only one DES recognised training programme at Certificate Level 7 provided by St. Angela's College, Sligo. Schools endeavour to provide SNAs with additional training to undertake their role in the school. However, schools do not have access to a budget for training of SNAs.

Bus Escorts:

Pupils in special schools and classes can avail of a bus escort employed by the school and funded by the DES. The role of the bus escort is to look after pupils with special educational needs (SEN) on their bus journey to and from school. There are approximately 1,300 bus escorts in the country. There is no standard training for Bus Escorts with many schools endeavouring to provide on the job training to address issues related to the school or availing of training provided by the Patron.

Special Education Support Service(SESS):

The SESS provides a wide range of support, training and online resources for teachers in the area of special educational needs. SESS provides in-school seminars, on line training and webinars and by Middletown Centre for Autism.

Training needs and associated issues:

Whole school training:

All staff working in special education should be trained to a very high and consistent standard. Whole school training is invaluable and staff assisting the pupils throughout the school day including SNAs and Bus Escorts, should also be trained to ensure that the pupil with SEN obtains the maximum benefit from the school day.

There is a need for whole school training across a range of issues such as Manual handling, First Aid, Child Protection, Risk Assessment, Fire Safety, Use of ICT for pupils with SEN, FEDS(Feeding, Eating, and Drinking), Intimate Care, Challenging behaviour/positive behaviour, education related training in the areas of Autism and special education needs. Whole school training allows for a whole school approach for pupils with special education needs and is essential for their learning.

Teachers can avail of training of a wide range of training from SESS but this training is not available for other staff such as SNAs or Bus Escorts who would benefit from adopting or being aware of the appropriate approach for the pupil with SEN.

Funding and related issues:

Special schools and classes have ongoing training needs which may need to be refreshed every two years e.g. manual handling, behaviour intervention, LAMH, PECS, First Aid, Emergency Medication training. This is a considerable ongoing cost for schools that currently needs to be met through fundraising or through capitation funding.

The initial costs of this type of training is very high but this training also requires regular renewal and ongoing initial training for newly appointed staff at a significant cost to the school.

Training in the areas of positive behaviour/crisis intervention and other areas of Health and Safety training are essential for school but are a major cost. In response to our members concerns, NABMSE is working with the Schools Procurement Unit in sourcing this training at a competitive rate. However, our members are concerned that this training still needs to be funded.

Bus Escort training

NABMSE identified the gap for training of Bus Escorts in 2010 and engaged St Angela's College Sligo to research the area of adequacy and need for training. Subsequently a training programme was designed and a pilot was undertaken in Galway in 2013. An independent evaluation was undertaken but unfortunately this programme has not progressed due to funding constraints. NABMSE would welcome the opportunity to assist with the nationwide rollout of this very important programme.

Suggestions:

1. An annual training fund (with guidelines) for the school, where the school could prioritise the training needs of the school. Schools would not need to use their capitation funding or fundraising.
2. Some SESS training could be made available to whole school staff involved in the education of pupils with SEN
3. Re introduction of the training fund for SESS where schools could apply for funding for specific areas of training for their school.
4. Incentive for schools/individuals to have inhouse staff trained to provide specific training in relevant areas such as the promotion of positive behaviours.
5. Rollout of Bus Escort training without delay

2.Supports:

NCSE Policy Advice Paper No 4 - ***Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Schools*** was published in 2013 and contains 28 recommendations relating to training/continuous professional development(CPD), early intervention, transition planning, school, buildings, curriculum, Health supports, and pupil teacher ratio among others.

Findings and recommendations of this report should be examined and implemented without delay. One recommendation on a new allocation model of teaching resources to mainstream school has recently been introduced.

2.1 Capitation Funding

Special schools and classes receive enhanced capitation grants (paid per pupil) based on the special educational needs of their students. However, this grant has been reduced over the years and does not adequately cover the needs in a special education setting. In these schools, capitation is required to cover the basic running costs of the schools such as light, heat, electricity, water rates, insurance, maintenance and educational materials.

In most special education settings, these costs are higher due to the complex and additional needs of the students.

In addition to the basic running costs, essential staff training (see training section), maintenance of specialised equipment and health/medical provisions such as dressings, gloves etc are also have to be funded from the capitation grant.

While schools are encouraged to engage with the Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) and NABMSE is working with the SPU to ensure that the needs of its members are met, the capitation payment still falls short for many schools.

Some schools have experienced difficulties this year with the cost of insurance for their school with some smaller schools stating that insurance has cost a significant portion of their grant. Work has started on examining this issue and it is hoped a resolution will be found to this issue prior to the next school year.

Suggestions:

1. An examination of capitation funding should be undertaken with a view to increasing this funding for the next school year.
2. An annual training fund would be made available for each special education setting with a view to the schools identifying the training needs of their staff and procuring this training as required. This would ensure that the capitation grant would be used for the running costs of the school.

2.2 Staffing

Reduced Pupil teacher ratio

The implementation of recommendation 27.2 of NCSE Policy Paper No. 4, for reduced pupil teacher ratio for pupils with serious medical needs and the provision of funding by the HSE for access to school nurse would reflect the complexity of pupils presenting in some special schools.

Substitute Cover for special education

Currently, substitution is not permitted for some teacher absences. Special schools or special classes find it impossible to divide a class between other full classes of pupils with complex needs and classes, making it difficult for providers of special education to provide an appropriate education in a safe manner.

Posts of responsibility:

Principals in special education settings have responsibilities that span a huge range of areas including health and safety, dealing with challenging behaviour, managing a large and diverse staff and working with multi-disciplinary teams and other staffs. Some of these Principals also have full time teaching duties.

In addition, special education settings with large numbers of staff and pupils with the most complex needs do not have an administrative deputy principal.

An example: A special school has 110 staff to include teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs), bus escorts and caretaking/cleaning staff. This school has no administrative Deputy Principal.

There is an anomaly in the system where a mainstream school with 5 special classes can appoint an administrative Deputy Principal with no specified enrolment (CL 07/2016 – Appendix B)

Suggestions:

1. Implementation of recommendation 27.2 of NCSE Policy advice paper
2. NABMSE would suggest the provision of substitution for all teacher absences in special education settings
3. All staff should be included in the numbers for the determination of posts of responsibilities for special education settings including for the posts of administrative Principal and Deputy Principal.

2.3 Curriculum issues

We note Goal 3 Strategy 3 Statement of strategy 2015-2017 – ‘*Develop further policy and programmes to support learners with SEN and disabilities in participating and progressing across the continuum of education*’. This strategy should be kept under review.

It would be essential that provision for pupils with special educational needs would be included in ALL new curriculum developments in the primary and post primary sectors. The rollout of Aistear has been welcomed by special schools even without resources,

Level One and Two Learning Programmes:

Special schools are designated national schools yet cater for pupils age 4 to 18. As part of their remit, schools provide a separate programme for pupils over 12.

NABMSE was involved in the consultation and the rollout of the Junior Cycle Level Two Learning programmes and welcomes its successful introduction to schools. This programme has been very well received by schools and many have undertaken extensive training over the past two years.

However, a need has been identified for a rollout of a Level 1 Learning programme for pupils with more complex needs and work by the NCCA is ongoing in this area. We are anxious that this work continues and that the programme will be ready without delay. Schools are piloting Level One Learning Programmes from September 2017.

Specialist teachers:

More special schools have expressed an interest in providing Junior Cycle and QQI programmes and require the provision of specialist post primary teachers for these programmes. While some schools have access to these teaching hours through the DES and/or ETBs, no new teaching hours have been allocated for some years

Learning materials:

Standard text books whilst used by teachers are usually difficult to follow for young people with special educational needs. Teachers are now sourcing relevant materials to match curricular objectives through a wide range of educational websites. It should be noted that to be compliant, schools must purchase licences to use these sites.

Home School Community Liaison:

Recommendation 27.3 of NCSE Policy Advice Report no 4 states

‘ the DES should enable special schools to provide structured engagement between parents and schools. The option of including special schools in the home school community liaison scheme should be explored as one way of achieving this on a cost neutral basis’

Suggestions:

1. Junior Cycle Level 1 programme should rolled out as soon as possible
2. NABMSE would suggest that a mechanism be found to provide and/or increase specialist teaching hours in special schools so that all schools can provide their students with the same opportunities as their peers.
3. School book grant should be increased to include provision for purchase of licences (ICT) and resources for Aistear and other play based learning
4. JCSP programme should extended to all special schools who have pupils over age 12
5. NABMSE would recommend the implementation of Recommendation 27.3 of NCSE report without delay.

2.4 Planning

Inclusion:

The whole area of inclusion needs a very definite strategy and one which seeks to include various government departments working together for the betterment of all.

To enhance opportunities for inclusion, the DES should consider the possibilities of dual enrolment and placing any new special schools and mainstream schools on the same campus.

Transition planning

NABMSE welcomes the recognition that focus on transition points on page 70 of the Programme for Government. Early transition planning should involve health and education at all 4 transition points in the education system.

Future planning for special educational needs provision:

It is essential that there is early planning for post primary provision for students with special educational needs. There are many areas of the country where students wish to attend mainstream post primary schools with special classes and there is no provision. Schools should be given time to plan for the proper provision of these classes including staff training thus ensuring that students are provided with appropriate education.

2.5 Support Staff

Nursing:

Some special education providers are educating students with the most complex medical needs. Nurses currently working in schools are being funded and governed in various methods.

This situation is untenable for schools as many are unsure of their funding from year to year and Boards of Management and Principals with no medical background are responsible for supervising nursing staff.

NABMSE **suggests** that Recommendation 27.2 of the NCSE policy paper No 4 regarding the HSE providing funding for access to a school nurse be implemented without delay. We also suggest that the HSE be responsible for the supervision of this cohort of staff in schools.

Other support staff:

Education of students with special educational needs can depend on the ability to access the Curriculum. This is often dependent on the correct health-related supports being available to the pupil and the school.

NABMSE **suggests** that other therapies such as Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language therapy, Physiotherapy, behaviour support, psychiatric support could be provided to schools on a cluster basis. Early intervention is the key to addressing special educational needs (SEN).

All schools should be under the remit of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

2.6 Integration between Health and Education

Students with special education needs very often require health related/clinical supports to enable them to access the curriculum. Schools report the inadequate provision of clinical supports and loss of services to the pupil if they move school or opt for another school setting.

Substantial monies are spent in the education system. However, a more integrated approach throughout the system might yield better results. There needs to be more robust integration between health and education particularly in the provision of therapies, services and nurses.

The introduction of improved interagency working arrangements that has been mentioned on page 66 of the Programme for Government and should be extended to schools.

2.7 ICT and Assistive Technology

The use of ICT and Assistive Technology is essential in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs.

The current ICT Grant to schools awards a higher grant per pupil with special educational needs. However, as the numbers of pupils in special school tends to be lower, this is still inadequate for the needs given the need for and cost of equipment.

Communication is key to learning and special schools use a variety of methods to teach communication – picture exchange, objects of reference, lamh etc. Our members report that the key requirements in any special classroom are: interactive touchscreen whiteboards, touchscreen computer, iPad, teacher computer to identify and make resources, access to

printing and enlargement of documents (photocopier), laminator, two sided Velcro (included here because of the cost of a box), multisensory seating and other equipment, specialised seating and desks.

Inclusive technologies such as big macs are used by teachers to make language meaningful for children. Teachers also use packages such as Clicker and Grid. All of these packages assist pupils to access the curriculum but are at present considered to be communication aids and therefore schools do not receive funding to purchase these.

Suggestions:

1. Recognise that communication technologies are essential for access to curriculum for some children
2. Increase the funding for ICT to special education settings to reflect the specialist nature of how these settings access teaching and learning
3. Establish funding for our schools for multisensory rooms/environments
4. Provide all schools with a budget for educational licences
5. Other methods of distributing the ICT grant should be explored and suggestions have been made for a separate scheme for special education or a grant per classrooms.

Conclusion:

The submission identifies the relevant issues and looks at some suggestions for a way forward for training and supports available to special education settings. NABMSE welcomes the opportunity to work with the Joint Oireachtas Committee and all the education partners in finding a resolution for the issues identified.

2017/2017a



Submission to
The Joint Committee on Education and Skills

*On the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs
education and education in DEIS schools*

On behalf of the INTO

June 2017

Adequacy of training and supports available to providers of education in DEIS schools

The INTO notes the publication of the Report of the DEIS Review and the subsequent DEIS Action Plan 2017 published in February 2017. Teachers in DEIS schools work in very challenging environments. Consequently, they have complex and specific professional development needs.

Literacy and Numeracy Programmes

Under the DEIS Plan, the PDST provides support to teachers in urban DEIS schools that enables them to implement literacy and numeracy programmes such as *Maths Recovery*, *First Steps*, *Reading Recovery* and *Ready Steady Go Maths*.

Overall, DEIS teachers welcome the provision of high quality professional development in targeted literacy and numeracy programmes. The programmes are evidence based and indicate positive learning outcomes for students. However, teachers have identified a challenge in sustaining these programmes and embedding them at a whole school level. The professional development should be expanded to include in-school and ongoing support tailored to the school's individual context. Schools would prefer CPD to be delivered to all staff simultaneously to ensure consistency across the whole school.

There is some concern that 'pre-packaged' literacy and numeracy programmes can fail to address socio-cultural practice. Therefore, it is crucial that DEIS literacy and numeracy programmes remain flexible to allow teachers to employ their professional judgement to customise according to the particular school context.

The moratorium on posts of responsibility has had a negative impact on the effective co-ordination, implementation and continuance of such programmes. For example, there is no capacity within the current system for schools to replace the literacy and numeracy co-ordinator if they leave the school.

Mental health and wellbeing

The INTO notes the lack of commitment to emotional counselling supports for pupils in DEIS primary schools. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the highest levels of complexity of need and this should be addressed and supported in a targeted and specific way. There is a constant battle for teachers in DEIS schools to strike a balance between the care needs (social and emotional) and the education/learning needs of the most vulnerable children. It is challenging to pursue learning when many pupils have outstanding emotional needs that need to be addressed first.

The current services provided by the Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and other outside supports are not sufficient to meet the demand required. The INTO notes the proposal to consider the transfer of the Teacher Support Scheme to the NCSE Regional Support Service. However, these support teacher posts should remain in

their original DEIS school. The establishment of the Regional Support Service should be considered as an opportunity to develop an integrated support service to meet the emotional and behavioural needs of pupils and to provide a counselling service to pupils giving priority to those attending DEIS schools.

There needs to be a multi-disciplinary and inter-agency approach to support pupils who present with difficulties, for example, social or emotional difficulties. Research indicates that the key challenges to addressing mental-health needs include the shortage of mental-health professionals and the stigma associated with mental disorder (Patel, Vikram, et al., 2007). According to the Children's Mental Health Coalition Report (2015), one in seven children and teenagers referred for mental health treatment are still waiting a year or more to access appropriate services. Unfortunately, despite additional resources that have been put into CAMHS services in the last few years, community teams are struggling to cope with increased demand. CAMHS should be made more accessible, including through the provision of clear information to young people and their families.

The INTO proposes that consideration be given to the provision of an in-school model of mental health support service. In-school support services have many benefits including an increase in attendance, a decrease in stigmatisation and improved cross-agency collaboration between teachers and other professionals. Consideration should also be given to subsuming the various external supports for mental health and wellbeing under one umbrella service such as the Inclusion Support Service (ISS).

Support for Teachers

The mental health and wellbeing of teachers, particularly in DEIS schools, needs to be supported through access to counselling and other professional support services to help them in addressing the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour. Teaching children from socio-economic disadvantage backgrounds with serious social and emotional difficulties, in addition to learning difficulties, requires significant emotional and physical energy from teachers. Teachers require substitutable CPD opportunities in resilience practice to help sustain them in their challenging work environments.

The INTO welcomes that the commitment to the initiation of a Sabbatical Leave Scheme, for teachers in DEIS schools, is back on the agenda. The INTO strongly supported the original commitment to the Sabbatical Leave Scheme included, but never actioned, in the 2005 DEIS Action Plan. Such a scheme would provide opportunities for principals and teachers, working in the most demanding and difficult contexts, to apply to undertake a period of professional development or participate in alternative educational experiences to enhance their own learning and effectiveness, and bring subsequent benefits to their students and schools.

Social, emotional and behavioural programmes

There is a large range of programmes available that assist in the promotion and enhancement of pupil wellbeing in the classroom. Many DEIS schools now use social, emotional and behavioural programmes such as *Incredible Years*, *Friends for Life*, *PAX*, *Restorative School*, *S.A.L.T* and the *Roots of Empathy*. However, a comprehensive

evaluation of these various programmes should be undertaken and made available to teachers.

While teachers acknowledge the value of NEPS recommended programmes, *Friends for Life* and *Incredible Years*, they should not become substitutes for proper psychological supports in schools, particularly where pupils are presenting with serious behavioural and emotional difficulties. In addition, the absence of substitutable CPD makes accessing professional development for these programmes prohibitive for many teachers in DEIS schools. The INTO believes that whole school substitutable CPD is crucial to ensure full and effective implementation of any initiative. Furthermore, the programmes themselves can present significant cost and time barriers that make their implementation prohibitive in some schools. Finally, teachers must adapt these adopted programmes to benefit the Irish context. The development of a fully resourced and funded indigenous wellbeing programme, applicable to the Irish context, would be more desirable for teachers in Ireland.

Multi-disciplinary Approach

There is a need for cross-agency interaction in the pursuit of inclusion for pupils with special educational needs and children at risk of educational disadvantage. It is the INTO view that all teachers should have direct and timely access to multi-disciplinary support services, with priority given to DEIS schools initially. Psychological, counselling and other therapeutic services, such as art, music and play therapy, should be made available in-school by the relevant professionals, where there is capacity.

In addition, the INTO welcomes the commitment in the DEIS Plan 2017 to trial speech and language therapy in schools. Services to support speech and language can significantly improve engagement with education, particularly those at higher risk of educational disadvantage. In areas of socio-economic exclusion, more than 50% of children are entering school with impoverished language skills (O' Connor et al, 2012). In-school speech and language pilot programmes, such as *Chit Chat*, have increased access for children, reduced stigmatization and increased parental and school involvement in speech and language development (Hayes et al., 2016).

Community Projects

Local community projects offer support to teachers in DEIS schools in their efforts to tackle educational disadvantage. Programmes such as *Young Ballymun* and *Preparing for Life* offer much welcomed support to DEIS schools although there is insecurity of funding arising from the fact that they depend on philanthropic funding. The INTO believe that the source of funding for educational community projects should be supported by the government to ensure the sustainability and long-term certainty of these worthwhile initiatives.

Student Placement

The DEIS Plan 2017 encourages schools participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) to provide placements for student teachers from initial teacher education colleges. Ideally, school placements in marginalised communities would become an integral and recommended part of the school placement programmes allowing student teachers the opportunity to build their capacity and experience in educational disadvantage settings. It is

crucial that teachers are adequately prepared for varying socio-economic contexts particularly in light of the fact that the majority of those teaching in urban DEIS schools are early career teachers, teaching for less than 5 years (Mc Coy, Quail & Smyth, 2014).

School Leadership

Principals in DEIS schools also require professional development opportunities and support in their administrative role. There are no specific provisions set out in the DEIS Plan 2017 to support principals of newly-included DEIS schools in terms of developing a school plan specific to DEIS schools. It is essential that schools joining DEIS are offered the same professional development support as was originally provided under the 2005 DEIS Plan. The INTO believes that the reinstatement of posts of responsibility in DEIS schools is essential in facilitating in-school management structures.

Adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education

In light of the inclusive nature of our schools, every primary school teacher is a provider of special needs education, therefore, all teachers in our system must have an equal opportunity to access professional development and other supports specific to special education provision.

Special Education CPD

In 2017, the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Children who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VTHVI) transferred from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and joined with the services already being provided by NCSE's SENOs and administrative staff to form a new NCSE Support Service.

The NCSE now has responsibility for providing Continual Professional Development (CPD) and support for teachers in the area of special educational needs formerly provided through the SESS. The NCSE Regional Support Service provides the opportunity to promote a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive and responsive. However, it remains to be seen how the newly integrated support service will impact on the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education.

Previously, teachers accessed the majority of their Special Educational Needs (SEN) professional development through the SESS. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

Teachers report positively on the quality of courses provided through the SESS. However, teachers desire more professional development to be offered in school settings to allow for a whole school approach that is tailored to specific needs and context of the school. Furthermore, it is crucial that there is a collaborative approach to special educational

provision across the whole staff including school principals, mainstream teachers, special educational teachers and special needs assistants (SNA).

DES Diploma in Special Education

In order to assist all schools and educational services in meeting the needs of students requiring learning support and the teaching of students with special educational needs, a combined post-graduate diploma programme of continuing professional development is offered to primary and post-primary teachers by the Teacher Education Section of the DES. The INTO notes the substantial and necessary theoretical and practical CPD provided by this programme to teachers working with children with special educational needs. However, the INTO does not believe that mainstream teachers should be ineligible for such a programme. As stated previously, all teachers in primary schools teach children with special educational needs on a daily basis. Therefore, the INTO recommends that consideration should be given to expanding this positive opportunity to all teachers working in our schools.

Initial Teacher Education

The Teaching Council's *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (2011) sets out that all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes should address specific elements including inclusive education such as Special Education and Disadvantage. By delineating them as mandatory elements of all programmes, the Council is ensuring that, all student teachers will be required to develop an understanding of the theory and practice in these areas in preparation for their careers as teachers. However, such engagement at the initial teacher education level alone is not sufficient to sustain teachers' professional development needs throughout their career. The initial introduction to special education and disadvantage education must be complemented with follow-on CPD in these areas as teachers journey along the continuum of professional development. Furthermore, the provision of professional development must be responsive to changes in society over time. For example, in recent years teachers are requesting additional supports and training in response to the increasing prevalence of mental health and emotional issues in pupils.

Summer Courses

Teachers also access professional development and support by way of the summer courses. The main objective of summer courses is the advancement of teachers' pedagogic and management skills, in the context of their specific role. Therefore, many teachers in special education, disadvantage and indeed mainstream settings will enrol on face to face and online courses based on promoting and supporting inclusion. The scheme for the summer course is invaluable to teachers in that it enhances their professional development in an area of their own interest with the added incentive of Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days. However, the INTO recommends that consideration should be given to the provision of EPV courses during term time to allow teachers the opportunity to instantly apply the new learning in their setting and reflect accordingly.

Conclusion

The INTO believes that there is an ongoing need to support teachers of pupils with special educational needs, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to the greatest extent

possible. A holistic approach to the provision of supports is required. While teachers have positive experiences of DEIS and SEN supports, the level of supports for pupils with social and emotional difficulties is insufficient.

The INTO looks forward to any further discussions regarding the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools. In addition, the INTO are currently preparing a response to the DEIS Plan 2017. It is anticipated that the response will be available in September 2017.



2017/218a

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Written submission in relation to the Committee's examination of the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools.

Introduction

Because my professional background and experiences are based within special education this submission will focus on the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education.

The submission will concentrate on:

1. The role of special schools in the Irish education system, to include the Departments vision of them and its expectations of what a special school should achieve
2. Appropriate placement of pupils with SEN in schools – who decides?
3. Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN realistically and appropriately
4. Links with the HSE particularly with regards to clinical and medical supports
5. Teacher training at both Initial Teacher Education level or post graduate courses

I will offer a brief synopsis under the above headings examining the issues facing special schools in particular. Where possible I will suggest areas of reform but would feel that they may not be financially viable. However it is important to note and discuss them in the changing system of contemporary education.

In making my comments it is important to acknowledge that there have been many positive innovations and initiatives on the part of the DES both from a curricular and pedagogical point of view. The resources are almost there (however this is dependent on regional variations), the interest is there but I feel the vision is lacking something.

This document reflects the concerns and issues of all special schools. However I am presenting it from the perspective of our own school in county Kildare.



Executive Summary

This document considers the current model of SEN provision in a typical special school and focuses on the impact of what is considered to be adequate training and supports available to providers of special needs education.

It will look at the evolution of the special school under the patronage of HSE voluntary bodies and the subsequent lack of a definition and/or vision by the DES for this group of schools who initially had little influence on this evolution. The impact of this lack of vision and how special schools eventually developed significant autonomy in what they were to become, is discussed within the framework of inclusion. The obligation to offer post primary certification to those post primary aged pupils in our schools is examined within the current definition of special schools as primary schools only and the fact the DES does not expect us to offer anything other than the primary curriculum.

This lack of a common vision for all children and their equal right to an appropriate education regardless of how they were assessed and taking into consideration their age, has never been challenged. This is now being addressed with the development of the new Junior Cycle at Levels 1 and 2 – however special schools still have a choice not to offer this level of accreditation. Mainstream schools may never offer JC level 1 unless tested.

Special schools continue to be viewed as the only option for a large group of children and this is considered within the supports available and the reluctance of many mainstream schools to broaden their vision to include this group. The fact those same voluntary bodies provided all clinical supports and parents had no choice but to choose a special school in the past is somewhat diluted with the new model of clinical support under the Network Disability Teams. This should have opened the doors for further inclusion but this is debateable. This model should be fully reviewed prior to other areas adopting it.

It is important to consider from a financial point of view if it is more effective to place all resources necessary to meet the changing and often complex needs of some SEN pupils into one facility i.e. a special school so allowing only certain categories of child into their local mainstream school. Whether this can be a positive and productive learning environment for all must be deliberated particularly with regards to pupils with significant behaviours that challenge.

If this were to be the case then special schools will have to be resourced at a different level. Who decides the how and where children are placed for their education and if this can be appropriately resourced is an issue which is central to the future of special education provision regardless of whether this is mainstream or a special school and should not be an economical one. The roles of the clinical teams and the Special Education Needs Organiser are enmeshed in this.

Central to all of this is the attitude, training and ultimately the philosophical belief of all teachers in educating all children with SEN regardless of their assessed need.



1. The role of special schools in the Irish education system, to include the Departments vision of this and its expectations of what a special school pupil should achieve before leaving

1a) Historical context

The growth of special schools over the years has been managed in many instances by patron bodies which, for many special schools, meant a voluntary body funded exclusively by the HSE. Whereas this was initially a positive model it created many difficulties for special schools in that it was difficult for them to forge a positive educational identity within their local school community and to promote a culture firmly based within the Department of Education's edicts. It should not have caused conflicts but in many cases it did as the philosophical visions often clashed.

At the outset this model was generally encouraged as many patrons funded the often underfunded special schools and in some instances provided extra staff. However this only served to create further distance for teachers teaching in special schools from their professional peers and to create a level of professional segregation that would prove to be difficult to eliminate to this very day.

It was logical then that the vision created for special schools would be determined by their patrons. This may be the reason why there is no description of, nor vision for the special school in Ireland today. It has proven impossible to find any statement or promise by the DES of what a special school should set out to achieve. What should a child leaving a special school have achieved after 14 years?

1b) Modern context

Because of this lack of vision and statement, special schools have been allowed a high level of autonomy and have a great amount of freedom to describe what they intend to achieve (when not influenced by their patrons) particularly at post primary level. Looking at this positively – dynamic special schools acknowledged the needs of their pupils and offered programmes they considered necessary to support their pupils educational achievements. These included the Junior Cert Schools Programme, Leaving Cert Applied, FETAC (QQI) or ASDAN to name a few.

This created further levels of segregation as regardless of a child's potential they were judged by the school they were enrolled in. For example when our own school applied many years ago to offer the Junior Cert Schools Programme to our post primary aged pupils (having discovered that schools for children in the Mild range of GLD were doing this) I was dismissed as we were considered a primary school (this is true but so are the schools for mild GLD) and as our pupils had Moderate GLD and came under the disability services we were not eligible – even though 50% of our pupil population were over 12 years of age.

We eventually registered to offer QQI (then called FETAC) at levels 1, 2 and 3 and successfully gained our Quality Assurance.



When post primary schools were given a larger download speed under a new NCTE initiative four years ago, again we were not eligible because we did not offer an appropriate post primary curriculum i.e. we were only offering level 2 QQI subjects.

It is a fact that even though some special schools offer post primary certification, there is no obligation on them to do this. There are special schools extant today that continue to offer the primary curriculum for the entire school life of the child which could be 14 years.

Those of us who do offer levels 1,2 and 3 certification were allowed to employ post primary trained teachers and received support from the ETB's in the form of specialist teachers. Some special schools have been told that they cannot do this anymore and have been unable to develop their post primary aged provision.

Young adults over the age of 18 can remain in special schools to complete a level 3 programme, this is not allowed for those only studying level 2 programmes.

1c) Reform

- The Minister through the Department of Education and Skills should develop a national strategy/vision or statement as to what a special school is/ should be, what it should offer and what its pupils could/should achieve by the time they leave. It may be implicit at primary level through the curriculum but consideration must be given to those children over the age of 12. The courses and training are out there especially with the new Junior Cycle programme but there is **no** obligation on special schools to do any of this.
- The need to employ post primary trained teachers should not be ignored. It has made a valuable difference to our pupils and the vision they have of what they can achieve. There is a strong need to consider the PP model in all special schools. The DES have proven to be visionary from a building perspective in providing all the specialist rooms e.g. Home Economics, woodwork, computers etc. but for some reason it is deemed entirely suitable to only provide primary trained teachers. No one is debating their proficiency in teaching but there is a rights issue in this. Promoting employment of post primary trained teachers to teach the new junior cycle would promote this model of education across all schools and so support and endorse the inclusive vision. It would also allow for mobility of post primary teachers within the system whether it be special or mainstream school thus spreading knowledge and experience throughout the system.
- Equal educational opportunities should be the vision and brief of the DES for all children with SEN up to and including the 18 – 21 year olds. Some of our brightest pupils have ended up at 18 in day care centres under the remit of the HSE, often they are completing rehabilitative training courses. This is a system that would not be countenanced for their typically developing peers.

NB – all post primary trained teachers in our school regardless of their qualifications and the fact they are offering Junior Cycle Level 2, are paid the primary teachers rate of pay.



- Regardless of school placement or level of accreditation all pupils should have the same rights to complete their course, even if it means remaining in school until 19 years of age.

2. Appropriate placement of pupils with SEN in schools – who decides and where?

2a) Special schools are under tremendous pressure to enrol any child who applies as there seems to be a shortage of places. This is regardless of the fact the school might be full, the class is not suitable, or we might not be able to meet the child's needs. This is particularly relevant if the child develops behaviours that challenge. The more challenging they are – the quicker they are filtered down through the system to us. As a school for children in the moderate/ severe/profound range of GLD we are considered the last resort, “if not here then where”. This is without addressing the resource issue.

It is debated that there will always be a role for special schools without determining what that means. More recently it has been stated that inclusion in a MS school is beneficial and worthwhile but not for pupils in the severe/profound range of GLD. We now have a different level of segregation which discriminates against a child in a different category from those who were discriminated against 20 to 30 years ago before children in the severe/profound range were even in the education system.

We have to ask what is it about the special school teacher that makes them suitable and competent to teach children within this range yet somehow MS teachers are not. Why is it acceptable that staff in special schools can sustain injuries and children can miss out on their educational experiences but staff and pupils in main stream schools have more rights. We could ponder the concept of the teacher with restricted recognition who had no option but to teach in special schools and therefore developed the competence and tolerance because s/he had no choice. Thank fully that model is being phased out and should not influence competency in future but the legacy remains.

The reality is more persuasive. There is nothing that a special school teacher (or indeed a special school) does that cannot be done in any other school.

It is important to consider some facts:

- a) Mainstream classes with ASD units have access to the same grant to set the class up, the same staffing ratio, the same capitation, the same access to training and the same support (in the Kildare area) from the Network Disability Teams as our school. We are expected to cope in the same environment with identical resources as our MS counterparts. However we are obliged to take the most challenging (and often with several others who display behaviours in the same class) and those with lower levels of ability without additional supports/resources. This is unrealistic and is not working. It is also the worst model of educational provision and an appalling learning environment.



- b) Psychologists are making the decisions as to who enrolls in our school and are supporting parents in Section 29 appeals if we can't. We are full and have been for quite a while and will be for the next couple of years. Already pressure is mounting for September 2018. On one hand the clinical team are condemning our old buildings as being unsuitable for children with sensory processing difficulties yet a different independent psychologist supported a parent in a section 29 appeal which we lost. We are oversubscribed and now have to put an extra child into a crowded room. This is because the child had no other school to go to.
- c) There is talk about building yet another special school in the town (giving 3 in total).
- d) Psychologists are moving away from diagnoses of moderate/severe/profound GLD and are opting for outlining the child's needs and how they could be met. This is good practice but again it has resourcing implications.

2b) Reform

- The role of special schools needs to be defined within the national vision discussed earlier to outline their purpose and *raison d'être*. This should not be as a "specialist school", (a term that has been around for many years and again lacks definition) nor as a catch all for those children who are perceived as unsuitable to go anywhere else. An informed approach/discussion as to how and where pupils needs can be met with the emphasis on their absolute right to go to their local school with their peers. This should not be the dictate of one clinical professional. A suitable learning environment must be maintained and meet all needs.
- If the philosophy continues to exist that special schools will become the catch all for those pupils other schools do not want – then they must be resourced differently and staff trained appropriately. The current model is unsustainable. It would be preferable to consider the model whereby all children should attend their local schools either in special classes e.g. autism, severe/profound. The alternative is to have increasingly larger special schools filled with the most challenging and most medically vulnerable who will be there for 14 years. To promote this as a positive learning environment would be to stretch that idea beyond recognition. All children are entitled to be with others who can act as positive role models. It would prove difficult to maintain a consistent, productive, viable staff grouping. Could the question be do we still really need special schools?
- All children are entitled to be educated by appropriately qualified teachers regardless of the course they are undertaking. The new Junior Cycle has broken down many barriers. Junior Cycle Level 1 is being launched in September in several special schools. It is clear it is being considered a special school programme only. This concept could be stretched to main stream post primary schools as part of their junior cycle programme thus enabling them to broaden their level of pedagogy to include a broader range of needs.
- If special schools are to remain as it seems they will be, their role needs to be defined more precisely to include appropriate staffing and resourcing. Currently each diagnostic group brings its own staffing ratio. If these groups are no longer to exist, as is currently happening, and we move to a needs based model, a system of allocating staffing and resources, to enable special schools to meet these needs, must be designed.



- To set up another special school underlines the fact that segregation is a reality. It is far better to build alongside mainstream classes, schools and campuses to foster inclusion and further acceptance of the vast range of needs many children now display.
- Develop an inclusive curriculum at primary level. It was never a good idea to issue curriculum guidelines for teachers of children with mild/moderate/severe/profound general learning disabilities. It was innovative in its time as prior to that there was no curriculum of worth for SEN but the new Primary Oral Language Curriculum is an excellent model for inclusive learning.
- Committee members involved in the Section 29 appeals are, on their own admission, completely uninformed about most aspects of SEN. The decisions they have handed down to special schools can and have had far reaching effects on existing arrangements because of this. These committees must have experts from an SEN background on them.

3. Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN realistically and appropriately

3a) In describing the role of the special school it may be necessary to consider that it may have to be a totally different concept or else strong links with the HSE must be forged to support the children in ways that are relevant to them and their families. First it is necessary to consider the increase in those children enrolling who display behaviours that challenge within the following points:

- Many of these children go on to have serious mental health issues and at times their behaviour is such that they cannot function within a school setting at any level. We have children who can have psychotic episodes and for whom no form of behavioural intervention will work at that time. The risk to staff and other pupils can be significant.
- If these children are suspended or placed on a reduced day for health and safety reasons by the board, we are put under pressure by the clinical teams to bring them back full time regardless of our ability to manage or to sustain positive behaviour interventions.
- Injuries to staff occur on a daily basis and they can only get assault leave when they have exhausted all their sick leave. Staff should not have to sustain injuries – proper resources could minimise this. This starts with smaller class sizes and higher staffing ratio than MS schools.
- For children with mental health issues – a different service is required at crisis times – school is not the place for them. There may be need for pure therapeutic interventions by suitably qualified therapists or simply a respite facility provided by the HSE.
- Some of these pupils are 17 and 18 year old young men and women and in some instances much taller and stronger than staff.
- The impact of this behaviour on other pupils is significant and other pupils are frightened to go near these children. Many spend time in other locations e.g. the school hall, corridors, going out for walks etc. as it is not safe to leave them in the class if there is a meltdown. Their education can be seriously disrupted and they should not have to witness this. The child who demonstrates the behaviour commands all the resources at the expense of the others. Unfortunately our children cannot go home and explain this to their families.
- We have five classes of children assessed as being in the severe/profound range of GLD who have complex physical and medical needs. Many children require specialised



equipment from tables to changing beds, hoists, learning stations, standing frames and IT. The DES are exceptional at providing much of this however, these have to be maintained and serviced. We cannot afford to do this without fundraising, it appears this is why we have an enhanced capitation grant! We currently have three learning stations we cannot use as the battery packs are flat, we need new batteries which cost €500 each. We have an annual contract for servicing our hoists which costs €1,700 per year. We have to have nappy disposal units which we fund ourselves, correct facilities for storing medication and we must provide gloves, aprons, wipes and anti-bacterial sprays, and in many cases masks to carry out intimate care.

- The enhanced capitation grant is not sufficient to cover all of this – another type of grant must be allowable based on the number of children in this category with these described needs. This could be a grant to meet medical needs provided by the HSE

3b) Reform

- It should be possible for special schools to be able to admit they are unable to meet certain needs. Historically special schools were, through their patrons, encouraged to keep supporting the children even in very difficult circumstances. Very few special schools would permanently exclude children regardless of the difficulties and injuries experienced. Children with mental health issues may need to absent themselves from school in co-operation with parents, clinicians and the Board. Typically clinicians require that children attend as “they have a right to go to school.” Procedures are in place to facilitate expulsion but pressure from clinicians is put on special schools to keep children in order to better support parents. Special schools who do exclude or suspend such pupils are losing Section 29 appeals (with clinical staff supporting families) and being made to bring children back in. Training is always touted as being the answer, it is only a very small part of it. Smaller class sizes, lower teacher pupil ratio and a guaranteed 2 special needs assistants in each class may go some way to alleviating this problem and guaranteeing a safer learning environment.
- All teacher absences in special schools and classes must be covered by a substitute. We cannot divide the classes easily as happens in MS schools particularly those for children with autism and behaviours that challenge. However we do have to do this and manage the consequences as best we can which may be significant.
- There is an urgent need to introduce assault leave which is provided as it is needed. This should be granted in much the same way as maternity related illness - on receipt of a doctors certificate and not when all other leave has been exhausted.
- Training in management of behaviours and person moving and handling should be a compulsory summer course funded by the DES. Our staff is large (62) and it can be very expensive to organise and keep updated. Currently schools pay for it and any other specific resources. It is urgent that another form of grant is allowed to meet these needs.
- Courses for SNA's at level 5 and above should, as a matter of urgency, have compulsory training as part of that course in person moving and handling and behaviour management. SNA's we employ for the first few months have no training until we can organise this and allow time off to attend. This is an integral part of their working day.
- If the pupil profile remains as it is then smaller class sizes and an increase in SNA's per class is urgent if the service we offer is to continue in a viable and safe way.



4. Links with the HSE particularly with regards to clinical supports

- Under the old model of provision created by the schools patronage (wherein the patrons also provided clinical supports) the roles of staff within special schools were very much blurred. Special schools grew up in a system whereby clinicians saw themselves very much as consultants who told school staff what to do. Prior to the advent of a curriculum for SEN this may have been a model that worked. However teachers found this difficult to manage on a day to day basis and it was realised that the expectations placed on them by clinicians were outside of their expertise, training or role. Were staff actually entitled to carry out occupational therapy or physiotherapy recommendations? Unfortunately in realising this nothing palpably changed for them.

Today the network disability teams who support the school however pleasant and supportive they may be, still by and large, consider themselves to be consultants who instruct school staff. In some situations this may work but in many others it does not.

Consider the referral to a psychologist for support in managing behaviours that challenge. They do not see their role as one whereby they come in and observe the child for a reasonable period. It is the responsibility of the school staff to assess and record all instances of behaviour which can take up the time of a full staff member over a period of days. If we cannot do this – they cannot support. Staff are expected to complete observation charts and maintain records, graphs etc. which are then copied to the team who analyse them off site. We are not given staffing to do this nor can it be a very accurate observation when trying to keep the classroom running whilst managing behaviour.

Many recommendations suggest sensory integration breaks or movement breaks to help calm the child, this pulls staff from the room. Staff are not comfortable going alone with a child with behaviour that challenges therefore 2 staff accompany him/her. This can leave the teacher on her own in class with others who require the same support.

Very few, if any clinicians, spend significant amount of times working with the children, their client list maybe too long to give referrals full and complete support. Referrals are prioritised according to their matrix not the difficulties experienced by the school. It is supposed that this is to manage their significant work load.

Teachers feel that recommendations, if and when they come, can be unrealistic or contain no new information other than that provided by them. On rare occasions clinicians can offer no further help. We have been told to, “Just keep them happy.” There is a tendency to blame the school structure or our need to make sure the child gets an education. It is not any one person’s fault but appears to be the fact that they are also under pressure from the workload placed on them. On occasion it looks as if it is a box ticking exercise.

Nursing cover is an essential resource to a typical special school such as ours. Many of our children have life threatening conditions and are very medically fragile. They would not be able to attend school if we did not have this resource. It is up to the patron to decide what



and even if schools get this support. We are lucky that we have this resource through our patrons but other schools like ours do not. This must be an automatic right for medically vulnerable children and the responsibility of the HSE to provide it.

4a) Reform

- Urgent liaison with the HSE before other areas launch the network disability teams. It is a very progressive and dynamic model as children can be supported regardless of which school they attend. This is excellent for inclusion but seems to place children with more challenges in our school than ever before as references are being made to the child's inability to cope in other schools even when they have the same resources.
- Agreed definition as to where boundaries begin and end or else the Department of Education needs broaden the role of the special needs assistant to include therapeutic interventions across the board. This would require further extensive training. Otherwise the HSE must provide clinical support staff to aid the clinicians work on the ground. (Model in situ in Tor Bank Special School, Belfast)
- There needs to be a unified, agreed approach on how the clinicians work with school staff. At the moment it seems we work for them. The above point should be the desired model.
- Class sizes are key to providing essential support, they must be reduced.
- Nurses could be clustered in areas according to the needs of pupils in a certain catchment area. They can be school based and should have access to a regional nurse manager for support and advice on policy.
- Specialist equipment is costly and readily available from the DES however, it cannot be reused or apparently recycled. A system must be put in place, in consultation with the HSE for recycling the vast amount of equipment special schools have. We currently link with the clinicians regarding getting equipment recycled and have handed over large amounts of specialist chairs, tables etc. that we no longer use. A national policy advising schools of the appropriate way to dispose of this would be beneficial or is there any way the DES can recuperate funds from this.
- The role of the SENO must be reconsidered and copper fastened. We still work in a system whereby depending on where your school is, it is possible to get any amount of supports through your SENO. In some severe/profound classes across Ireland each child has their own SNA as their needs are so complex especially with regards to feeding and intimate care. In our school we have a class of six 16 – 18 year olds with only 2 SNA's. Some of the children require the support of 3 SNA's for hoisting and intimate care. This system needs to be refined, again reduce class sizes and keep staff to at least 2 SNA's.

5. Adequate teacher training at both Initial Teacher Education level or post graduate courses

There are many debates over whether it is essential to offer training in special educational needs particularly at the initial teacher education level. It is acknowledged that teachers are the most significant resource in our schools, therefore it could be argued that they should have all the tools to ply their trade and surely this includes an adequate training.

The following is an extract from my thesis on teacher training for SEN



“Internationally there are moves to improve and promote pre service training in special educational needs and it is generally acknowledged that a pre requisite for positive inclusion is that teachers are adequately and appropriately prepared. (Johnson et al 1995; Balbas, 1995; Reynolds and Birch 1997) The feeling represented is that teachers are generally not ready for the challenges of the inclusive classroom. Nor do they feel that they have the skills to offer appropriate attention to children with special needs. (Reynolds, 1990)

Training may be one aspect of the difficulties experienced but there are other very real issues that must be considered. Central to this is attitude – both in the prejudice towards children with SEN in the classroom and the expectation that teachers must change current practice to effect inclusion.

It is widely acknowledged that more needs to be done to prepare teachers for this aspect of education and to look at the advantages of this training from many different perspectives. (Potts, 1995; Johnson, Wright, Hornby, 1995; Balbas, 1995) Some countries prefer the pre service model of training in SEN whilst others prefer the in service model with the idea that it can be quite inappropriate to concentrate on producing teachers for this highly specialist and very limited field of employment. (2011)”

Training in SEN could be looked on as an enticement for teachers to enter an area of education they would not otherwise have considered but are now doing so because they understand and have experienced the positive aspects of this line of teaching. We find it quite difficult to attract young teachers to our school and even when we do it can prove to be a difficult experience for them even with support. As well as acquiring an understanding the needs of their pupils they teach they can be faced with the prospect of managing, on occasion, 3 SNA's.

Exposure at initial teacher education level may go some way to forging positive attitudes and eliminating prejudice. However it has to be considered if it is appropriate to concentrate on producing teachers for such a specialist field. If inclusion is to be successful in the Irish context I would support this approach.

In service training is an option but it is not compulsory nor is there an obligation on schools to undertake this form of training. It can also be costly and difficult to organise especially in these difficult times of no substitute teachers. It can also be used as a reason not to enrol. We were recently a child could not attend a main stream schools ASD unit as the teacher simply was not trained!

Appropriate initial teacher training should prepare young teachers for the challenges of the inclusive classroom. In my experience the minute exposure they are currently getting, (sometimes a one hour seminar, maybe a one week placement), has proved that this is not the case when they come to teach in a special school. Even with support not all teachers manage to completely grasp the philosophy of education for children with general learning disabilities, however, when they do they do it well.



Mary Immaculate are currently offering a B. Ed in Education and Psychology, having recently interviewed a young teacher who graduated with this course, I was very impressed at her knowledge and understanding of many aspects of special education. Unfortunately many others simply cannot even get the terminology right.

5a) Reform

- Some compulsory SEN training at initial teacher education level is very desirable both to broaden the perspective and knowledge of the teacher and to promote positive attitudes to the range of SEN and inclusion in its purest form.
- Placement in a special school or special class should be a requirement at initial teacher education. Many teachers are not aware of the breadth nor depth of needs of some pupils and feel they do not have the skills to educate them.
- Training and placement, in enticing teachers into special education (as in special schools), will hopefully allow for a more fluid movement within schools and movement between special and mainstream schools. This is important to share expertise and knowledge and also to allow movement and change. Many teachers in special schools with restricted recognition will have to spend 40 years working in an increasingly challenging environment without a chance of moving on unless it is to another special school.

Pauline Dempsey
Principal

10th June 2017

2017/219

Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection

Examination of the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools

Written Submission

National Council for Special Education

14th June 2017

Introduction

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) welcomes the opportunity to assist the Committee's examination of the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education. Our submission focuses on the training and supports available to **all** schools, including DEIS schools. It does not deal separately with education in DEIS schools as the NCSE does not have a remit in relation to DEIS schools that is distinct from other schools.

One of NCSE's key roles is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on special education. The NCSE has recognised that the Educational for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act continues to provide the most comprehensive basis for the assessment and education planning for students with special educational needs. We have advised that the Act should be fully implemented as soon as State resources allow.

Since 2011, our policy advice to the Minister has specifically addressed the supports required by students with special educational needs in schools. We have provided advice on:

- The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes (February 2011)
- The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland (December 2011)
- The Education of Students with Challenging Behaviour arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Disorders (September 2012)
- Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools (2013)
- A Proposed New Model for Allocating Additional Teaching Supports (2014)
- Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

Our 2013 paper – Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools – was the first major review of special education in twenty years and we made 28 wide-ranging recommendations for improvement. Many of these recommendations are or have been implemented.

This written submission draws on some of our key findings to date. Full reports are available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/policy-advice>.

Some key findings in NCSE policy advice

Through our consultations and research work leading to the development of our policy advice, the NCSE has found general agreement among stakeholders that the State's substantial investment of c€1.7bn per annum in special education has had a positive impact on schools' ability to include and educate students with special educational needs. There is generally a good, and improving, range of placement options available. Many students with special educational needs are thriving in our schools. Student retention rates to Leaving Certificate level in recent years have increased from 82% in 1997 to well over 90%. The increase has been even greater in DEIS schools where retention levels has risen from 68% to over 82%.

Students are generally supported well in schools and have access to a diverse and appropriate curriculum. The following supports are available:

Student supports

- Additional Teachers in Mainstream Schools: Mainstream class/subject teachers are supported by over 13,000 special education teachers whose sole work is to support students with special educational needs: there is approximately 1 special education teacher for every 5 class/subject teachers.

- Small Class sizes in Special Schools and Special Classes: There are over 2,000 teachers educating some 14,000 students in special classes and special schools. Class sizes range from 11 students in a class to six students in a class depending on the specific nature of the disability e.g. a special class for students with autism would have no more than 6 students with one teacher and a minimum of two Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).
- Visiting Teacher Service: 43 Visiting Teachers for children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing; Blind/Visually Impaired.
- Care Supports: The care needs of 32,500 students are met by over 13,000 SNA posts in mainstream and special schools.
- Funding for Assistive Technology/Specialist Equipment.
- Funding for adaptations to school buildings.
- Special School Transport arrangements.
- Educational psychology through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).
- Additional capitation funding is provided to special schools and mainstream schools with special classes.

Teacher Professional Development supports

All teachers are required to be fully qualified and registered with the Teaching Council. This requirement to be a registered teacher is a strength as standards for teachers are prescribed and have to be met in order to teach in Irish schools.

Research findings are clear that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes. Principals and Teachers require the knowledge, skills, understanding and competence to provide for the education and care of students with special educational needs. Through their initial teacher education courses, teachers are equipped with many of the broad skills necessary to teach students they meet in the classroom. Teachers have access to post-qualification support through the Professional Development Service for Teachers which provides a number of stand-alone services and professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. Examples include: Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Maths Recovery, Transition Year, Primary Professional Development Service, Second Level Support Service and so on.

However, the skills learned through initial teacher education and more general professional development need to be further refined and adapted to meet the diverse, and sometimes very complex, needs of students with special educational needs. These students require qualified teachers who are trained and equipped with the skills necessary to meet their educational and care needs.

Currently, the system which enables teachers to access targeted continuing professional development in special education is undergoing fundamental change. The three key support services have been brought within the NCSE this year and work is underway to develop one unified support service – this unification work is at a very early stage. The services in question are:

- The **Special Education Support Service (SESS)**, with an annual non-pay budget of approximately €2m, develops and delivers a range of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs. The SESS supports teachers working with students with special educational needs in over 4,000 schools, including mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes. It works at national, regional, local, school and individual teacher level, whilst also facilitating accredited pathways to post-graduate qualifications in special education.

From January to December 2016, the SESS provided support to over 18,800 teachers through its different support structures including seminars, school visits and funding

attendance at courses. This equates to an overall total of approximately 20,250 training days. More detailed information on the types of support provided by the SESS is provided in Appendix 1.

- The **National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS)**, with an annual non-pay budget of approximately €1m, promotes and supports positive behaviour in some 240 post-primary schools providing intensive support to over 1,700 students.

The NBSS supports schools to address challenging behaviours through intensive support from some 90 teachers seconded to the service, two Speech and Language Therapists and two Occupational Therapists as well as one research and development officer. The three elements of this support comprise: behaviours for learning; social/emotional/well-being literacy; literacy, learning numeracy and language.

- The **Visiting Teacher Service**, with an annual non-pay budget of approximately €3m provides a service to Deaf/Hard of Hearing students and students who are Blind/Visually Impaired from the time of referral through to school completion.

Currently, there are 43 whole-time equivalent teacher posts within the visiting teacher service to support approximately 2,700 children with sensory impairments throughout the country.

The service provided by the visiting teachers includes:

- Guidance and support and specialist teaching to pre-school children and their parents in the home
- Specialist teaching, support and monitoring in schools
- Advice to parents and teachers on curricular and environmental implications, including the use of assistive technology
- Liaising with parents, teachers and other professionals
- Advising the State Examination Commission on applications for reasonable accommodation in State exams
- Providing a transition report for students in final year post-primary education to advise disability and access officers on appropriate accommodations and supports at third level.

These services are joining with the NCSE's **79 Special Educational Needs Organisers** who provide support and information to schools, process applications for SNA support, assistive technology, school transport etc.

In addition, up to 300 places are funded on programmes leading to postgraduate diplomas for teachers in specialist roles and settings in schools across seven different third level colleges/universities. These programmes extend over one academic year with eight weeks' release from schools for attendance at the relevant programme venue. The remainder of the year involves teaching and supervised teaching practice in the participants' own educational settings.

However, as a result of our policy advice work, the NCSE has advised the Minister of a number of areas where there is room for improvement. Our recommendations are aimed at ensuring that all school-aged students have access to appropriate supports in line with their needs and that their teachers have access to appropriate CPD programmes tailored to the needs of the particular educational setting in which they work.

The Department of Education and Skills is currently working towards the implementation of many of our recommendations. For example, a new model for allocating special education teachers to schools is being introduced this year. The three support services are being unified to form one

coherent service for schools. The Admissions to School legislation will provide a robust regulatory enrolment framework for schools to protect children with special educational needs from “soft barriers” blocking his or her access to schools and so on.

Specific recommendation in relation to the adequacy of training and supports are discussed below.

Adequacy of training and supports

Teacher Training

There is agreement that the supports already in place in schools are those which continue to be required so that students with special educational needs are enabled to participate in, and benefit from, education and generally to fulfil their potential. There is also no doubt that Teacher knowledge and understanding of special educational needs have improved and continues to develop. Many teachers have engaged in professional development; groups consulted acknowledged the high quality of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes provided through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and colleges/ universities.

Despite these improvements, we are concerned that many teachers continue to report that they do not feel fully confident or equipped to teach students with more complex special educational needs. General areas of particular difficulty include:

- Differentiation – teaching the curriculum at differing levels appropriate to a student’s abilities.
- Management of challenging behaviours – this has become a significant issue for schools and the inclusion of students with more complex level of difficulties.
- Measurement and review of outcomes for students with special educational needs.

Students in every classroom have a range of abilities and all teachers need to know how to differentiate the curriculum to enable students achieve in line with their own individual ability. Some students with special educational needs have extensive learning needs and teachers have advised that they do not feel equipped to differentiate to the level which may be required.

The challenging behaviour of some students causes extreme difficulties to schools – this behaviour concerns students with and without special educational needs. Research, commissioned by the NCSE, shows that, with the appropriate expertise and programmes in place, challenging behaviours can reduce in intensity and quantity, allowing teachers to teach and students to learn in safe environments.

We recommended that all teachers need greater expertise in the management of behaviour and that every school should have one teacher with specialist training in this area. Problem behaviours can begin very early and become deeply embedded as young as 8 or 9 years. Early intervention activities such as early screening, encouraging and acknowledging positive behaviour, early contact with the home have been shown to be beneficial. We recommended that the availability of early intervention programmes such as the Incredible Years Programme be extended. Problem behaviours can also emerge for the first time at post-primary school as a result of traumatic experiences, difficult familial situations etc. Whole school programmes such as FRIENDS can assist.

We consider that the Teaching Council and the DES should ensure that teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding and competence to meet the diverse learning needs of students with special educational needs. For this to happen, we have advised that:

- Special education should form a mandatory and meaningful part of every teacher’s initial training and on-going continuous professional development.

- The DES should request the Teaching Council to state what are the requisite knowledge, skills understanding and competencies that teachers require to work with students with special educational needs in mainstream and special settings.
- The Teaching Council should stipulate mandatory levels and frequency of CPD that teachers are required to undertake for teaching students with special educational needs within an overall framework of CPD for teachers.

We are aware that, since the publication of our advice, the Teaching Council has worked on developing a framework for professional development and that special education is a core component of this. However, it will be a significant challenge within existing resources to provide sufficient professional training as so many teachers received their initial teacher education at a time before special education became a mandatory course module.

In addition to the general areas highlighted above, the NCSE recognises that every student with special educational needs is different, has individual learning needs, and therefore may need an individualised educational response that meets these needs – teachers need to be equipped to support these students.

One example is Deaf/Hard of Hearing students who can think and learn differently to hearing students. Research shows that if teachers communicate well in the language used by their students, this represents “best practice” in Deaf education. The NCSE made a number of recommendations in relation to teacher training and qualifications to ensure that teachers understand how Deaf /Hard of Hearing students think and learn in order to support them in the classroom.

Research on the education of Deaf/Hard of Hearing students shows that access to any language, oral or signed, is vital and will improve their ability to benefit from education. The NCSE has recommended that all Deaf/Hard of Hearing children and their families should be provided with the opportunity to learn sign language from the time of diagnosis. While a scheme currently exists, not all families are aware of and availing of it.

Another example can be students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), some of whom may need help with developing social skills, others with behaviour, and others with learning. Some students with ASD may need help with all of these areas and require a programme based on a number of different interventions. Some students will respond better to certain interventions than others.

The NCSE identified and listed 34 interventions that teachers can draw on, knowing that they are evidence-informed. We have advised that when working with students with ASD, teachers should be trained to know when to use these and other effective teaching methodologies.

The development of a framework of specific professional development programmes to address some of these gaps will be a key part of the development work for the new NCSE support service. Our ability to improve school capacity will be in line with the resources provided to us for the service.

NEPS

Parents of children with more complex needs need advice and support regarding placement options as these may change as a child gets older. All schools need advice in relation to whole school approaches in supporting inclusion. Special classes and special schools require particular support from Educational Psychologists in assessing and meeting the needs of their students.

There are currently 163 educational psychologists. We have recommended the need for additional Psychologists to support and provide advice to schools and we note that under the DEIS Action Plan, the DES is currently recruiting to fill vacancies and additional posts which will bring the full complement to 184 NEPS psychologists

Health-funded Supports

The inconsistent availability of clinical and therapeutic supports including speech and language therapy; occupational therapy; physiotherapy; clinical psychology and psychiatric services is a major concern. The NCSE has supported the roll-out of the HSE's current policy as outlined in the Progressing Disability Services for Children 0-18 (HSE, 2009), but strongly believes children and young people with special educational needs require immediate access to adequate health services, which cannot await this programme's full implementation.

We have recommended that children and young people with special educational needs should be recognised as a key health priority. Pending the full roll-out of the progressing disability services for children 0-18 programme, the HSE should develop a plan that provides adequate clinical and therapeutic supports for children and young people with special educational needs, irrespective of school placement.

SNA Review

It is important to point out that lack of training for Special Needs Assistants has been highlighted by the education partners as a major gap in the current system of supports. At present, the support services provide teacher professional development opportunities.

The NCSE is currently leading a comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme as requested by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, T.D., in 2016. The review is intended to assist the Minister in ensuring that the scheme continues to meet its objectives and that resources are being utilised effectively and efficiently, in line with guidelines.

We are pleased to provide any further assistance to the committee should this be necessary.

Appendix 1: SESS Background and Overview

The aim of the service is to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, with particular reference to special educational provision. Since its establishment, SESS has provided for a range of CPD programmes using a variety of models at national, regional, local, school and individual teacher level, whilst also facilitating accredited pathways to post-graduate qualifications in special education. DES policy, including the development of inclusive practices, the impact of developing legislation and a commitment to developing best practices with strong evidentiary basis, all inform the work of the SESS.

The aims of the SESS are:

- To **enhance the quality of teaching and learning** through the provision of professional development and support for **personnel working with students with special educational needs** in a variety of settings-mainstream primary and post-primary, special schools and special classes.
- To design and deliver a range of **professional development initiatives and supports** for school personnel.
- To **consolidate and co-ordinate** existing professional development and support.

Context

SESS serves over 4,000 schools mainstream primary and post primary, special schools and special classes. The work of the SESS ranges across all areas of special education. It uses a variety of models in its approaches to CPD including:

- Dialogue with Teachers
- School Based Seminar Delivery
- School Visit: Class Teacher
- SESS Designed Courses
- Models / Initiatives - Projects
- On-line Professional Development and Support
- Accredited courses
- Use of External Providers
- Development and Supply of Resource Materials.

SESS remains conscious of the limitations of one-day single presentations in providing CPD for teachers. Whilst some of the work (information giving, conveying knowledge) relies on this model of delivery, many of the other models in use such as in-school support, accreditation pathways and SESS projects adopt a more long-term approach to CPD with a view to embedding change processes in individual schools.

The SESS Team (2016-2017 academic year) comprises:

- 23 full-time and 80 part-time teachers/tutors.

SESS Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

January to December 2016

	Primary	Post Primary	Total
Number of Teachers supported	13,485	5,336	18,821
Number of Training Days Provided	14,572	5,677	20,249

2017/220

37 Mapas Road,
Dalkey.
Co. Dublin.
12th June 2017.

Ms. Fiona O'Loughlin, T.D.,
Chairperson
Joint Committee on Education and Skills
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

Dear Chairperson,

In reply to your invitation, I am happy to attach a brief submission for consideration by your committee in relation to its examination of the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools, including suggesting some reforms.

As my submission indicates, I have been professionally interested in educational disadvantage and social inclusion for over fifty years. I have been a member on a pro bono basis of many government appointed committees and boards – some of which I mention, and I continue in my retirement to offer my experience and expertise for the public good, where I feel I may be able to contribute to the amelioration of educational disadvantage. I have also led projects which received funding from philanthropic sources to provide support for schools and communities in disadvantaged areas, especially in Cork city between 2000 and 2006.

I am familiar with most of the initiatives and projects relating to educational disadvantage which were funded from government and other sources over the years – from early childhood initiatives to those supporting broader access to higher education to community education projects. I am familiar with the academic research on educational disadvantage and with the approach taken in other jurisdictions to overcome the obstacles to inclusion encountered by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I am aware that some government-supported initiatives in Ireland are as good as can be found anywhere in the world. But I am also aware that some interventions have not been successful and I believe strongly that all projects need to be evaluated and reconsidered from time to time.

I would be more than happy to meet your committee and to expand on my submission and / or answer any questions you may wish to ask me.

With best wishes for your ongoing very important work,

Yours sincerely,

Áine Hyland,
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Cork.
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Submission to the Joint Committee of Education and Skills – in relation to its examination of the adequacy of training and supports available to providers of special needs education and education in DEIS schools.

Áine Hyland (ahyland@ucc.ie) June 2017

Áine Hyland's Background (relevant to this submission):

- Civil Servant in the Department of Education, 1959 – 1964.
- Secondary school teacher 1970s.
- Senior lecturer in Carysfort College of Education, 1980 – 1986.
- Senior lecturer in Education, UCD, 1986 – 1993.
- Founder member of Dalkey School Project (first Educate Together school) 1978.
- Professor of Education, University College Cork, 1993 to 2006.
- Chair of the (Statutory) Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2002 – 2005.
- Chair of the NESF Task Force on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion, 2009.
- Director of the Bridging the Gap Project in Cork, 2000 – 2006.
- Member of the (Statutory) Dormant Accounts (Disbursement) Board, 2004-2010.
- Member of the Dept. of Education Special Education Review Committee, 1992-1993.
- Member of the Constitution Review Group, 1996.
- Current member of the board of Tusla, January 2017 to date.

Educational Disadvantage:

I have been interested in educational disadvantage since the mid 1960s, when as a civil servant in the Department of Education, I worked with the *Investment in Education* team to carry out a major fact-finding survey of the Irish education system. The *Investment in Education* report, published in December 1965, identified major areas of educational disadvantage and the report led to the introduction of free second level education and a school transport scheme in September 1967. This was followed shortly afterwards with a comprehensive grant scheme for third level education.

In the fifty years since then, I have continued my interest and involvement in ameliorating educational disadvantage and have remained committed to social inclusion and to an inclusive education system.

I was appointed chair of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC) which was set up in March 2002 under Section 32 of the Education Act (1998) “to advise the Minister for Education and Science on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage”. The committee was to advise the Minister on

- The creation, co-ordination and implementation of new and existing initiatives
- The identification and commissioning of research and evaluation
- In-career development for teachers and other personnel serving the needs of those experiencing educational disadvantage

- The development of interdepartmental and interagency links with a view to ensuring greater cohesion among the initiatives catering for educational disadvantage.

The committee included experts from the formal mainstream education system – early childhood, primary, post-primary, further and higher education – as well as from non-formal youth, adult and community sectors. It also included people with expertise in the areas of research. One of the strengths of the committee lay in the diverse backgrounds and experience of its members. The committee also engaged in wide-ranging debate and consultation and held a public consultation meeting in November 2002, which was attended by 300 people from a wide range of organisations. The Report of the Educational Disadvantage Forum was published in January 2003; and the committee made four separate submissions to the Minister during 2003 and 2004. The final report of the Committee was published in July 2005.

The publication of the 2005 report coincided with the ending of the three year term of office of the committee. In spite of the fact that the Education Act 1998 envisaged that the Educational Disadvantage Committee would be a standing committee, the committee was not re-appointed when its term ended, nor was any subsequent committee appointed. In 2012, when the 1998 Education Act was amended, Section 32 of the 1998 Act was repealed, thereby removing the statutory requirement for an Educational Disadvantage Committee. The reasons for repealing this section of the act have never been clear to me.

As far as I can ascertain, the submissions and reports of the Educational Disadvantage Committee are no longer accessible on the website of the Department of Education and Skills, but the final report, which encapsulates the recommendations of the various submissions is still available on a number of other websites e.g.

http://www.most.ie/webreports/Fatima%20reports/Policy/edc_moving_beyond_educational_disadvantage.pdf.

It would not be possible in the limited space available for this submission to list the recommendations of the 2005 report. However, the vision underpinning the report was of “an inclusive, lifelong learning society in which everyone can achieve their full potential and aspirations without barriers”. The report emphasised that the following principles should inform a national strategy for educational equality to equality:

- A rights-based approach to equality
- Inclusion of diversity
- Integration of strategies, structures and systems
- Coherence of provision
- Focused target-setting and measurement
- Monitoring of outcomes and results.

Throughout the work of the committee, there was considerable emphasis on the need to ensure a more integrated and effective delivery of educational inclusion measures, and a recognition that further work needed to be done to link school-based measures with community initiatives and to bring cohesion to disadvantage initiatives inside and outside the school sector. The report referred to “an unnecessary fragmentation in policy on educational disadvantage and a failure to gain maximum benefit from the various

programmes which have been put in place”. The committee proposed a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions of the approach in Ireland to addressing educational disadvantage and advocated “a comprehensive, holistic approach” to tackling social inclusion. It also recommended systemic and structural changes to give recognition and resources to adult and community education as a distinct and equal sector of the education system. It welcomed the commitment in the then National Development Plan (2000-2006) to “encouraging marginalised communities to help themselves by identifying their own problems and working towards their solution in a planned and integrated way with the agencies of the State”.

Among the recommendations of the committee were the following:

- Service delivery should be person-centred
- Services should be family-oriented
- Interventions should be outcomes-driven and evaluated by outcomes.

In the final section of the report, an integrated national strategy was proposed for achieving educational equality, which it was hoped would result in an inclusive, diverse and dynamic learning society without barriers.

Weeks before the final report of the committee was published, the DEIS scheme (Delivering Educational Inclusion in Schools) was announced in May 2005. Under the DEIS scheme, schools with the highest proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were identified. These schools (about 22% of all schools) would receive additional staffing, resources and support. However, the DEIS scheme made no provision for the more than 50% of pupils from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who attended schools which were not designated disadvantaged. In spite of the fact that senior staff of the Department who drew up the DEIS scheme had attended the meetings of the Committee throughout the three years of its existence, the EDC had no involvement in preparing the DEIS scheme nor was it made aware of the Department’s intention to launch the scheme. While noting that DEIS took some cognisance of its recommendations, the final report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee pointed out that “Schools alone cannot achieve educational equality” and insisted that the debate and the solutions must move beyond school-based education, stating that: “Everyone gains when educational inclusion is achieved as part of a bigger social and economic change agenda. In such a situation there are social, economic and political advances, with improved life chances, opportunity and fulfilment for all”.

In 2009, I chaired the NESF committee on Literacy and Social Inclusion and from 2002, I was a member of the Dormant Accounts (Disbursement) Board until its dissolution in 2012. I also directed a project “Bridging the Gap” in Cork, from 2000 to 2007. This 1 million Euro project which was funded mostly by private donors, aimed to bridge the gap between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more advantaged peers, by supporting schools and communities in disadvantaged areas of Cork city to enhance the educational opportunities available to them.

Some Current Issues:

1. Many positive developments have occurred within the Department of Education since 2005. The Social Inclusion Unit was set up with overall responsibility for issues relating to educational inclusion and in general, there is now greater engagement and a more coherent approach within the DES (including the inspectorate) to supporting educational disadvantage within the school system. However, this cohesion is limited to schooling and not to the broader community and other areas identified in the report of the EDC. The holistic and cross-departmental approach to addressing issues of social inclusion which was recommended by the EDC, if it exists, is not visible.
2. In line with the recommendations of the report of the NESF committee on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion in 2009, a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was prepared by the Department of Education and launched in 2011. This strategy has been effective in improving levels of literacy across the educational sector, although the achievement of pupils in DEIS schools is still somewhat lower than their more advantaged peers. In addition, initial teacher education programmes have been extended by one year for both primary and post-primary teachers. This has enabled more time to be spent on literacy and numeracy training in initial teacher education programmes and on giving greater emphasis to preparing teachers to deal with diversity in their schools, whether this be social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic diversity or children with disabilities. Continuing professional development has also been made available.
3. While the DEIS scheme reduced the fragmentation of provision which was a feature of pre-DEIS support, there is a real risk that the transfer of responsibility to Tusla three years ago for the School Completion Programme (Budget of €25 million), the Home School Community Programme and the National Education and Welfare Board, may exacerbate rather than reduce this fragmentation. It is not clear to me why the decision was taken by government to transfer these three sections of educational support to Tusla in 2014.
4. The DEIS scheme takes no account of the need for additional support for the more than 50% of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not attend DEIS schools. There still seems to be no provision for these pupils.
5. The financial cutbacks which occurred during the recession from 2008 to recent years, impacted disproportionately on disadvantaged communities. The reduction, and in some cases, the withdrawal of funding from community education initiatives, the massive reduction in funding for traveller education, reduction in special educational grants such as back-to-school allowances etc., and the failure to provide increased funding for the education of migrants in line with recent needs are examples of the impact of the recession on educational funding for disadvantaged families. The recent unprecedented level of homelessness among children, and their placement in hotel accommodation, especially in the greater Dublin area, has appalling consequences in terms of the schooling of these children, some of whom have to travel long distances to get to school every day.
6. I have recently become aware that some funding from the Dormant Accounts is allocated to the Department of Education and Skills every year. I suggest that the approach taken by the Dormant Accounts Board from 2002 to 2010 be revisited and

that a more open and transparent approach to the current disbursement of Dormant Accounts money be re-introduced.

7. A major area of concern to me is the very significant numbers of pupils (especially) boys aged 12 to 16, who are excluded from full-time schooling because of suspension and expulsion. Most of these young people are vulnerable young people, and come from disadvantaged homes. Figures given by Minister Katherine Zappone in reply to a Dáil Question in March of this year indicated that more than 13,000 pupils were suspended and 145 expelled in the previous year. These figures do not include pupils who are on a "limited" or "reduced" school day because of their behaviour nor does it include pupils who are not enrolled in any school but are in receipt of home tuition hours because no school will accept them. It is of interest to note that capitation grants to schools are based on enrolments on 1st October every year. As far as I can ascertain, if a pupil is expelled or regularly suspended (which can have the same educational effect as expulsion) after the 1st October, s/he will remain on rolls for a period and the annual capitation grant will be paid in respect of this pupil.

Ironically, some of the schools which have the highest rate of suspensions and exclusions are in receipt of additional funding under the School Completion Programme (SCP), the stated purpose of which is to target and provide supports to young people identified to be most at risk of early school leaving. The current rate of completion of pupils in DEIS schools is 82.7% - the national completion rate is 90.2%. The SCP is due to be revised shortly. It is important that the new strategy should be person-focused, not school-focused. Some of those who most need support, are currently excluded from school and are either in receipt of limited home tuition or are attending informal education classes in ad-hoc centres, which receive little or no state funding and in some cases are unregulated.

8. When a young person fails to get a place in a second level school, or is excluded for behavioural or other problems, the EWB tries to find a place in a school for that young person. However, the EWB cannot require a school to enrol a pupil if a school does not wish to do so, nor does any other organ of the State appear to have the legal power to ensure that a school place is made available. This issue also applies to pupils with special needs who are refused admission by a school or schools.

The Education of Children with Special Needs

There have been considerable improvements in the situation regarding the education of children with special needs since the report of the Special Education Review Committee (of which I was a member) was published in 1993. That report recommended that special schools for such pupils should be the exception and that children with special educational needs should be catered for in mainstream schools as far as possible. This is now government policy and very significant investment has been made to support such pupils, through the provision of resource teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) in schools; the setting up of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE); the provision of a network of SENOs throughout the country and the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service.

Funding for special education provision in 2016 amounted to €1.5 billion, which is the equivalent of 17.6% of the gross current allocation for education and training. There are almost 13,000 SNA posts available to schools and over 12,500 Learning Support and Resource Teaching posts. A new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools will be introduced from Sep. 2017. The new model will allocate teachers to schools on the basis of profiled educational needs of each school.

Special Educational Needs – Current Issues

There are however, still some issues to be addressed. In particular, there is a need to provide appropriate facilities at post-primary level for young people with autism. Some progress has been made in recent years to provide support for children with autism at primary school level, and in areas where new schools (both primary and post-primary) are being provided, it is now departmental policy to ensure that special classes and facilities for pupils with autism and other disabilities are provided. However, in some areas of the country, especially in established areas where there is pressure on school places, no follow-through provision for children with autism is available at post-primary level.

One example is the postal code area of 2, 4, 6, 6W and 8 in south Dublin city where there are a total of 26 second level schools, not one of which has a special class or facilities for children with autism. Atypically from a national perspective, all post primary schools in this area are voluntary secondary schools and 50% of them (13 schools) are fee-paying. A recent survey carried out by a group of parents in this geographical area, identified at least 120 children with autism who are currently receiving support in a primary school (either in a special class or unit or in a mainstream class with an SNA and Resource Teacher support). But at present, there is no post primary provision for these children. They are outside the catchment area of post-primary schools such as Ballinteer Community School or Newpark Comprehensive School, both of which have excellent provision for pupils with autism but both of which are vastly oversubscribed and have waiting lists for pupils even within their own catchment areas.

The parents of children with autism in south Dublin city have initiated a campaign -“2-4-6-8, ASD kids just can't wait” -<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2gRcBW49Uo> to have a special class or classes set up in a secondary school or schools in this area. NCSE have informed them that they (NCSE) have no statutory power to require any school to provide a special class, nor does it appear that any other body (including the DES) has such power. The group has also been informed that it is departmental policy NOT to fund special classes in fee-paying schools, which if true, means that non fee-paying schools are expected to cater for a disproportionate number of children with special needs. In this context, it is no surprise to find that in the league tables published by the national newspapers every year, fee-paying schools top the league in terms of the proportion of their students who go on to third level education. While I understand the reluctance of the Department of Education to provide additional funding to fee-paying schools, the unintended consequences of this policy need to be addressed.

When a young person with autism fails to get a place in a post primary school, they are eligible for some hours per week of home tuition. Anecdotal evidence from parents in this

area indicates that there are already some young people with autism who have failed to get a place in a school and whose only option is Home Tuition. Home Tuition is a totally unsuitable form of education provision for young people with autism who really need to be in an environment where they can develop social skills and learn to interact with their peers.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the provision of in-service training for teachers, especially post-primary teachers, to inform them and help them to cope with and to develop teaching strategies for students with special educational needs. Some limited in-service training is sometimes available for mainstream primary teachers but is almost never available for post-primary teachers. While Resource and Special needs teachers play a crucial role in the education of pupils with special needs, mainstream subject teachers in post primary schools also need special training. Traditionally, in-service training provided by the DES for second level teachers has tended to focus on syllabus change i.e on subject content and methodology. There is a need for the DES to provide in-service training and support for second-level teachers to ensure that they have the expertise to cater for the more diverse cohort of students which they will encounter as a result of the mainstreaming of children with special educational needs.

I will be very happy to elaborate further on the above points at an oral hearing, if this is deemed helpful.

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SCOIL NA NAOMH UILIG, RICKARDSTOWN, NEWBRIDGE, CO. KILDARE

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE OIREACHTAS IN RELATION TO
THE ADEQUACY OF TRAINING AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO PROVIDERS
OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION AND EDUCATION IN DEIS SCHOOL,
INCLUDING SUGGESTING ANY REFORMS.**

20-06-2017

Background Information

Scoil na Naomh Uilig is located at Rickardstown, Newbridge, Co. Kildare. It is a fully-inclusive school and operates proudly under the Catholic ethos. We have 21 mainstream and 5 special classes with an enrolment of 566 from 31 different ethnic backgrounds. Children of all abilities, including children with severe/profound and moderate general learning disabilities, children with A.S.D, as well as gifted children are all valued members of the school community. Children from the A.S.D. units and the Severe and Profound units are integrated wherever possible into their age-equivalent mainstream classroom and reverse integration also proves very productive. The work of the school is underpinned by the school motto ‘Uile le Chéile’ – meaning ‘all together.’

Scoil na Naomh Uilig was established to answer to the need for primary school places in 2017 as a model of inclusive education initially, with the support of KARE, a local voluntary organisation, while Departments of Health and Education were developing the model. (eg the Educational Support Services were being developed and Beechpark services was set up to look after the clinical needs of children who had a mild GLD and autism). Scoil na Naomh Uilig set up a best practice committee to plan our development, with input and support from a number of agencies.

Michael Shevlin (Former Head, School of Education, Trinity College, and senior lecturer in Inclusive Education) was asked to examine our practice and help us adapt best practice from other jurisdictions. (Report attached). We were visited by a number of political figures including John Moloney and Kathleen Lynch, both former Junior ministers for health, Sé Goulding, Marie Byrne etc from the NCSE (Exemplars of Best Practice to Accommodate Inclusivity attached), as well as various groups from within the Irish Education system and ministries of Education overseas. Every year representatives from a number of primary schools visit the school to see how we have developed the inclusive model and we have spoken to a number of BOMs when schools are considering opening an ASD class. However as the downturn developed into a full-blown financial crisis, interest in our model disappeared. Soon we were informed by the NCSE through our SENO that the role of the SNA was not to facilitate inclusion or indeed the pupils’ academic development but health and safety and care needs. As more children with SEN were enrolled in the school, it became increasingly difficult to get clinical support for them.

Our school is now 10 years old and we are in a good position to reflect on the adequacy of training and resources for special needs education. Our young staff is highly competent and works very hard to provide each individual child with the opportunity to develop to their full potential, academically, socially and spiritually.

However are our considered observations and recommendations:

1.0 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:

1.1 Building

The Scoil na Naomh Uilig building is the envy of all our neighbouring schools with its excellent facilities for meeting the needs of all our pupils. We have a number of multi-sensory rooms dotted around the building and some of the special classes are considerably larger than the mainstream classrooms. Because the building was planned to facilitate inclusive education, all rooms are wheelchair accessible. However the mainstream rooms become very crowded when wheelchair users join the class, meaning the children can only be accommodated at the back of the classroom. Reverse integration is easier to manage and also very beneficial.

Solution: All schools should be planned for universal access and to enable inclusive education from the outset. Retro fitting of schools is much more expensive than providing a building fit for purpose from the start.

1.2 Equipment:

Many of the children require very specialized equipment which gives rise to many issues:

- Storage facilities for equipment: typically a child with severe/profound SEN have 3 additional pieces of equipment eg. standing frame, activity chair, Acheeva(long stretcher like-bed on wheels). Currently we use a resource room to store these which means that this room is out of commission in the school.
- There is no follow on plan for the recycling or re-modelling of this equipment when the child outgrows it. Each piece costs up to €3/4,000.00 as it is customised individually for the child. We already have 2 storage areas full of this type of used equipment.

Solution: There needs to be a clear pathway for this equipment to be collected, sanitised and adapted for use by another.

2.0 Provision of places for children with a diagnosed SEN

2.1 Places for children with SEN both at Infant level and when they are transitioning to secondary school.

These processes cause parents huge angst over a prolonged period. The responsibility is put on parents to find a place for their child in an appropriate school. At times, having spent months traipsing from one school to another trying to find a place, they end up retaining children in Preschool or Primary school for a year longer than is appropriate or home schooling their child for up to two years. For example, we organised a meeting for Principals of secondary schools to visit our special classes 7

years ago to alert them to the inclusive nature of the school and to the fact that the children would need secondary places in due course. Because there was no follow up on the issue, there has not been any planning for these children and now their situation has become an emotive source of anxiety for their parents.

Solution: The Department of Education and Skills needs to adopt a proactive approach to providing places for children with SEN, as soon as they are aware of them. An emphasis should be placed on transition planning between the different levels of education. It is not good enough to leave it to parents to search for and to spearhead campaigns to find places for their children. It is their constitutional right to have an education and the DES needs to provide a clear pathway for parents to find the most suitable place for their child.

3.0 Clinical support

3.1 Nursing

Our nurse was initially employed through KARE to deal with the complex medical needs of 3 children. An application (enclosed) was made to the Junior Minister for Health to have this position financed and ring-fenced but it never happened. 10 years later her workload has increased significantly, she looks after the complex medical needs of 9 children (10 next year) and her paid working hours have been reduced. We believe that this is a much higher ratio than is the norm in Special schools.

Additionally, there is currently no provision for nursing cover for breaks, or sub cover when needed at short notice. The Board of Management is presently exploring how to find the means to pay her adequately for the extra hours she works because of the demands placed on her due to the increased caseload.

Solution: The DES needs to fund nursing cover for children with complex medical needs so that their constitutional right to an education can be realised. Provision needs to be made for substitute cover when required. The nursing duties need to be defined and provision made for adequate cover to be put in place. This needs to be standardised throughout all schools and should be on par with the nurse:pupil ratio in Special Schools.

3.2 Clinical Assessment and Support

There are currently long waiting lists for assessments of up to 18 months. Under the assessment of need process the government had guaranteed that these would be done within 6 months of initial referral.

Pupils are also on waiting lists for speech and language and occupational therapies for up to 18 months and those who can afford it will often resort to accessing this privately. This creates a huge inequality of access.

Solution: More clinicians need to be employed through the HSE and NDT to allow waiting lists to be reduced. Maternity leave needs to be covered.

4.0 Challenging Behaviour

The DES must provide guidelines and directions on restrictive practice in schools. Every school, at some stage, has children who abscond or who present with severely challenging behaviour inc. hitting, kicking, spitting, throwing rocks/ equipment, damaging property, trying to injure other pupils etc. In these instances the child has to be restrained to preserve the safety of all present. The extent of the advice currently from the DES is to investigate the cause of the behaviour and put a behaviour plan in place. At present there are no guidelines on restrictive practises and schools have to come up with their own policies and also arrange for “suitable” training on this. It is costing our BOM €3,000.00 to train 30 people and this has to be drawn from the school’s own funds.

Solution: Guidelines from the DES on restrictive practice in schools need to be published. Funding must be made available for specialised training in the area.

5.0 Training

5.1 Training is currently only provided for teachers when they are already teaching in a special class. This means that teachers have to access training in Term 1 of the new school year which is very disruptive for children, in terms of having a substitute teacher in their room. Late training in certain aspects of SEN result in teachers trying to implement new approaches/programmes in the middle of a year or waiting until a new term or year starts;

Solution: Before starting in a class for children with SEN, teachers should be enabled to access a set preparation course in Term 3 of the previous year.

5.2 The courses that are provided are often very short and give a mere overview of the topic in question;

Solution: More in-depth courses of greater duration ought to be provided;

5.3 At present the course on challenging behaviours is open to teachers of children with mild ASD in a mainstream room and teachers of children with severe ASD and an intellectual disability in a SEN room. Teachers often attend courses exploring approaches that are totally inappropriate for their setting;

Solution: Courses ought to be made more specific to those in particular settings;

5.4 Whole-school training days for SEN are not provided. Too often only a few members of staff are trained in a specific programme which limits the effectiveness of its use in the school as a whole;

Solution: More whole-staff training days (one or two per year) ought to be provided so that a whole-school approach can be adopted. We applied in April 2009 for a day’s

closure to facilitate training on a number of below mentioned courses and were refused;

The following courses are essential and should be provided to whole staffs: LÁMH, PECS, TEACCH, CPI or equivalent, manual handling, First Aid.

5.5 Education centres are providing training at present but very often this is in a teacher's own time;

Solution: More substitute cover ought to be provided to allow teachers to go on courses during school time;

5.6 Many training courses for SEN programmes require a school to buy resources at costs that are not feasible for schools.

Solution: Annual funding for SEN rooms in the form of capitation needs to be increased or materials relevant to courses should be provided to those attending to make the course worthwhile.

5.7 No training in how to manage SNA staff. In our special classes we have three SNAs working under the direction and supervision of a teacher. A whole different skill set required and no training provided for this.

Solution: Workshops should be provided for class teams including teacher and SNA in this case. The SESS or Education Centres should provide this training.

6.0 Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Qualification

6.1 Junior Certificate is the current minimum qualification for SNAs. This lack of training and qualification can hinder a SNAs ability to engage with the complexities of the job on many levels.

Solution: A minimum qualification in childcare and special educational needs at FETAC Level 6 or higher.

7.0 Training and supports for DEIS

7.1 I am not in a position to reflect on this as Scoil na Naomh Uilig is not included in this initiative, even though we have a large proportion of children with significant social needs in our school. In fact we are the only Catholic school in Newbridge which does not have access to Schools Completion Programme. The majority of our children progress onto Newbridge Community College, which is in receipt of the DEIS supports and training.

Based on the 2014 DEIS survey of the children in 3rd class, 33% of their parents were identified as being unemployed and 52% on a medical card. With a projected population of 650 pupils in 2 years, 33% of this is 214 children and 52% is 338 children. If these children were enrolled in a smaller school it would be granted DEIS band 1 status and **all** the staff would have access to substituted training of the very

highest quality for literacy (Lift off, Reading Recovery, First Steps etc), numeracy (Maths Recovery, Mata sa Rang, Ready Set Go Maths etc) and SPHE (Friends First/Friends for Life, Incredible Years etc) programmes. They also would have a full time Home School Community Liaison Officer, breakfast clubs, homework clubs as well as more financial aid to the school to buy necessary resources.

All of DEIS support is granted, based solely on the socio-economic background of the child and ethnicity. Complex special educational needs need to be central to the process of allocating DEIS status to schools. We have as much need for all of the above supports under the categories including social and emotional needs, behavioural needs and the high number of children with a diagnosed learning disability.

Solution: DEIS status criteria needs to be reviewed to take account of all of these factors. It is a huge injustice to the children and staff of Scoil na Naomh Uilig that we do not have access to any of this due to a very simplistic approach to its provision. Surely some kind of sliding scale can be used to roll out the benefits of DEIS to all who need it.

Review Report
Scoil Naomh Uilig Inclusion programme
27 February 2009

This brief overview report on the Scoil Naomh Uilig Inclusion programme is based on knowledge gained through my teaching and research in the area of creating inclusive learning environments for children and young people who have special educational needs.

I was invited by the school and the Kare organisation to meet and discuss the progress to date in developing an inclusive learning environment for three children who have a severe/profound level of intellectual disability. A range of staff attended this meeting including teachers of the special classes, classroom teachers, the school principal, the Acting CEO of Kare and the Chairperson of the Board of Management. This meeting was a valuable introduction to the school and the thinking informing the inclusion programme. In addition, I visited the classroom assigned to the three children and observed some curricular work. I was also supplied with documentation concerning the inclusion programme. Based on the school visit and the documentation supplied I believe I can make some initial observations about the inclusion programme. This programme can only happen with the cooperation and collaboration of the teachers, SNA's and Nurse all of whom have their own vital role to play in its implementation.

It is clearly evident that inclusive thinking permeates all aspects of school provision in relation to children who have special educational needs. While the inclusion process is rooted in a whole school approach there is considerable evidence of leadership and vision as articulated by the principal, the chairperson of the Board of management and the Acting CEO of Kare. This vision for inclusive practice is apparent in the development of structures within the school to support the active participation of the three children of concern in the life of the school. The school has managed to establish a coherent form of support that involves all members of the school community in facilitating the inclusion process. This has been achieved through considerable advance and ongoing planning and consultation with all the stakeholders in the inclusion programme.

The advance and ongoing planning involving the whole school has taken place at a number of levels including:

Structural:

- Regular discussion at staff meetings and Board of Management meetings
- Pairing of special class with Senior Infants class

- Reverse integration in classes
- Setting up Best Practice group to plan, review inclusion research and recommend appropriate interventions

Collaboration:

- Classroom teacher/special class teacher in planning for inclusive lessons
- Aligning curricular inputs to support social inclusion:
- Playground games in Physical Education to enable participation in playground interaction
- Focus on 'Me' strand of SPHE (everyone is different)
- Clinical supports (Kare) to enable curricular access rather than stand alone discrete interventions
- IEP (special class pupil) linked into mainstream class activities when reverse integration occurs

Fostering positive teacher attitudes:

- Teachers modelling positive behaviour towards children of concern
- Greeting by name on corridors

Parental response:

- Very positive and the initial fears of one parent that her child could experience bullying have proved groundless.

I believe that Scoil Naomh Uilig has made considerable progress in developing an inclusion policy that is grounded in the practical realities that schools face and has also managed to incorporate a vision for inclusion that attempts to include all children and all teachers. It is clear that the school staff support this initiative and the school leaders in collaboration with Kare have demonstrated a considerable commitment to developing an inclusive learning environment.

In conclusion, I am aware that the ongoing inclusion of these three children who have severe/profound intellectual disability depends on many factors most particularly the provision of full time nursing care to enable these children to participate actively in school life. I cannot emphasise enough the critical nature of nursing support and with this guaranteed I have no doubt that the school will continue to develop and enhance inclusive provision. My initial remit was to review school provision and recommend appropriate models of inclusion, however, it has become very evident that Scoil Naomh Uilig in collaboration with Kare has developed a vibrant, exciting inclusion model that should be replicated throughout Ireland.

Dr. Michael Shevlin

(Head, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin and Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education).

Founded 1967 Promoting Inclusion for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Newbridge Industrial Estate
Newbridge
Co. Kildare

5th November, 2008

Mr. John Moloney T.D.,
Minister of State at Health & Children
Department of Health & Children,
Hawkin's House,
Hawkin's Street,
DUBLIN 2.

Re: Scoil na Naomh Uilig.

Dear John,

Further to our meeting in Scoil na Naomh Uilig, Station Road, Newbridge on Tuesday, I would like to confirm KARE's position in relation to the Inclusive Education Project in this school.

As you know, the project came about as a result of discussions between representatives of St Anne's School and the Department of Education. Following these discussions an approach was made to the Parish of Newbridge, who were also pursuing a new primary school in the town. The Parish Priest indicated an agreement to pursue the idea of a Parish School that would be inclusive of children with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities and autism. Agreement was reached with the Department of Education & Science that the project would advance on this basis with its full support. St. Anne's School and KARE worked in partnership with the parish to initiate this project.

KARE made a commitment to provide limited clinical services to the first twelve children attending Scoil na Naomh Uilig on the basis that if they were not attending this school, they would be attending St. Anne's Special School where they would receive such services. This service provision is from the already limited clinical services available to St. Anne's School and is insufficient to provide comprehensive cover to the children.

In the allocation of the therapy posts provided for in the 2008/2009 budget, an allocation to Scoil na Naomh Uilig would be most beneficial in the interest of further development of this innovative and unique project. KARE will do whatever is necessary to provide this service if posts become available.

2.

In relation to the nursing cover for the school, and as discussed at the meeting, a recommendation was received from the Minister for Health & Children, Mary Harney in January, 2008 that KARE should request an additional allocation from the HSE for a nursing post in New Developments of 2008. This request was made but the allocation was not received from the HSE, who have confirmed that they are not in a position to provide this allocation in 2008 and would give consideration to it in 2009 but with competing demands, it was not possible to confirm its provision.

In the meantime, KARE have been funding the provision of a nurse from voluntary funds to Scoil na Naomh Uilig who are not in a position to make this appointment. KARE are struggling financially to “break-even” in 2008 and will sustain at least a 1% cut to our budget in 2009 and therefore, will be unable to continue funding this post after the end of this year.

As I explained to you, this is a highly and innovative and extremely successful project and its continuance and development is dependent on the provision of a nurse, as these children with significant disabilities will be unable to attend school if a nurse is not present on the premises.

I would like to thank you for your attention to this matter and understand that you appreciate the significance of this project and the importance of the provision of a nurse and additional therapy services to this school. I look forward to continuing to work with you on this matter.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Coffey
A/Chief Executive Officer