NCSE
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

Project IRIS – Inclusive Research in Irish Schools

A longitudinal study of the experiences of and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in Irish Schools

Richard Rose, Michael Shevlin, Eileen Winter and Paul O'Raw

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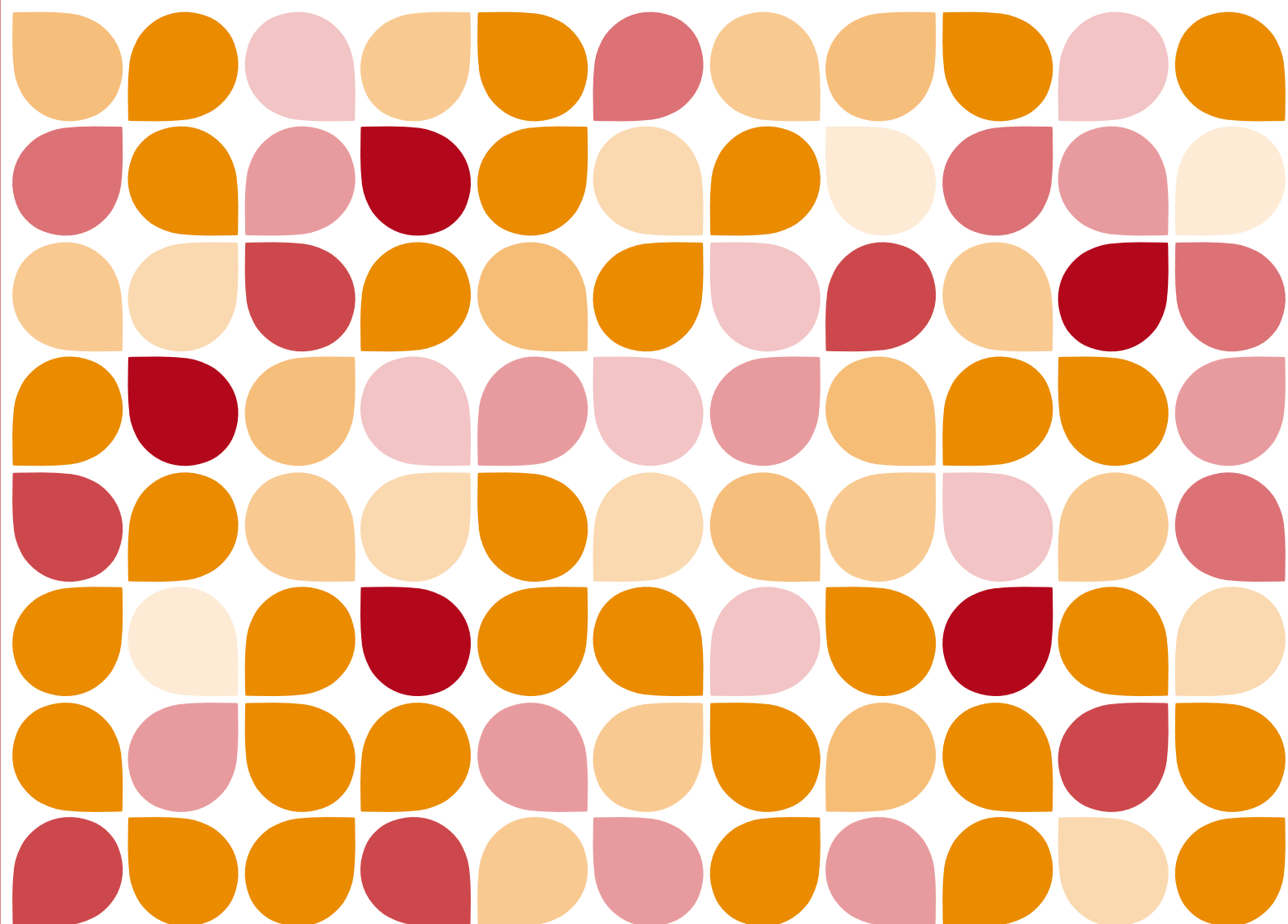
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Foreword – Project IRIS

The experiences of, and outcomes achieved by students with special educational need can help guide future policy advice on the education that should be provided to such students. This report "Project IRIS" looks at these experiences and outcomes and is the largest research study commissioned by the NCSE to date. It involved over 150 students and their parents and school staff in 24 mainstream and special schools around the country over a three year period.

The researchers reviewed school policies, provision and practices, and the experiences of and outcomes for the pupils and their parents in the study. The study shows that Irish schools were generally providing an inclusive learning environment for children with special educational needs and that substantial progress had been made in recent years. In particular, the research notes that the strong learning support and resource teacher network ensured that most pupils with special educational needs received high levels of support.

The researchers concluded that there was significant positive progress achieved by students in their education as well as in areas of happiness, engagement and independence. It is encouraging that the majority of parents in the study were satisfied with the academic and social experiences of their children.

The authors note that progress made by some students with special needs was often not measured or was measured in ways that were not appropriate for students with special educational needs. The report identifies the need to develop ways to measure and recognise progress made for students with special educational needs.

The study also highlighted other shortcomings in the system such as difficulties in accessing timely assessments in order to avail of resources; limited and inconsistent access to therapeutic supports; the need for greater levels of teacher knowledge and expertise and inconsistent development and application of individual plans.

The findings in this report will interest those working in schools, parents of children with special educational needs and others working in education.

Teresa Griffin
Chief Executive Officer

October 2015

Acknowledgments

Key Words

Inclusive education; Ireland; pupil experiences; pupils outcomes; school provision; special education; special needs policy; transition; pupil voice; parental involvement.

Abstract

This report describes a longitudinal study of special and inclusive education in Ireland. Data were collected from a national survey and field visits to primary, post primary and special schools across the country. Illustrative case studies were developed to provide a picture of the influences of policy and provision on the experiences and outcomes for pupils with a diverse range of needs and abilities. The research suggests a commitment to supporting the development of inclusive education provision in schools. Examples were seen of innovative teaching and the development of support systems that enable pupils to access academic and social learning. Parents and schools were seen to experience difficulties in accessing psychological assessments to secure appropriate provision for children with special educational needs. Teacher confidence in addressing a range of SEN is variable and expertise in this area often resides with specialist teachers rather than across a whole teaching staff. For many pupils, access to therapeutic services is limited and others have difficulties availing of assistive technology. Many pupils with special educational needs make good progress through their schooling though their academic attainment is often less than that of their peers. In general, they enjoy school and are well supported in their transition from primary to post primary education.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – symptoms include inattention, difficulties with sustained attention, difficulties in organisation, difficulties in following directions, forgetfulness, as well as hyperactive symptoms including fidgeting and impulsivity.
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder – autism affects development in areas of social interaction and communication. Autism is described as a 'spectrum' disorder. This means its symptoms and characteristics can present in a wide variety of combinations and can range from mild to severe.
CD	Conduct Disorder – Conduct disorder is a common childhood psychiatric problem that has an increased incidence in adolescence. The primary diagnostic features of conduct disorder include aggression, theft, vandalism, violations of rules and/or lying. For a diagnosis, these behaviors must occur for at least a six-month period. The differential diagnosis of conduct disorder includes oppositional defiant disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mood disorder and intermittent explosive disorder. Russell Searight, H., Rottnek, F. and Abby, S. (2001). Am Fam Physician. 63(8):1579-1589.
CPD	Continuous professional development.
DD	Developmental Disorder – One of several disorders that interrupt normal development in childhood. They may affect a single area of development (specific developmental disorders) or several (pervasive developmental disorders). (www.medicinenet.com, July 2015)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – the DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support, in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.
DES	Department of Education and Skills (previously Science).
DS	Down Syndrome – Down syndrome is a genetic disorder caused when abnormal cell division results in extra genetic material from chromosome 21. This genetic disorder, which varies in severity, causes lifelong intellectual disability and developmental delays, and in some people it causes health problems. Down syndrome is the most common genetic chromosomal disorder and cause of learning disabilities in children. (www.mayoclinic.org).
Dyslexia	A learning disability usually manifested in reading and spelling difficulty. Its origin is assumed to be neurological.
Dyspraxia	Students diagnosed with dyspraxia have difficulty acquiring the movement skills expected in everyday life and are often referred to as 'clumsy'. Their difficulties are explicable in terms of a generalised delay in development. They may have difficulty co-ordinating their movements, perceptions and thoughts and exhibit difficulty with everyday tasks such as buttoning shirts and using a knife and fork and may confuse left and right. Dyspraxia can also affect speech production, making the child's speech difficult to comprehend.

Acronym	Description
EBD	Emotional Behavioural Disturbance – Being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school (NCSE Annual Report, 2014, p. 60).
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act.
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council.
GAM	General allocation model – within the Irish education system it provides additional teaching resources to assist schools in making appropriate provision for pupils eligible for learning-support teaching, those with mild speech and language difficulties or with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD and pupils with special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities.
HI	Hearing impairment – in the Irish context, the DES defines hearing impairment as a hearing disability so serious as to impair significantly [a pupil's] capacity to hear and understand human speech, thus preventing them from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction.
HSE	Health Service Executive – provides Ireland's public health services, including speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy in hospitals and communities across the country.
ICT	Information and communication technologies.
IEP	Individual education plan – a written document prepared for a named student which specifies his/her learning goals to be achieved over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve them.
Lámh	A manual sign system for children and adults in Ireland with special educational and communication needs in Ireland.
LCA	Leaving Certificate (applied) – a distinct, self-contained two-year programme to prepare students for adult and working life.
Mild GLD	Mild general learning disability – defined by DES as significantly below-average general intellectual functioning reflected in a slow rate of maturation, reduced learning capacity and inadequate social adjustment.
Moderate GLD	Moderate general learning disability – defined by DES for the purposes of resource allocation as a disability likely to display significant delay in reaching developmental milestones. Students may have impaired development and learning ability in basic literacy and numeracy, language and communication, mobility and leisure skills, motor co-ordination and social and personal development.
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service – provides support and expertise to partner post primary schools on issues related to behaviour.

Acronym	Description
NCSE	National Council for Special Education – was set up in 2003 to improve delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities, with particular emphasis on children.
NDA	National Disability Authority.
NEPS	National Educational Psychology Service is designated to work with others to support the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard for children with special educational needs.
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) usually begins in adolescence or young adulthood and is characterized by recurrent intense obsessions and/ or compulsions that cause severe discomfort and interfere with day-to-day functioning. In OCD, the obsessions or compulsions cause significant anxiety or distress, or they interfere with the child's normal routine, academic functioning, social activities, or relationships. (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry; www.aacap.org).
PD	Physical disability – defined by DES as 'permanent or protracted disabilities arising from conditions such as congenital deformities, spina bifida, dyspraxia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones or severe accidental injury. Because of the impairment of their physical function, [such students] require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities. Many require the use of a wheelchair, a mobility or seating aid or other technological support. They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation; as for example, in the case of severe dyspraxia for resource allocation purposes.'
PECS	Picture Exchange Communication System – is a form of augmentative and alternative communication often used as an aid in communication for children with special educational needs.
SEBD	Severe Emotional Behavioural Disturbance – Children with severe EBD must be in the care of a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist for a severe clinical disorder. A very small number of students would be expected to fall within this category. (NCSE Annual Report, 2014, p. 61).
SEN	Special educational needs.
SENO	Special educational needs organiser are the local contact points for parents of children with disabilities. Their role is to assist parents in securing education services for their children in their journey through the education system. SENOs work with all stakeholders, including children, parents, schools and the health services within a particular geographical area.

Acronym	Description
SESS	Special Education Support Service – its role is to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in special educational provision. 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 classes.
SLD	Specific Learning Disability – Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as: being of average intelligence or higher; having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the second percentile on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests. (NCSE Annual Report, 2014, p.60).
SNA	Special needs assistants act in a care and support role under the guidance and supervision of the principal and/or class teacher.
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.
SSLD	Specific Speech and Language Disorder – Such pupils should meet each of the following criteria: non-verbal or performance ability that must be within the average range or above, that is, non-verbal or performance IQ of 90 or above; assessed by a speech and language therapist and found to be at two or more standard deviations (SD) below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level (– 2 SD or below, or below a standard score of 70) in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development. (NCSE Annual Report, 2014, p.62).
VI	Visual impairment – defined by DES as 'a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly [students'] capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from such conditions, such as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa.'

Executive Summary

Research Aims

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned this research to provide an understanding of how inclusive education policy is being implemented and how school provision is addressing the special educational needs of pupils. In addition this longitudinal study over a three-year period investigated the experiences of pupils and parents receiving special education and the learning outcomes of pupils. The key research questions consisted of:

1. What are the educational experiences of pupils/students with a variety of special educational needs in the classroom in different cycles of education and school type?
2. How do school policies and practices affect this experience?
3. How is the curriculum applied and delivered to these pupils/students?
4. How does the school use special educational resources and other support services to provide an inclusive education?
5. How are individual education plans developed and applied?
6. How does the school interact and coordinate with other stakeholders and the community in the delivery of education, for example health professionals?
7. What are the outcomes (including formal and informal outcomes) and associated benefits and drawbacks for the pupil/student from their educational experience?

Background

Within Ireland the development of provision for students with special educational needs in common with other European and international administrations has tried to address issues of equity and equal opportunity by embracing a more inclusive education philosophy. In recent years a government agency, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) with specific responsibilities for the welfare of children with disabilities in Ireland, has provided significant policy advice to the Minister for Education on addressing the needs of these children. It has administered substantial resources dedicated to creating an infrastructure to support the education of such children and young people at national and school level.

Internationally and within Ireland an increased emphasis on providing demonstrable outcomes in education for all children and young people including those with special educational needs has been seen as a priority (OECD, 2011; NCSE, 2012, Quin, 2005). Information from such research has been used to shape policy and provision in many countries and it is therefore appropriate that a review be conducted of how SEN provision has been conceptualised and delivered over an extended period of time in Ireland. Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools) comprised a longitudinal research study spanning three years. It investigated how special education was provided within a range of primary, post primary and special schools. In particular, this study focused on how support was structured and delivered within schools and how the target students and their families experienced this support.

Method

A review of Irish and international literature was conducted to inform the development of research instruments and to provide an overview of SEN provision. A detailed thematic analysis of the literature helped shape questions for a national survey and for interviews conducted with service users and providers in case study schools.

An electronic survey of a representative sample of schools gathered data from schools in all phases across the country in 2011. The quantitative data from this survey was subjected to statistical analysis to develop a picture of services provision across Ireland. The qualitative data was further interrogated to provide insights into school responses to current policy initiatives, including the EPSEN Act, 2004 and NCSE guidelines.

Focus groups were conducted with service providers and support groups, including school principals, psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), providers of teacher training and disability groups. These findings helped the research team to refine research instruments before visiting case study schools.

Case studies were developed in ten primary, ten post primary and four special schools. A stratified sampling procedure identified these to ensure a wide variety of school types, geographical location and school size was achieved. Each case study school was visited twice by two or more researchers. There was a minimum of one year between visits to gain a picture of developments over that period. First visits to schools were made between September 2011 and March 2012 with follow-up visits 12 to 14 months later. Pupils identified in each of these schools provided a hub around which interviews were conducted with all professional personnel and parents. A total of 158 pupils formed the case study sample, comprising 77 primary, 56 post primary and 25 special school pupils. During case study school visits interviews were conducted with school staff, parents, pupils and other service providers, including those from the Health Service Executive (HSE). Observations were made of children working in classroom and withdrawn situations and also during social activities during the school day. A scrutiny of school documentation including policy documents, individual education plans (IEPs), pupil records and testing and assessment data were made to inform the research team of pupil progress and learning outcomes.

Key Findings

The research findings are reported under four areas: policy, provision, experience and outcomes. They present a mixed picture of the special education system in Ireland. It is evident that the infrastructure to support special education provision has developed over recent years. It is also apparent, however, that serious systemic shortcomings exist. These include issues related to access to appropriate and timely assessments in order to avail of resources, availability of therapeutic support, and failure to fully implement the EPSEN Act with implications for the consistent development and application of individual education plans. There is evidence of commitment to inclusive practice within schools, though this is variable and schools are at different stages of development in this process.

School Policy

Previous research within an Irish context (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011) indicated that over a fifth of primary schools had not developed SEN policies. Findings from the current study indicated that policy development to provide for pupils with special educational needs and in support of inclusion is variable in primary and post primary schools. The current status of the EPSEN Act, 2004, not yet fully implemented, has resulted in uneven policy development on establishing inclusive schooling. Most schools had SEN policies, though these do not

always indicate how the school is moving towards a more inclusive provision. School admission and enrolment policies acknowledged the need to provide for a diverse learning population, but often contained clauses that enabled schools to limit access for those with complex needs.

Provision

Resource Model

Most schools visited demonstrated a high level of commitment from staff towards pupils with special educational needs. There was evidence that the general allocation model (GAM) and low incidence resourcing had enabled primary schools to establish dedicated SEN teams, though some concerns were expressed on the equity of including pupils with MGLD within the GAM resourcing. Dedicated SEN teams were less evident in post primary schools. Pastoral care teams in the latter were well developed with a high awareness of student needs. Guidance counsellors were particularly valued in these schools for their insights on students with special educational needs.

Assessment

There were shortcomings, however, in the assessment processes which are an important factor in enabling schools to gain appropriate resources for pupils with special educational needs. This finding has resonance across many countries including the UK where the Lamb Inquiry (2009) identified issues concerning assessment as the major difficulty parents experience. Within this study the assessment process in order to access resources presented difficulties for parents in two areas: many could not access assessments for their children within a reasonable time; inequity in assessments mean those who can afford to pay for a service have an advantage over others who cannot pay and have to wait.

Types of School Supports

(i) Support Teachers

Support provision for pupils is well developed in most schools with resource teachers and learning support teachers providing strong leadership. In some schools SEN support systems are developing though quality and consistency of implementation vary. Withdrawal from class by specialist teachers for individual and/or small group support, identified as the dominant model of intervention in Ireland (Travers *et al*, 2010), remained the model most extensively employed in this study. There were some examples of collaborative planning between support and classroom/subject teachers and team teaching in the classroom was gradually emerging, a finding also reported in the Irish context by Farrell and O'Neill (2012).

(ii) Special Needs Assistants

The role of special needs assistants (SNAs) has been a source of ongoing debate as DES stipulations clearly define their role as meeting the care needs of pupils with disabilities/special educational needs. Researchers have observed, however, that the SNA role also includes curriculum interventions and support for teaching (Logan, 2006, Rose & O'Neill, 2009). In this study SNA support was highly valued by parents, teachers and often the pupils involved. Enabling curricular access for a minority of pupils with special educational needs was achieved through collaborative planning between SNAs and classroom teachers. Some concerns were expressed about allocation of such staff particularly during transition from primary to post primary schooling. It was also recognised that as pupils get older the type of support required should promote greater independence for them and support may have to be offered discretely.

(iii) Services to Schools

There was little evidence of attempts to evaluate the efficacy of partnerships between Irish schools and external agencies reported in the literature. While Project IRIS identified many positive features of collaboration in this area, there was a shortage of empirical evidence to inform a view of the efficacy of services provided. Pupils and parents reported positive experiences of special educational needs services provided in schools and by other professionals. Where services were available, schools and parents valued the work of HSE professionals, though many parents experienced difficulties in accessing services.

Special schools have established particularly positive working practices with HSE service professionals with whom they have regular contact. Therapists who work in these schools have established effective partnerships with teachers and programmes have been established for individual pupils.

Examples of a range of effective behaviour management approaches were evident, including use of rewards and sanctions and differentiated teaching that took account of pupil interests. They were not seen in all schools, however, and in some instances were inconsistently applied. Where advice and support had been provided by NEPS, NBSS or SESS staff reported that it had a positive impact on behaviour management. Many schools reported to work effectively with charitable organisations and support groups to provide facilities for pupils with special educational needs and their families. These organisations often provide resources and support deemed beyond the reasonable remit of the school.

Schools valued additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs (for example assistive technology) where available, though access to these was not always guaranteed. Schools appreciated the SENO role and in most instances good relationships between the two had resulted in development of effective resource management. However, schools expressed concern about the processes of resource allocation and its continuity. This was particularly an issue during periods of transition from primary to post primary.

Level of Teacher Knowledge/Expertise

The need for increased expertise in schools to respond effectively to the diversity of pupil needs has been extensively promoted (Corbett, 2001, Booth *et al*, 2003, Kinsella & Senior, 2008). This perspective was borne out in this study as many class/subject teachers were uncertain of the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide effective curricular access for pupils/students with special educational needs in their classes. Differentiated instruction is essential in ensuring that this cohort gains curricular access (Broderick *et al*, 2005). Ware *et al* (2011) reported that while teachers used a range of differentiation strategies within an Irish context it was evident these were used by a small number of teachers for a limited amount of classroom instruction. Similarly, in this study there was evidence of differentiation by task and outcome across the phases of education but little indication of wider forms of differentiation to enable greater curricular access to pupils with special educational needs. Many pupils were exempted from Irish lessons and this time was used to provide focused SEN support. There appeared to be little discussion or awareness of the implications of not studying Irish for future career prospects, however.

Access to Curriculum and Accreditation

There was a distinctly different emphasis of curriculum in special and mainstream schools. The former put greater emphasis on developing the social aspects of learning. The implementation of the JCSP at junior cycle and the Learning Certificate Applied (LCA) in senior cycle of post primary education was seen to have significant benefits for pupils with special educational needs. Some special, and a few mainstream, schools have explored alternative forms of accreditation (such as ASDAN) to address the needs of students struggling to be accommodated within existing Leaving Certificate programmes.

Individual Education Planning

Individual education plans (IEPs) have been developed in many countries to document and respond to the specific learning needs of individual pupils with special educational needs (Rose, Shevlin, Winter & O'Raw, 2012). Legislation has been enacted to support this process and ensure that IEPs are implemented for these pupils. The section on IEP development in the EPSEN Act, 2004 in Ireland has not been enacted due to economic constraints, however. This research suggests the consequent lack of clarity around IEP status is a source of confusion to schools and that limited data related to the effectiveness of their use exists. Where studies into IEP development in Ireland have been conducted these have been small scale (Nugent, 2002; Ring & Travers 2005) with little attention given to parent/pupil roles in their development and implementation. It was apparent in this study that many schools had developed IEPs but often these provided no opportunities for parents or pupils to engage in either their development or evaluation. Examples were seen of teachers planning to include pupils with special educational needs in lessons along with evidence of an emerging range of differentiation in many schools. Resource and support teachers managed individual learning programmes and those interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of individual pupil needs. Special schools had well developed processes and procedures for IEP management. Teachers knew their pupils' needs and often provided specific approaches such as use of augmentative communication to address these needs. Transitions between primary and post primary phases of education were generally well managed.

Pupil Attainment

Schools visited maintained detailed records on progress and attainment for all pupils. Most primary schools used a battery of tests that afford summative details of pupil performance. In some instances, however, a large number of tests used replicated information not used as part of a formative process. In particular there was little evidence that test results informed specific planning to address the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Post primary schools were significantly less focused on standardised test used and depended more on teacher assessment of individual progress. Both parents and teachers and particularly those working in primary schools, emphasised the importance of social learning for many pupils with special educational needs and some schools have implemented supportive programmes in this area. Special schools were adept at teaching functional academics directly related to achievement of social outcomes.

Continuing Professional Development

Many teachers responding to the survey and also in case study schools, particularly those in support roles, had benefited from professional development in SEN. The Special Education Support Services and higher education providers have developed supportive courses at several levels, including those offering accreditation to teachers and SNAs. Many class/subject teachers believed, however, that they lacked the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide effective curricular access for their pupils with special educational needs. HSE professionals have provided additional training in some special schools and this has increased staff confidence.

Links Between Special and Mainstream Schools

Despite suggestions that a new role in providing outreach support might be achieved for some special schools (Merrigan & Senior, 2011), and the experiences of pupils transferring into such schools have received some attention (Kerins & Day, 2012), discussions on the relationship between mainstream and special schools has received limited attention from Irish researchers. Little interaction between mainstream and special schools was reported during this research, even when they are in close proximity. Sharing good practice in addressing

SEN between both is currently limited in this study. Links between special and mainstream schools were rare and opportunities to share expertise and resources underdeveloped. In addition, some pupils attending special schools were transported a considerable distance and had little contact with peers in their own neighbourhoods.

Experience

Most parents were satisfied with their children's academic and social experiences. Home school interactions in all school types were generally seen as positive. There was a high level of preparation for transition from feeder primary and receiving post primary schools. Parents of transitioning pupils valued contact with the support teachers in receiving schools. Well established peer support systems existed in some post primary schools but this was not consistent. Less positive transitions were characterised by uncertainty about continuing support from primary into post primary schooling. Post school placement was complex for a number of pupils with a lot of responsibility reverting to parents. Pupils were generally satisfied with school professionals' support in their learning. Project findings suggest that for many pupils with special educational needs positive schooling experiences had benefits for both academic and social outcomes. While McCoy and Banks (2012) indicate that a significant number of pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with more complex disabilities, do not enjoy these experiences, this was not confirmed in the case studies constructed for Project IRIS, where most appeared to enjoy schooling and make progress. Primary pupils were positive about their school experiences and were involved in social and extra-curricular activities. Pupils in post primary schools were increasingly aware of the challenges of keeping up with curricular demands.

Outcomes

Measuring Progress

In the Project IRIS study, schools used a series of standardised tests as required by the DES. It was evident, however, that these types of tests were not always appropriate for measuring the academic progress of pupils with special educational needs, a conclusion also reached by Douglas *et al* (2012) in their review of assessment practices. Project IRIS findings reveal variability between and within schools on learning assessment practices and policies and the inconsistent application of assessment practices. Some children with special educational needs were benefiting from having their progress monitored and assessment results informing their IEPs, while others were not. This finding is also reported by Douglas *et al* (2012) in their study of Irish schools. Within Project IRIS assessment of progress for these pupils included academic attainment and curricular engagement, grouped as academic outcomes, and happiness and independence related outcomes, grouped as social outcomes.

Academic Outcomes

In this study, most pupils with special educational needs achieved positive academic outcomes as they progressed through their primary education. As they got older and were presented with more formalised learning tasks, however, they fell behind their peers in attainment. Behaviour difficulties presented a major challenge to attainment of and engagement in learning for primary pupils with special educational needs. Behaviour management approaches adopted by schools were not always consistently applied.

In post primary most pupils made academic progress, though often significantly below that achieved by their peer group. Most of those with special educational needs had a satisfactory school attendance record. Most in the sample had successfully achieved Junior Certificate certification and teachers of those in Leaving Certificate programmes expected them to attain the requisite certification.

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Pupils with ASD and some with EBD continued to have difficulties at post primary schools with behaviour that adversely affected their academic attainment.

Social Outcomes

In the primary years social outcomes appeared to be more positive as children get older though there are persistent difficulties for some, particularly those with a diagnosis of EBD or ASD. Teachers were aware of the importance of achieving social outcomes as well as those related to academic performance and in some instances had put into place support such as buddy systems and mentoring to support pupils at risk. Behaviour and/or communication problems were seen to be a major inhibiting factor in pupil ability to make and maintain relationships. Some, particularly pupils with ASD or EBD, at times became isolated in school. Pupils were generally encouraged to attain an appropriate level of independence but in some instances they were seen to become over dependent on SNA support.

In post primary schools, pupils with ASD and some with EBD continued to have difficulties with social engagement as a result of poor communication skills. For some, the lack of socialisation skills appeared to have had no adverse impact on their happiness in school, with some appearing to prefer their own company and being content on the periphery of peer groups.

School initiated strategies such as peer tutoring had a positive impact on inclusion of pupils in peer relationships. Few instances of formalised approaches to peer tutoring were seen during the study, however.

Pupils who had transferred from mainstream to special schools were seen to have settled well. Their parents expressed satisfaction with the levels of resourcing in the special schools compared to mainstream. This resourcing was seen as a critical factor in enabling pupils to make progress. Poor attendance, often associated with health problems, can impede pupil progress in special schools. These schools were seen to be supportive of frequently absent pupils and in particular tried to put into place processes to aid readmission. These schools considered they were effective in dealing with a wide range of needs and abilities and emphasised pupil pastoral needs. In some instances this had resulted in improved attendance by pupils who had exhibited tendencies towards disaffection and withdrawal. Attendance of those with special educational needs in mainstream was also good in schools visited as part of the research.

Conclusion

The research evidence from Project IRIS indicated that schools generally demonstrated a commitment to providing an inclusive learning environment for children with SEN. The establishment of skilled resource and learning support teachers ensured that most pupils with special educational needs received high levels of support. Communication between schools and parents was generally positive and there were many examples, particularly at primary, of effective home and school liaison. Transition planning between primary and post primary schools for pupils with special educational needs was generally well organised with clear, established pathways for them. This research also revealed significant barriers, however, which if not addressed could undermine the substantial progress achieved over the past 20 years in developing inclusive learning environments. These barriers include: inadequacy of current assessment procedures to access resources; limited access to therapeutic services; insufficient teacher knowledge and expertise; inconsistencies in development and implementation of IEPs; exclusionary clauses in school enrolment policies.

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In primary school years pupils with special educational needs achieved positive outcomes as they progressed through their education, though as they got older and were presented with more formalised learning they fell behind their peers. Social outcomes were more positive as children got older though difficulties persisted for some pupils, particularly those with a diagnosis of EBD or ASD.

As a result of their special educational need some pupils, particularly those with ASD or EBD could at times become isolated in school. In some instances this isolation appeared to cause little anxiety for pupils with ASD, some of whom made good progress in terms of attainment and independence. Although differentiation was inconsistent, where used consistently it appeared to have a positive impact on learning outcomes. A limited range of differentiation approaches was evident in most schools visited. Having friends and sustaining friendships was not necessarily an indicator of happiness with some pupils on the autism spectrum expressing a desire to be on their own. Similarly, there was evidence that some pupils not fully engaged with learning were happy in school and developing appropriate social skills.

Pupils who had transferred from mainstream to special schools were seen to have settled well. For some in special schools, use of augmentative systems of communication was seen to have been beneficial and had enabled pupils to gain confidence and make progress, academically and socially. Poor attendance, often associated with health problems, impeded some pupils' progress. Schools were seen to be supportive of those with long absences and tried to put in place processes to aid readmission. Most pupils with special educational needs made progress in all aspects of their learning in post primary and, in general, they enjoyed schooling and were well engaged with the opportunities provided. Most passed their Junior Certificate examinations mainly at ordinary or foundation level where appropriate.

Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to inform established and emerging policies and support the development of inclusive learning environments as envisaged in Irish legislation and policy. The researchers are aware of and acknowledge the potential of a series of current policy initiatives to address a number of the barriers to the establishment of inclusive learning environments documented in this longitudinal study. Recommendations from this study are designed to be read within the context of these major policy initiatives, more specifically the Working Group (NCSE, 2014) proposals to radically alter the current resource allocation system and the proposed School Admissions Bill (2013) promoting fairer more transparent procedures governing school enrolment. The recommendations are organised to address structural barriers at the systemic level; barriers to access at the level of service providers; school level issues on knowledge and expertise; development of a support infrastructure for professional development of personnel involved in delivery of special educational provision.

On the basis of the evidence from this research it is evident that a number of actions are urgently required to fully establish a coherent response to the needs of pupils with special educational needs in Irish schools, their families and the professionals working in this area. Our recommendations are as follows:

At Systemic Level

The failure to fully implement the EPSEN Act, 2004 despite repeated recommendations from policy makers, researchers and practitioners has resulted in several difficulties for schools, parents, pupils and support services including major problems in obtaining timely and detailed assessments and uneven and inconsistent IEP development.

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In developing inclusive learning environments it is important to be able to assess pupil progress on learning targets and over time. While a battery of test and assessment procedures are used in schools, these are not always suitable for recording academic progress for pupils with special educational needs. National policy makers in pupil assessment need to recognise the particular complexities associated with documenting the progress of pupils with special educational needs and develop appropriate mechanisms to address it. Academic progress for these pupils was evident though usually at a slower pace than their peers and most achieved national certification at junior level in post primary. However, a smaller number with an intellectual disability could not access the curriculum at junior and senior cycle and in some cases alternatives programmes were provided. The development of NFQ Level 2 proposed for the new junior cycle, while welcome, needs to be supplemented with a Level 1 certification to enable all pupils, whatever their SEN, to achieve nationally recognised certification. Senior cycle education for these pupils will also require additional levels of certification.

We therefore recommend that:

- As a matter of urgency the EPSEN Act, 2004 is fully implemented.
- An inclusive assessment approach is adopted at national and school level that measures and reports progress across the breadth of the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs.
- The NCCA should consider developing NFQ Level 1 programmes within the new framework for junior cycle to cater for those pupils who experience major difficulties accessing the current curriculum or lack the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised certification. Follow-on programmes with appropriate certification should also be made available in senior cycle for these pupils.

At School Level and Continuing Professional Development

While policies appeared to be generally supportive of including pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, exclusionary clauses existed which could prevent access. While some schools had highly developed IEPs, few were involving parents or pupils in setting targets, and processes for review were seldom well established. While the NCSE has produced guidelines and SESS has offered training in IEP development and management, lack of clarity on the legal status of IEPS has resulted in an uneven and disjointed approach across the country.

In most schools pupils with special educational needs were withdrawn from class for support in small group or individual sessions. The dominant use of withdrawal has been identified in the literature as a limiting approach to providing effective support. While quality of support provided was often good, pupils sometimes missed out on subject time and opportunities for interaction with their peers.

Strategies for promoting differentiated teaching were seen to be limited in most schools and teachers often reported limited knowledge of specific teaching approaches. Where they had received further professional development in SEN and inclusive teaching they were more adept at providing well differentiated modes of teaching and assessment. While there was evidence of well co-ordinated and consistent approaches to behaviour management in some schools, in many this was not the case.

Special needs assistants demonstrated commitment to the pupils they worked with. Teachers, parents and pupils asserted that they made a significant contribution to their learning. It was also clear that SNAs were undertaking a pedagogical role not envisaged in DES circulars and that joint planning between the SNA and the classroom teacher generally ensured that a pupil's support needs were met. There was also evidence that as children got older SNA support needed to be offered flexibly to respect their need to develop independence skills.

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We therefore recommend that:

- Schools should ensure their enrolment policy reflects an inclusive approach to pupils with special educational needs and that these pupils and their families are not denied access to their chosen school because of the nature of their learning needs.

- Guidance should be provided to schools to enable them to develop effective procedures for informing parents about the availability of support and resources for their children with special educational needs, particularly at critical transition stages. Further guidance should be provided to support these students prepare for leaving school and moving into adult life. Pupils and their teachers and parents need to be informed of the implications of exemption from Irish lessons to future career opportunities.

- A review of the use of withdrawal of pupils from the mainstream classroom as a method of support and its impact upon the learning and socialisation of pupils should be undertaken and alternative approaches such as team teaching promoted and developed.

- Schools should ensure that SNAs are included in the SEN team and enabled to participate in planning to support pupil needs. As children grow older the types of support SNAs offer and mode of delivery need to be kept under constant review.

- A co-ordinated approach to behaviour management which brings current services together to increase school capacity to address the needs of pupils with EBD and some with ASD should be prioritised.

- Further professional development should be structured to ensure that greater numbers of classroom/subject teachers acquire the necessary pedagogical skills and knowledge to enable pupils/students with special educational needs to access the curriculum. As a matter of urgency all members of school SEN teams should be enabled to access appropriate training for this role.

- Focused continuing professional development should be made available to support IEP development and the establishment of differentiated teaching in mainstream schools.

- Demonstration sites are developed where good practice in team teaching is exemplified and opportunities are created to enable this type of practice to be disseminated within the school system.

At the Level of Support to Schools from External Sources

Relationships with support services, including HSE professionals and NEPS, were generally positive and their contribution appreciated by schools and parents. It was also evident that access to these critical professionals could be extremely limited, difficult to obtain and influenced by demographic and geographical variables. The limited availability of therapeutic services combined with restricted access to psychological assessments was having a negative impact on school capacity to respond appropriately to the learning needs and support requirements for pupils with special educational needs.

We therefore recommend that:

- As a matter of urgency a review should be undertaken on enhancing collaboration between education and health services to guarantee accessibility of therapeutic services provided for children with special educational needs and their families. Adequate resources are necessary to ensure the proposals establishing school age interdisciplinary teams (Progressing Disability Services, 2009) can make a significant contribution to establishing an accessible therapeutic service at school level.

- As a matter of urgency procedures for management and delivery of SEN assessments should be reviewed in line with the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group (2014). This should include issues that affect equal opportunities and ensure that all families have access to appropriate and timely assessment procedures.

Internationally, addressing the rights of children to equitable access to education is strongly emphasised and gradually over the last century this commitment has expanded to include children and young people with special educational needs (Richardson & Powell, 2011). In some countries this development has been gradual, building on existing policies and programmes while in others, including Ireland, this has consisted of a period of rapid change. Developing inclusive learning environments has occurred in Ireland against the backdrop of a rapidly changing educational and societal landscape. Since the beginning of the current century Ireland has developed comprehensive policies addressing the needs of children, strategies to implement these policies have been initiated and a government department with specific responsibilities for child welfare has been established. Substantial resources have been dedicated to the creation of an infrastructure to support the education of children and young people with special educational needs at national and school level.

Our understanding of how special educational provision is delivered at school level has substantially improved through increased investment in research, for example. Internationally and nationally the emphasis on providing demonstrable outcomes in education for all children and young people has increased and this also applies to those with special educational needs (OECD, 2011; NCSE, 2012; Quin, 2005). It is timely, therefore to review how special educational provision has been conceptualised and delivered within a selection of Irish schools over an extended period. The current Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools) consists of a longitudinal research study spanning three years examining how special education is provided within a range of Irish primary, post primary and special schools. In particular, it focuses on how support is structured and delivered within schools and how it is experienced by students with special educational needs and their families.

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1   The Irish Education Context

Chapter 1 consists of a brief overview of the Irish education system; a summary of key policies and legislation on special education and inclusion; a review of systemic and school supports for children and young people with special educational needs; and an outline of the research aims and associated questions for this longitudinal study.

1.1   The Irish Education Context

Compulsory schooling extends from age six to 16 and comprises primary and post primary education. Children can be enrolled in infant classes from age four, however, and this option is popular as 40 per cent of four-year-olds and almost all five-year-olds attend infant classes in primary. Early childhood education, apart from infant education in primary, is delivered by a range of private, voluntary and community providers. The primary State-funded education sector consists of religious schools, multi-denominational schools (Educate Together), non-denominational schools (community national schools) and Gaelscoileanna (Irish medium schools). In the academic year 2013-14 there were 3,145 Department of Education recognised schools of which 1,351 had fewer than 100 pupils enrolled (www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics). Apart from the majority of schools which are under the patronage of the Catholic Church other providers include Church of Ireland (n=174); Gaelscoileanna (n=144 outside Gaeltacht areas); and Educate Together (n=68). Primary education comprises an eight-year cycle, including junior and senior infants and first to sixth class with pupils usually transferring to post primary at age 12. Educational provision for children and young people with special educational needs is generally available in special schools (four to 18 years), special classes in mainstream primary and post primary, and in mainstream classes with support.

The post primary education sector encompasses three main types of schools: post primary schools which are privately owned, namely, voluntary secondary schools run by religious bodies (most are State-funded and charge no fees though a small minority are fee paying); vocational schools and community colleges which are managed by the recently established Education and Training Boards (Government of Ireland, 2013); and community and comprehensive schools which are managed by boards of management. In the academic year 2013-14, 723 post primary schools were officially recognised by the Department of Education and distributed as follows among the sectors outlined above: Secondary schools (n=373); Vocational/Community Colleges[1] (n=256); Community and Comprehensive schools (n=94) (www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics). Despite the varying governance structures all schools offer a junior cycle (age 12 to 15) and a two- or three-year senior cycle (age 16 to 18) depending on whether a pupil is offered the optional transition year.

Within the junior cycle phase the Junior Certificate is the main certification. In addition to this, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), established in 1996, supports students deemed to be potential early school leavers. It was not intended as an alternative to the existing Junior Certificate programme but rather an intervention to make the curriculum accessible and relevant to young people at risk of early school leaving. Additional teaching and curricular supports are provided and the programme now operates in over 240 schools throughout the country. The Leaving Certificate (established) is a two-year programme taken in most schools where pupils are examined in six or more subjects including compulsory Irish (unless an exemption is granted); the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme may also be taken over two years and shares many aspects of the Leaving Certificate programme though it aims to enhance the vocational dimension of the Leaving Certificate (established) programme (NCCA, undated); and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme which aims to address the learning needs of pupils not catered for in the other two Leaving Certificate programmes

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[1]   The Education and Training Boards were established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 and have replaced the Vocational Education Committees that were in charge of vocational schools and community colleges.

and those pupils who are at risk of early school leaving. This latter two-year programme is cross curricular rather than subject based, focuses on practical task-centred activities and is designed to prepare pupils for the transition to adult and working life.

1.2   Policy and Legislation

Policy and enabling legislation have been developed by the Department of Education and Skills to support children and young people with special educational needs within the education system. The 1998 Education Act provides the statutory basis for education provision for children of compulsory schooling age and it can be noted that within Section 7 the first function of the Minister is:

> To ensure ... that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person.

The Equal Status Act (2000) supports the thrust of the Education Act in responding to the support needs of children and young people with disabilities/special educational needs. It requires schools to provide reasonable accommodation including special treatment, facilities or adjustments to meet the needs of the child with disability if that child would find it unduly difficult to participate in school without it.

However, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN, 2004) Act represented a milestone in developing an infrastructure to support the education of children and young people with special educational needs (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011). Inclusion is a core principle informing this legislation and this value is explicitly stated in the Preamble to the Act:

> To provide that the education ... shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs.

The ultimate aim of inclusive education is to facilitate full participation in adult life:

> To assist children with special educational needs to leave 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. (Preamble, Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004)

The EPSEN Act, 2004 set out a detailed blueprint to govern delivery of resources to students with special educational needs including an 'emphasis on individualised assessment processes, educational planning and monitoring of student outcomes' (NCSE Working Party, 2014). Due to economic constraints, however, critical elements of the EPSEN Act, 2004 remain to be implemented, including making the development of individual education planning and assessment processes statutory obligations for schools/education authorities and the establishment of a Special Education Appeals Board (SEAB). The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was created by the Minister for Education in 2003 in compliance with Section 54 of the Education Act (1998) and its functions are detailed under Section 20 of the EPSEN Act 2004 and include:

- The planning and co-ordination of education for children with special educational needs and making sure that a continuum of provision is available.
- Directing and authorising research.
- Providing advice for the Minister for Education and Skills on special education.
- Distributing information on special education to stakeholders and interested parties.

- Conferring with voluntary bodies to enable their contribution to the development of policy advice by the NCSE.
- Evaluating the educational provision available for adults with disabilities (further, higher and/or continuing education) and informing educational institutions about best practice in relation to the education of adults with disability (NCSE, 2013).

In addition, the NCSE has explicit tasks in relation to central requirements of the Act such as assessment and individual education plans; however, as pointed out above, these provisions have yet to be commenced. The NCSE employs special education needs organisers (SENO) to support the assessment and resource allocation process in schools. SENOs are organised on a local basis in each county in the Republic of Ireland.

A continuum of provision is available for students with special educational needs ranging from full-time placement in a mainstream class to full-time placement in a special school and a number of options are also available between these two types of placement, including enrolment in a special class within a mainstream school (NCSE, 2013 – see numbers below).

1.3   Delivery of Resources

Over the lifetime of this longitudinal study the system for delivery of resources to support students with special educational needs has undergone changes, including how resources are allocated at post primary level and some reductions in resources made available. Below we have documented the allocation of resources in operation when the study commenced in 2009-10 and we have also provided current allocations where available. More recently, serious concerns have been expressed about the equity of the current resource allocation system in policy advice provided by the NCSE (2013) to the Minister for Education. This has been followed by a Working Party report (2014) which has recommended radical changes to the current system. We have provided a brief overview of the issues raised in the policy advice and the Working Party report. It is not within this study's remit to comment further, as these are only proposals at the moment with further consultation to be undertaken.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the NCSE share responsibility for the allocation of resources to support the education of children and young people with special educational needs. Resources are assigned on the basis of category of disability/special educational need. Fourteen categories of disability/SEN are recognised by the DES for support provision: physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, severe emotional disturbance, moderate general learning disability, severe/profound general learning disability, autistic spectrum disorders, assessed syndrome along with one of the above disabilities, specific speech and language disorder, multiple disabilities, specific learning disability (high incidence), mild general learning disability (high incidence), borderline mild general learning disability (high incidence).

'High incidence' categories, as defined in DES Circulars, refer to those disabilities/SEN occurring with greater frequency in the general population while 'low incidence' categories apply to those occurring less frequently.

The general allocation model (GAM) administered by the DES at primary level supports children and young people in the 'high incidence' categories, children who are at or below the 10th percentile in standardised tests and those with learning difficulties. Several factors determine resource level for each school, including gender, socio-economic disadvantage and school size. In 2012, the allocation process was changed to one based on mainstream classroom teaching posts, with more favourable allocations for all boys' and mixed schools.

Pupils assessed with 'low incidence' disability/SEN must receive a professional assessment which determines their disability/SEN and are allocated individual support hours by the NCSE depending on the category of disability/SEN as outlined in DES Circular Sp Ed (2005) illustrated below. The level of hours per category is the same for primary and post primary. It should be noted that more recently these allocations were reduced by 15 per cent.

Table 1: Support hours provided under the Individual Allocation Model

Low Incidence Disability	Hours of Resource Teaching per week
Physical disability	3
Hearing impairment	4
Visual impairment	3.5
Emotional disturbance	3.5
Severe emotional disturbance	5
Moderate general learning disability	3.5
Severe/profound learning disability	5
Autistic spectrum disorders	5
Specific speech and language disorder	4
Assessed syndrome along with one of the above low incidence disabilities	3-5 (taking into account the pupil's special educational needs including level of general learning disability)
Multiple disabilities	5

Source: Circular Sp Ed 02/05

Until the 2012-13 academic year the resource allocation model for post primary pupils with high incidence disabilities included an individual allocation of hours based on an assessed disability/special educational need. In May 2012, post primary schools were given an allocation for pupils with high incidence disabilities at 95 per cent of the hours allocated the previous December. This removed the need for individual assessments for new students. For post primary students with other learning support needs, a new general allocation of learning support was introduced the same year. Schools are allocated a fixed support teaching resource based on the size of school (under 600 pupils = 0.9 post; 600+ pupils = 1.4 post).

Figures are provided below for the number of children supported through the NCSE. It should be noted, however, that it is not possible to quantify the total number of children receiving support, as those getting resources under the GAM in mainstream primary schools are not quantified and therefore a large number of children are unaccounted for within these figures.

In the 2009-10 school year, about 34,140 pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post primary were allocated additional resource teaching support by the NCSE. Up to 16,600 children were designated with low incidence disabilities in primary in the school year 2009-10 (3.3 per cent of the total primary school population) while about 17,500 pupils were recognised as either low and high incidence special educational needs in post primary (5 per cent of the total post primary school population) (NCSE, 2011). In 2010, about 6,340 children with special educational needs were attending special schools, with an additional 3,000 (estimated) enrolled in special classes of which about 2,630 children were at primary and 369 at post primary levels (NCSE, 2011).

Table 2: Number of pupils with additional teaching supports sanctioned by the NCSE 2009-10

Academic Year: 2009-10	Post Primary	Primary	Total
Assessed syndrome	88	253	341
Autistic spectrum disorders	1,090	2,953	4,043
Borderline mild general learning disability	3,689		3,689
Emotional/behavioural disturbance	2,054	3,730	5,784
Hearing impairment	325	649	974
Mild general learning disability	3,611		3,611
Moderate general learning disability	244	511	755
Multiple disabilities	510	1,429	1,939
Physical disability	1,394	2,757	4,151
Severe emotional/behavioural disturbance	390	726	1,116
Severe/profound general learning disability	31	24	55
Specific learning disability	3,417		3,417
Specific speech and language disorder	493	3,314	3,807
Visual impairment	176	283	459
Total pupils	**17,512**	**16,629**	**34,141**

Source: NCSE 2011

Over the lifetime of this research study, a steady increase has been evident in the numbers of students with special educational needs supported through the NCSE allocation of additional teaching resources. In the 2009-10 academic year about 34,140 students in mainstream primary and post primary schools received additional teaching support whereas in 2012-13 this had risen to over 39,000 students with most recent figures suggesting a further increase to over 42,000 students (NCSE, 2014).

The DES, in consultation with the education partners, conducted a review of the operation of the GAM (2012) which concluded that the broad consensus was that it had succeeded in achieving its key aims. In particular, schools had a certainty of permanent staffing to respond appropriately to the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs. It was also noted that schools had an opportunity through the GAM to develop team approaches and use flexible teaching approaches on both an individual and group basis.

Despite this positive review, however, serious concerns about the equity of the current resource allocation system were beginning to emerge and were encapsulated in the NCSE Policy Advice to the Minister for Education and Skills (NCSE, 2013). Of particular concern was the appropriateness of requiring a diagnosis of disability to determine the level of support required for those with low incidence disabilities. NCSE-commissioned research studies 'suggest the diagnosis of disability should not be the prerequisite determinant for the allocation of additional resources for students with special educational needs. They should instead be based on an assessment of student needs' (NCSE, 2013, p5). It was pointed out that some children with special educational needs are 'unable to access the professional assessments on which resources for low incidence disabilities are based' (NCSE, 2013, p5). In addition, student support needs within a particular category of disability may vary widely; yet the current system allocates the same support level to each

child within the particular disability category regardless of whether they actually need more or less than the allocated support.

Concerns were also expressed about the current GAM system of linking the allocation of learning support posts to the number of class teachers in the school. While this may appear to be a reasonable approach to allocating scarce resources, this system cannot take account of the frequency and complexity of educational need presented in each school and the fact that each school's need for support can differ significantly. The NCSE determined that the 'current support allocation model does not provide all children with equitable access to educational supports' (NCSE, 2013, p5) and recommended to the Minister that a working group should be established to examine this issue.

The working group (2014) confirmed that a new allocation system was required as recommended in the policy advice provided to the Minister (NCSE, 2013). This proposed new system would consist of two major components: school educational profile; and baseline allocation to every mainstream school to support early intervention, prevention of learning difficulties and the establishment of inclusive learning environments. The working group recommended that the educational profile of the school should be based on:

- Numbers of students with complex special educational needs.
- Percentages of students performing below a certain standard on standardised test results.
- Social context of the school including gender, primary school location and educational disadvantage.

(NCSE, 2014, p6)

The working group believes the new proposed model 'is a better and more equitable means of allocating additional resources to schools' (2014, p12) and recommends that adequate time be given for further consultation with stakeholders before its implementation in schools.

1.4   Support within Schools

Additional teaching support in mainstream primary and post primary schools is generally provided by learning support and resource teachers. Over the past 20 years the increase in additional teaching resources allocated to support pupils with special educational needs has been significant. In 1993, 1,309 remedial teachers were allocated to support these pupils whereas in 2012, 9,950 learning support and resource teachers were appointed (NCSE, 2013). DES Circular (02/05) sets out how a school should deploy additional teaching resources in a flexible way 'leading to more effective and efficient delivery of services' (p4).

Special needs assistants (SNAs) are allocated to primary, post primary and special schools to address the care needs of pupils with special educational needs, usually those in the low incidence categories. Schools apply to the local SENO to obtain SNA support for a particular pupil and these applications are considered by the SENO within the parameters of DES policy and school capacity to meet specified care needs. SNA support was allocated to 13,016 pupils (including pupils enrolled in special classes) in primary and post primary schools in the 2009-10 academic year (NCSE, 2011). In the academic year 2012-13 over 23,000 students with special educational needs with significant care needs have access to SNA support, which represents a sizeable increase over a three-year period. However, in the Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme (DES, 2011), concerns were expressed that supporting children with significant care needs – the original purpose for SNA deployment – had been altered in practice in schools. SNA work now included involvement in pedagogical/ teaching roles, behavioural and therapeutic issues and administrative duties (DES, 2011). On foot of these concerns, a recent DES Circular (0030/2014) was issued which clarified and restated the purpose of the SNA scheme which is to 'provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs' (p1).

At primary level the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Guidelines (2007) recommend that schools provide a continuum of support for students with special educational needs. NEPS (2007) describe this Continuum of Support as encompassing '… a graduated problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools comprised of three distinct school-based processes': classroom support; school support; school support plus (p2). This collaborative problem-solving model recognises 'the central role of the class teacher' (p1), supported as necessary by school-based special education personnel and external support agencies. This model is 'underpinned by the recognition that special educational needs occur along a continuum from mild to severe and from transient to long term' (p2) and therefore a school's intervention should be responsive to the student's immediate needs and their changing needs over time. The collaborative problem-solving process is essentially an integrated and circular process addressing the following four questions: What is the problem? Why is it happening? What can we do to help? Did it work?

The classroom support process involves the classroom teacher working with the student and their parents/guardian to provide and monitor response to classroom-based approaches which are additional or different to those of the student's peers. On monitoring responses to such classroom-based interventions it is sometimes agreed that greater support is needed and a school support process is initiated. This involves widening the problem-solving team to include school-based support teaching personnel. More detailed information gathering may be conducted to guide a more intensive support plan which will often involve additional intervention support with a support teacher. A school support plus process will normally be initiated where a student's response to school-based support has been limited and/or a student's needs are complex or severe. The problem-solving process at this level will usually involve professionals from external support agencies (with parental permission) who will share additional specialist expertise with the problem-solving team in further clarifying the problem and developing and monitoring interventions.

Children with particular disabilities and/or special educational needs may require ongoing access to therapeutic services, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, clinical psychology and child and adolescent mental health teams. While there are examples of sustained co-operative practice between health and education professionals (HSE, 2013), serious concerns have been expressed about the uneven nature of provision throughout the country, limited access and long waiting lists (HSE, 2009; NCSE, 2013). The report of the National Group on Multidisciplinary Disability Services for Children aged five to 18 (HSE, 2009) made a series of recommendations to establish a clear pathway to services for all children with a disability living in a locality and ensuring equitable access to services throughout the country. It was also strongly recommended that health service interventions should be based in the school whenever appropriate to meet the child's needs. A network of school age interdisciplinary teams is currently being established with a focus on children who have complex ongoing health needs and require the services of an interdisciplinary team (HSE, 2013).

1.5   Special Classes

Special class placement within mainstream schools forms part of the continuum of educational provision available to students with special educational needs. Special classes enrol students from specific SEN categories as outlined by the DES. These classes are formally established by the NCSE. In 2013, the NCSE published the full list of special classes, indicating nearly 740 special classes in total (www.ncse.ie).

A recent national survey of special class provision undertaken in 2011 (NCSE/ESRI, 2014) looked at the number of formal classes established by the NCSE and informal classes established by schools through the pooling of resource teaching hours. The survey indicated that a considerable number of special classes had been established in primary (n=357) and post primary (n=302) schools at that time, totalling 659 in all. The expansion in numbers of special classes is particularly noteworthy at post primary with over half the classes in this sector established between 2009 and 2011. It is also worth noting that more than half were established informally at post primary, while this figure was less than 10 per cent at primary.

1.6   Special Schools

There are 105 special schools catering for 6,338 pupils with disabilities/SEN and they were traditionally designated for a specific category of disability/SEN within the categories recognised by the DES for support (NCSE, 2011)[2]. Ware *et al* (2009) reported that special schools often cater for a wider range of needs than the school's particular disability/SEN designation. Special schools are not evenly distributed throughout the country and tend to be mainly in the larger urban centres. The special school designation and numbers of pupils in attendance is outlined in Table 3 for the academic year 2009-10 (NCSE, 2011).

Table 3: Special school designation and population profile 2009-10

Official DES Designation	No of Schools	No of Pupils
Physical disability	7	343
Hearing impairment	3	153
Visual impairment	1	44
Emotional/disturbance and/or behavioural problems	12	366
Mild general learning disability	30	2,657
Moderate general learning disability	33	2,140
Severe/profound general learning disability	9	249
Autism/Autistic spectrum disorder	5	141
Specific learning disability	4	173
Multiple disabilities	1	72
Total	**105**	**6,338**

Source: NCSE, 2011

DES Circulars 03/2010 and 38/2010 outline the criteria for appointment of teaching staff and SNA support in special schools and special classes in mainstream schools. Specific pupil-teacher ratios apply depending on the designated disability/SEN category applied to a particular special school (see Table 4).

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[2]   Other special facilities including hospital schools are not included in these figures.

Table 4: Pupil-teacher ratio and SNA allocation in special schools/special classes

Category	Ratio of SNA to Class Group	Pupil-Teacher-Ratio
Physical disability	1:1	10:1
Hearing impairment	1:4	7:1
Visual impairment	1:4	8:1
Emotional disturbance	1:4	8:1
Severe emotional disturbance	1:1	6:1
Mild general learning disability	1:4	11:1
Moderate general learning disability	1:2	8:1
Severe/profound general learning disability	2:1	6:1
Autistic spectrum disorders	2:1	6:1
Specific learning disability	–	9:1
Specific speech and language disorder	1:3	7:1
Multiple disabilities	1:1	6:1

Source: DES Circular 38/10, DES

1.7   Additional Funding

Additional funding is available to support pupils with special educational needs in both mainstream and special schools, including enhanced capitation grants for schools, a transport scheme to enable attendance at school, grants for special equipment and funding for assistive technology to support access to the curriculum. In addition, a home tuition scheme has been established to support pupils with special educational needs who cannot attend school due to illness or who may be awaiting an appropriate educational placement.

1.8   Study Rationale and Outline

Ireland is not unique among OECD countries in facing the challenge of developing inclusive learning environments against the backdrop of rapidly changing educational and societal landscapes. Countries with a well-developed infrastructure to support inclusive education, such as Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000), Australia (Forlin, Chambers, Loreman, Deppeler & Sharma, 2011) and the United Kingdom (Department for Education, 2012), have begun to reassess provision in terms of demonstrable outcomes. Due to recent developments in education policy and legislation, Ireland is at a critical transition point in relation to establishing inclusive educational provision within mainstream schools. Irish policy on inclusion is articulated clearly within many government publications and the EPSEN Act 2004 provides the statutory support for developing highly inclusive educational environments for children with disabilities and/or SEN within Irish schools. The NCSE has amassed substantial evidence on special educational provision within Irish schools and has developed literature reviews on best practice internationally over a range of critical issues affecting its conceptualisation and delivery. In addition, the Minister for Education and Skills has been presented with policy advice on a number of issues.

The current study Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools) was designed to build on the existing Irish research base and provide evidence of how the complex issue of special educational provision is being addressed within an Irish context over an extended period of time. This longitudinal research study spanning three years examined how special education is provided within a range of Irish primary, post primary and special schools. In particular, the study focused on the experiences of pupils/students with special educational needs receiving this education and their associated outcomes.

The key research questions addressed in this study are:

- What are the educational experiences of pupils/students with a variety of special educational needs in the classroom in different cycles of education and school type?
- How do school policies and practices affect this experience?
- How is the curriculum applied and delivered to these pupils/students?
- How does the school use special educational resources and other support services in providing an inclusive education?
- How are individual education plans developed and applied?
- How does the school interact and coordinate with other stakeholders and the community in the delivery of education, e.g. health professionals?
- What are the outcomes (including formal and informal outcomes) and associated benefits and drawbacks for the pupil/student from their educational experience?

This study aimed to provide a national overview of SEN provision in Ireland from multiple perspectives, including children with special educational needs and their parents, school management, classroom practitioners, support personnel, SENOs and school observation. In addition, key issues within special education policy and practice have been examined including:

- Models of inclusive education environments.
- Current resource allocation model at primary and post primary.
- Identification and assessment system.
- Models of within-school support for a range of children with identified special educational needs.
- Support from education and health professionals.
- Models of transition within schools and from primary to post primary.
- Communication between home and school.
- Individual education planning frameworks
- Liaison between health and education sectors.
- Data requirements in respect of special educational provision.

Exemplars of current special education practice are provided within this report which illustrate the challenges and opportunities involved in developing provision for individuals and groups of children and young people who have special educational needs within a wide variety of schooling contexts and spanning the whole range of schooling from entry to primary through to transition from post primary to post school provision.

1.9   Terminology Employed in this Study

Special educational needs has been defined in a variety of ways in Irish policy and legislation since the term was first introduced within an Irish context in the report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC: Department of Education and Skills [formerly Education and Science]: DES, 1993). For the purposes of this study, the definition used was that given in the EPSEN Act 2004 which defines SEN as follows:

> … in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly (EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004, p6).

The generic term SEN will be used throughout this report. Though the authors acknowledge the terms SEN and disability are often regarded as synonymous, it should be recognised that a child/young person with a disability may have an access need rather than requiring additional support for learning.

While inclusion, as a concept, has achieved international prominence, it is generally recognised that the term has no single agreed definition. The EPSEN Act (2004), while explicitly promoting the concept of an inclusive learning environment, provides no actual definition. The Consultative Forum established by the NCSE decided that inclusion within an Irish context could be defined as a process of:

- Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities.
- Removing barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements, to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school. (Winter & O'Raw, 2010, p39).

1.10   Report Outline

The report is divided into six chapters. This chapter provides an introduction to the report, gives a brief overview of the Irish education system, describes how support is structured and delivered for children and young people with special educational needs and outlines key research questions and terminology employed in this study. Chapter 2 situates the discussion around inclusive learning environments within the wider literature on educational inclusion. Chapter 3 describes the mixed methods approach employed in this longitudinal study and explains why this type of research methodology is appropriate. The findings section is divided into four related chapters based on key themes identified: Chapter 4, school policies relating to SEN; Chapter 5, special educational provision; Chapter 6, school experiences of children and young people with special educational needs and their families; and Chapter 7, examining educational outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs. Chapter 8 discusses the study findings on current inclusion literature and policy. The final chapter highlights policy and practice issues raised by study findings and provides a series of recommendations designed to address shortcomings within current provision and suggest ways to improve policy and provision at systemic and school levels.

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2   Review of Literature

2.1   Introduction

This review addresses the wider international literature on inclusion and special needs and is used to locate the development of special and inclusive education in Ireland within a broader international context. The structured approach to the initial review (see Chapter 3 for detail or Rose *et al*, 2010) resulted in the emergence of four key themes within which the literature was arranged. These themes enabled a focus to be determined through which a detailed narrative could be constructed and applied to both the Irish and the international literature.

The four themes are: policy, provision, experience and outcomes.

Policy: evidence of development and implementation of policy for special and inclusive education at either a) the macro (national policy) level or b) the micro (local or school policy) level.

Provision: evidence of resources or places allocated to pupils by government or other agencies and the means by which this is distributed and utilised in school. Consideration of the impact of these resources.

Experience: evidence which indicates the experiences of pupils with special educational needs in school. This includes experiences related to attitudes, relationships, access and learning.

Outcomes: evidence of the learning outcomes, both social and academic, of pupils with special educational needs within the school system.

It is important to note that the research team acknowledges some emerging issues do not fall neatly into one or more of the four themes. In fact, they can be complex, highly interrelated and interdependent. For example parental perspectives on inclusion are addressed regarding the development and impact of policy, the provision made for their children and their expectations of social and academic outcomes for their children.

2.2   Policy

Education systems worldwide have undergone and continue to undergo considerable change with the introduction of inclusive policies and the subsequent requirements for provision for pupils with special educational needs and disability (Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick & West, 2012). In a number of countries (including Ireland), the move towards inclusion was initiated by parents of children with disabilities (Elkins, Van Kraayenoord, Jobling, 2003). A meta-analysis of international research conducted by deBoer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) indicated that parents particularly valued placement in a regular class so their child could participate socially. They did express concerns, however, that the teachers were not well enough trained to teach pupils with special educational needs. Furthermore, much of the change has also been in response to international demands and agreements which have led to significant government responses in individual educational jurisdictions. Chief among those is the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the accompanying Framework for Action. The statement, to which the Irish government is a signatory, focuses on the 'development of inclusive schools' in relation to the international goal of achieving education for all. It says: 'Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions' (UNESCO, 1994, p6). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, Article 24) confirms the right of all pupils to an inclusive education at all levels, stating that pupils are entitled to: '… reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements… and 'the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education'. Most policies on inclusion include the recommendation that a policy framework and legislative support must be in place to ensure all pupils have access to and can participate equally in inclusive programmes (Peters, 2003).

Significant policies focused on inclusion and provision for children with special educational needs have been implemented in Ireland in recent years (see Griffin & Shevlin, 2007 for a detailed examination of these policies). In 1993 the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) adopted a broad definition of SEN and while supportive of moves towards inclusion identified the need to maintain some specialist and separate provision. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, 2004) marked a milestone in the development of education legislation for these children and young people as it set out the framework and infrastructure to support the establishment of inclusive learning environments. It should be noted, however, that special settings would remain available for those deemed to be in need of a specialised placement. The implementation of sections including assessment, individual education planning and appeals which are a central feature of this legislation have been delayed indefinitely due to economic constraints.

Both internationally and nationally the challenges in implementing inclusive education policies in practice have been recognised. Vayrynen, (2000, para 3), for example, claims that: 'Despite adopted policies on inclusive education, all countries struggle with the management and implementation of an education system that truly caters for diversity.' Inclusion is an elusive concept with no universally accepted definition and while a system espousing tolerance, diversity and equity may be desirable, how this might be achieved continues to be challenging (Ainscow, 1999; Ballard, 1999; Slee, 2000). Peters (2003) in a meta-analysis based on research conducted in countries with widely varying socio-economic indicators reported a lack of consistency in governmental approaches to developing inclusion policy and practice. Inclusion policy may be implemented in different ways with a range of goals and services depending on context. As in other administrations, the literature related to SEN policy in Ireland has taken a critical view of its content and the challenges confronting its interpretation and implementation. Kinsella and Senior (2008), for example, suggest that a cultural shift from a focus exclusively on 'individual pupil pathology' that emphasises deficits in the individual child towards a critique of existing organisational policies and practices is necessary for inclusion to become a reality in Irish society. These writers advocate developing a systems theory which addresses environmental change rather than forcing individuals to adapt to life within existing structures. At school policy level O'Gorman and Drudy (2011) reported that 86 per cent of schools surveyed stated they had a SEN policy although over a fifth of primary schools had not developed policies. The capacity of schools to translate policy into credible practice is questioned by Shevlin, Winter and Flynn (2013) who, in recognising the importance of school ethos as a starting point for the development of inclusive provision, recognise the professional development of teaching and other staff is a critical factor to ensure consistency of inclusive practice.

2.3 Provision

International literature on provision has tended to concern itself with placement and whether children should be placed in separate settings in special schools, special classes within mainstream or fully included in mainstream with support (Croll & Moses, 2000, Emanuelsson, 1998). More recently attention has increasingly focused on how children are identified and assessed and how educational provision is organised and delivered (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010).

A considerable volume of the literature to date focuses on education provision for pupils with special educational needs with mainstream versus segregated provision as a common theme (Norwich, 2008). Meijer *et al* (2003) conducted a review in 28 European countries and described three different approaches to including these pupils. These are:

1. One track where all pupils are in mainstream schools.
2. Multi-track where multiple approaches are used.
3. Two-track where mainstream and special schools operate as distinct entities.

Advocates of full inclusion (Ferguson, 2008, Sapon-Shevin, 2000-1) claim the possibility of developing inclusive learning environments is severely compromised by the very existence of separate placements. Others support the concept of inclusion in principle but do not believe it is a 'one-off, cure-all solution'. For example, a review of educational provision in Canada shows that while inclusion is the dominant policy (Hutchinson, 2007), in practice, most jurisdictions do maintain segregated classes for students considered to benefit from such placements (Bunch & Valeo, 2004) or whose parents wish for segregated placements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000).

The multi-track approach appears to embody the notion of a continuum of educational provision ranging from mainstream to special schools designed to respond to the continuum of needs presented by children and young people with special educational needs (Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp & Harper, 2013). The review of literature on the continuum of educational provision (Rix *et al*, 2013) identified 29 different types of continuum. The authors recommend caution when referring to the continuum as widely differing interpretations and manifestations exist across countries.

Meijer (2010) conjectures that in jurisdictions where a two-track system operates, mainstream schools are accustomed to transferring pupils with special educational needs to special schools where the specialist teachers often consider themselves SEN experts. The assumption is that special school teachers can fulfil the needs of specific groups of pupils. Meijer also finds that those countries where the special school system is relatively large (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, France), inclusion is regarded as a threat to the existence of the special school system as a whole. Across Europe, there is a recent trend towards transforming special schools from their traditional role of supporting pupils to that of being resource centres (Meijer, 2010). The intention is that a range of options may be made available to mainstream teachers including courses and training, resources and materials, help for individual students and support for parents and mainstream teachers.

Many countries, including Ireland, claim there is a continuum of provision to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs; these children and young people are placed on a continuum of need, supported within a continuum of educational provision and through a continuum of services (Rix *et al*, 2013). As pointed out by Rix *et al* (2013) an effective continuum 'needs a spread of inter-connected services and levels of services which are preventative, proactive and responsive at a group and individual level, and which share expertise and knowledge, spreading pressures across the system, being locally owned, cooperatively developed and responsive to top-down policy' (p382). The authors observe that in many countries the traditional continuum (mainstream classes, special classes, special schools, long-stay residential institutions and home support) continue despite a discourse of inclusion within policy documents and legislation. The emphasis on separate provision tended to become more apparent at the transition between primary and post primary schools, a finding also reported in the Irish literature (Kerins & Day, 2012). The authors reported that across countries inclusion was perceived to be more successful at primary level rather than secondary and that more boys than girls tended to be recipients of extra support in schools. Rix *et al* (2013) concluded there was a lack of consensus across countries about what constituted 'special': 'It seemed evident that no two countries dealt with the issue of support for pupils with special educational needs in the same way. No two countries shared a view about who needs support, the nature of the support they provided or the nature of an appropriate curriculum. No two countries had the same mechanisms for assessment, resource distribution, in-class support or support service provision' (p388).

Ensuring that children and young people with special educational needs are fully included in mainstream classrooms depends on interrelated factors including appropriate identification and assessment procedures (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010); establishment of effective supports; developing knowledgeable and skilled teachers in special educational needs (Kearns & Shevlin, 2006); and implementation of individual education plans (NCSE, 2006).

Identifying the cohort and their specific needs is crucial to establishing an effective SEN system in any country (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010). Watkins (2007) comments that while many countries may have similar assessment processes differences exist in how assessment information is collated and used within a national framework. Assessment processes while varying between and even within countries that have federal systems of governance appear to share the following core aims:

- The screening and identification of any suspected learning difficulties or delays.
- An evaluation of the pupil's strengths, areas for growth and general progress.
- Diagnosis of a particular condition and the pupil's eligibility for additional resource support.
- The development of an individual education plan (IEP).
- The consideration of programme planning and placement.

(adapted from NASET [USA] 2010)

It is generally agreed, however, that the identification process is complex and fraught with difficulties. Desforges and Lindsay (2010) point out that internationally variation in identification policy and practice is considerable and not all countries require a diagnosis of disability when assessing SEN for resource allocation. Categorical or classification systems for identifying SENs have been critiqued and serious questions raised about the appropriateness of this type of approach (Florian & McLaughlin 2008; Norwich 2008). Desforges and Lindsay (2010) claim this type of categorisation is 'inconsistent with the complexity of the SENs of individual children and are instructionally irrelevant in that they do not inform educational interventions' (p35).

Within the Irish context a disability diagnosis is required for children with low incidence disabilities to access resource teaching. As indicated in Chapter 1 of this report, the recent NCSE Working Group Report (2014), if implemented, would significantly affect future teaching support allocation as this would remove the need for a diagnosis to access such support. Winter *et al* (2006) observed that the current system of assessment has inherent difficulties: the medical model of disability dominates these categorisations; children placed in the same category do not necessarily have the same learning needs; and the risk that as an unintended consequence incentives are given to identify greater numbers of children to attract higher levels of resources. Rose *et al* (2010) identified significant issues with SEN assessment in the Irish context including parental frustration about the length of time taken to complete assessments and whether the recommended supports are delivered for their children (Kenny *et al* 2005; O'Donnell, 2003; Redahan, 2006).

Drudy and Kinsella (2009) argue that creating the conditions for the furtherance of inclusion is complex and that Irish schools, being at the beginning of a process of change, require support in specific areas of development. In particular they focus on the need to examine the availability of expertise, the development and sustainability of structures and the integration of processes across services if progress towards a more equitable education system is to be achieved. Developing effective support structures within schools is evidently critical in ensuring the learning needs of children and young people with special educational needs are met. Travers (2010) argues that the roles of learning support and resource teachers are insufficiently developed in primary schools to establish a sustainable support system. The predominant use of classroom withdrawal by resource teachers and a focus on within-child factors may inhibit inclusion through the perpetuation of a deficit model. However, Farrell and O'Neill (2012) in a small-scale study of learning support/resource teachers found respondents within their sample had a greater focus on supporting their teaching colleagues than was evident in Travers's earlier work which may imply a shifting of this role over time.

The special needs assistant (SNA) role in Irish schools has been the source of considerable debate. In many countries the role of non-teaching staff working in classrooms has been focused on direct provision for pupils with special educational needs. Often, as is the case in the UK, this includes involvement in pedagogical

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activity with pupils under teacher supervision (Groom 2006). The effectiveness of teaching assistant (TA) support for students with special educational needs has generated controversy and much debate in the UK. An extensive longitudinal study (Blatchford, Bassett & Brown, 2007; Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012) questioned the effectiveness of TAs in providing effective support for students with special educational needs. They reported there was no compelling evidence that TA presence had a positive impact on pupils' academic attainments. While it was evident that their presence enabled students with special educational needs to have more active interaction with their teachers, evidence suggested this type of interaction declined considerably in secondary school. In contrast, Farrell, Aborz, Howes and Pearson (2010) in a literature review on the role and impact of TA support concluded that targeted TA support for students with special educational needs at primary level had enabled these students to make substantial improvements in academic attainment.

In Ireland the SNA role has been shaped in a distinct manner focused on the care needs of pupils and is in many respects divorced from curriculum intervention or support for teaching (Carrig 2004; Logan 2006). The DES Circular (0030/2014) updates policy on the criteria governing SNA provision and reiterates that the SNA's primary role is to address significant care needs of children with special educational needs, enabling them to attend school. Researchers considering the role of the SNA have been confronted with anomalies, suggesting policy is at odds with school practice where there is evidence that SNAs are involved in pedagogical tasks under the direction of the classroom teacher (Carrig 2004; Rose & O'Neill 2009; Keating & O'Connor 2012). Spens (2013) indicates considerable inconsistencies in the interpretation of the role of SNAs in mainstream post primary schools and that the tasks they carry out differ at times considerably from those identified within their contracts. Spens concludes that an expansion of the role has taken place over time and that this may possibly have resulted from the changing expectations upon schools to address the needs of a more diverse population. O'Neill and Logan (2012) examined the development of a collaborative model involving teachers and SNAs in a primary school which indicated that collaboration including SNAs in planning and implementation of learning programmes alongside teachers brought benefits for all parties and that a review of the SNA role may be needed as schools promote more inclusive practices.

The development of knowledgeable, skilled teachers in SEN is recognised as a critical factor in the establishment of inclusive learning environments. However, there is evidence that within the UK context new teachers regarded their preparation for inclusion in initial teacher training (ITT) as inadequate (Dwyfor Davies & Garner, 1997; Garner, 1996), a perception that has persisted over time (Barton, 2003; Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003; Garner, 2001; Jones, 2002; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Winter, 2006). Many concerns about the lack of preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms are relevant right across the UK and internationally (Florian & Rouse, 2009). In their international meta-analysis research, Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond (2009) contend that teacher beliefs are not typically addressed in pre- and in-service programmes, yet they are critical to developing effective inclusive practices. In contrast, in a recent Irish study involving 110 pre-service secondary teachers, O'Toole and Butler (2013) suggested this cohort of pre-service teachers was positive about including pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms though there were some concerns about the inclusion of pupils who had behavioural difficulties. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) in a literature review addressing teachers' attitudes to inclusion cite a number of studies which suggest that beliefs, '… have a considerable impact on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion which, in turn, are translated into practice' (p140). Avramidis and Norwich reported that teachers who have pre-service or in-service qualifications in SEN are less resistant to inclusion and they support a coherent plan for training in the educational needs of pupils with special educational needs without which it will be difficult to include the pupils successfully. Lack of training for teaching pupils with diverse needs continues to inhibit current practice, a finding that has resonance across countries (Hodkinson, 2010; Vayrynen, 2000). For example, in New Zealand Mitchell (2001), in a review of provision, reports some schools resisting the inclusion of pupils with special needs on the grounds that the teachers lack the training to manage them in the regular classroom. In Canada,

Timmons (2006) in her review of the establishment of inclusive learning environments finds teachers to be supportive of inclusion in principle but overwhelmed by the scope of the change that inclusion requires when they consider the organisational and pedagogical issues involved.

Drudy and Kinsella's (2009) analysis of the need for increased expertise in schools is echoed in studies focused on teacher training in Ireland. O'Gorman's (2007) research indicated a shift within initial teacher education which has increased opportunities for exploring SEN issues and placing these within a mainstream classroom context. Clarke, Lodge and Shevlin (2012) suggest the initial training of teachers needs to focus not only on the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but also on engendering positive attitudes and beliefs about children and young people who are perceived as different from their peers. Recent policy initiatives from the Teaching Council (2011a; 2011b), supported by recommendations from the Sahlberg Report (2012) in Ireland, have prioritised the reform of structures, content and delivery within initial teacher education to ensure that high quality teacher education is assured. Within these initiatives there is an emphasis on enabling newly qualified teachers to address the needs of a more diverse student population, in particular those who have SEN. O'Donnell's (2012) study reported a direct correlation between an emphasis on special and inclusive education input during training and the maintenance of positive attitudes among teachers to pupils with special educational needs over a ten-year period. This finding was replicated in relation to the impact of ongoing professional development among established post primary teachers across both the Republic of Ireland and the North (O'Gorman *et al*, 2009). In particular these researchers identified increased teacher confidence in their ability to fulfil their roles for pupils with a range of special educational needs. However, the authors suggest that while continuing professional development opportunities have increased they remain inconsistent and are not readily available to all teachers. O'Gorman (2007) sees a move away from the expert model in which knowledge resides with a well-trained individual who provides advice and support to colleagues, to a more holistic development of a community expertise in which all teachers achieve a level of understanding of SEN issues.

It has been argued that differentiating the curriculum enables the inclusion of all learners including those with SEN in mainstream classrooms (Broderick *et al*, 2005). Differentiated instruction is critical to ensuring that pupils with special educational needs can become active participants in the learning processes in heterogeneous mainstream classrooms. It is generally accepted that differentiated instruction involves adapting teaching and curriculum content to meet the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs. Stradling and Saunders (1993) identified six distinct types of differentiation including differentiation by task; by outcome; by resource; by time; by pace; and through dialogue (teacher-pupil). The risks associated with differentiated instruction include lowered teacher expectations (O'Brien & Guiney, 2001); oversimplification of material leading to exclusion from more demanding academic tasks (George, 2005); and pupils with special educational needs following a narrow curriculum with consequences for achieving certification (Tomlinson, 2001). Broderick *et al* (2005) observe that ascribing learning difficulties to within pupil factors rather than an interaction between pupil difficulties and classroom practices can lead to the perception that the modification of curriculum content represents an unfair burden on classroom teachers. This, in turn, can lead to the belief that specialists are required to deliver differentiated instruction for pupils with special educational needs. While it is generally agreed that differentiated instruction is a core element in developing inclusive learning environments there appears to be a dearth of empirical research studies that demonstrate which aspects of differentiation are effective in practice for pupils with special educational needs (O'Mara *et al* 2012). In addition, the extent of differentiation in practice appears to be variable as Newman (2006), for example, reported that limited modification of instruction and curriculum content was evident in a US national longitudinal study. Classroom teachers value support from specialist SEN teachers and collaboration within the classroom can be an effective way to differentiate the curriculum (Broderick *et al*, 2005).

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Within an Irish context, Ware *et al*'s (2011) study of facilitating curricular access for pupils with special educational needs in primary schools reported that teachers did use a wide range of differentiation strategies; however, it was also apparent that most of these strategies were used by a small number of teachers for limited classroom instruction. The most common form of differentiation observed involved SNA use with little evidence of collaboration between classroom teachers and resource/learning support teachers in designing and implementing modified instruction and curriculum content. In addition, use of assistive technology was extremely limited.

Individual education plans (IEPs) have been used in many countries to address the specific learning needs of individual pupils with special educational needs (Rodger,1995; Meijer, 2003; National Disability Authority, 2005;Takala, Pirtimaa & Törmänen, 2009). In addition they have been developed to enable teachers to make the necessary curricular adaptations to ensure that the target pupils gain access to learning alongside their peers (Ryndak, 1996; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010). In many countries legislation underpins implementation of IEPs for pupils with a formal assessment of special educational needs. For example, in England the Special Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001, para 4.27, p37) requires that:

> Strategies employed to enable the child to progress should be recorded within an individual education plan (IEP); this should include information about the short-term targets set for the child, the teaching strategies and provision to be put in place, when the plan is to be reviewed, and the outcome of the action taken.

Similar provision for IEPs is made within the legislation of other countries including, for example, the Australian states (Forlin, 2001), in Canada (Dworet & Bennett, 2002), the Netherlands (Peetsma, Vergeer, Roeleveld & Karsten, 2001), and the USA through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (US Department of Education, 1997) designed to enable pupils with special educational needs to access education on an equal basis to their peers. As a result a significant number of models and formats for IEPs have been established at school, regional and national levels (US Department of Education, 2004; Byers & Rose, 2004). Good practice within the development of IEPs has been identified, including an emphasis on the importance of parental and pupil participation, multidisciplinary collaboration and effective systems of reviewing targets (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Poppes, Vlaskamp, de Geeter & Nakken, 2002; Goepel, 2009).

Within the Republic of Ireland IEP development has been an emergent process that until relatively recently was focused within a number of special schools which have established individual education planning as a core element of their provision for pupils with special educational needs (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007). Increased mainstreaming of these children led policy makers and legislators to promote the implementation of IEPs through legislation. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) sets out a detailed blueprint for IEP development, however, due to economic constraints, requirements for schools to introduce a system of IEPs have not yet been implemented. Support for schools to develop IEPs is available through the Guidelines on Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006) and hands-on support from the Special Education Support Service (SESS). Research into the development and deployment of IEPs in an Irish context have been limited in scope, often reporting single school case studies or focusing on practice for discrete pupil populations (Nugent, 2002; Ring & Travers, 2005).

2.4   Experience

Parental participation in decision-making on educational provision for their child who has special educational needs has become more evident in the international literature (Alur, 2010; Hornby, 2010). The educational experiences of such children and young people, however, have received comparatively limited coverage (Flynn, Shevlin & Lodge, 2012; Lundy, 2007).

Parental expectations of school for their children with special educational needs include progress in social skills (Whitaker, 2007); school recognition of difficulties experienced by the individual child (Lewis *et al*, 2007); and happiness of the individual child (Hornby, 2010). Parental satisfaction with educational provision for this cohort was reported to be high in several nationally representative surveys (USA-National Longitudinal Transition Study 2-Newman *et al*, 2006, UK-National survey-Hamlyn *et al*, 2010). This finding was replicated in a national survey (n=1,394 parents) in Ireland with 90 per cent of respondents stating they believed their child was attending the right type of school to meet their particular needs. Parents believed staff had a good understanding of their child's specific needs which was a major factor in their positive rating of the school (Armstrong *et al*, 2010). Two small-scale Irish studies (Kenny *et al*, 2005, Shevlin *et al*, 2003) generally supported the survey findings though some parents had experienced difficulties in accessing the school of their choice for their child.

A Northern Irish study that collated data from over 1,000 parents (O'Connor *et al*, 2003), and a further small-scale Swedish study (Roll-Pettersson & Mattson, 2007) indicated general parental satisfaction with the assessment process. However, serious concerns about the delays often experienced were evident, particularly in the Lamb Inquiry (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) in the UK when the author commented that:

> The assessment process drives much of the controversy and dissatisfaction in the system. Many parents found the statutory assessment process stressful and difficult due to lack of information, poor support and the negative attitudes they often encountered (Foreword to the Lamb Inquiry report Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009).

Irish parents were generally satisfied with the standard of assessment for their child (Armstrong *et al*, 2010) though serious concerns were raised about the delay in assessments and parents having to pay for private assessments, a finding also reported by Flatman-Watson (2009) in an Irish study involving 119 parents of children with SEN.

Ensuring effective school-home communication on the progress of the child with special educational needs is regarded as critical (O'Connor *et al*, 2003) though it appears from studies that this type of home-school relationship is not always guaranteed (Hornby, 2010). Researchers have recommended approaches to facilitate more effective home-school communication including a home-school diary (Elkins *et al*, 2003); a designated contact person in the school (O'Connor *et al*, 2003); and school willingness to seek parental views (Whitaker, 2007). Armstrong *et al* (2010) reported that Irish parents surveyed believed their child had received a positive welcome in school, parental views were respected and an effective level of communication was maintained between school and home. Kenny *et al*, (2005) a small-scale Irish study involving ten parents of children with an intellectual disability, indicated that parents were particularly concerned about the adequacy of communication for key transition points such as the transfer from primary to post primary school.

Parental views on the appropriateness of the inclusion of their child within a mainstream school appear to vary widely often dependent on local context and the child's level of disability. Parents (n=33) in a UK study who favoured inclusion in mainstream believed their child received social and academic benefits (Frederickson *et al*, 2004) and that inclusive learning environments were characterised by positive teacher attitudes towards and positive expectations for their child, a finding also reported in a UK study involving 1,776 parents conducted by Lewis *et al* (2007). Whitaker (2007) highlighted the parental concern that their child with ASD would experience positive peer interactions and develop relationships in the school setting. Parents' perception of support received within mainstream settings varied with some very concerned about what they perceived as insufficient teacher knowledge and expertise in meeting their child's needs (Elkins *et al*, 2003, O'Connor *et al*, 2003). Other studies (Grove & Fisher, 1999,) reported that parents favoured placement in a special setting which they deemed to be better positioned to meet the specific needs of their child. The Irish parental

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survey (Armstrong *et al*, 2010) indicated a high level of satisfaction among parents though 10-20 per cent consistently reported serious difficulties in relation to their child's educational provision. Parents who were generally dissatisfied with provision attributed this to their belief that teachers did not have the requisite knowledge and skills to address their child's needs. Other studies (Flatman-Watson, 2009; Kenny *et al*, 2005) reported that parents were very concerned that the insufficient coordination of health/education services presented a major obstacle to inclusion in mainstream schools.

Both nationally and internationally increased attention has been given to recognising the right of children to be heard, in particular in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Article 12, for example, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) affirms their right to express their views in this regard. Student voice research has emerged and it has been cogently argued that students should be active participants in decisions about school policy and practice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Within an Irish context the National Children's Strategy (2000) clearly states that 'children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity' (Government of Ireland, 2000, p10). Children in a number of studies prioritised having a say in decisions relating to their lives (Coyne *et al*, 2006, Kilkelly *et al*, 2005), though Lundy (2007) among others cautions about the risk of a token response where adults comply with consultation requirements and then ignore the children's views. Tangen (2009) observes that certain groups of children are routinely denied a voice including those under age five, those with special educational needs and children from ethnic minorities. Davies (2005) says 'legislation alone will not achieve the goal of greater social or educational inclusion for disaffected or alienated pupils … research suggests that listening to what these pupils have to tell us holds the key to subsequent action to help combat social exclusion' (p299).

Recently increased attention has been given to documenting the school experiences of children and young people with SEN and their families. The Growing Up in Ireland Study (Williams *et al* 2009) reporting a longitudinal investigation into the lives of children and young people in Ireland indicates that, for some children, having a special educational need has a significant impact on their experience of education. Children aged nine with multiple disabilities (learning difficulties and EBD) were less inclined to like school compared to their peers without a special need. However, children with physical disabilities, sensory needs and speech impairments were no less likely to enjoy school than their peers without special needs (McCoy & Banks, 2012). The study also reported that boys were more likely than girls to be referred for SEN assessment. In a follow-up study children aged 13 with SEN reported fewer positive interactions with their teachers compared to their peers, though the difference between the two groups in terms of negative interactions was less evident (ESRI/TCD, 2012).

The Growing Up in Ireland Study (Williams *et al*, 2009) also indicated that children with special educational needs were more likely to be bullied than their peers without. However, other studies such as the international review of the literature conducted by Rose, Monda-Amaya and Espelage (2011) and the study undertaken by Farrell (2000) indicate that the evidence for incidents of bullying of children with special educational needs is inconclusive. O'Donnell (2003) reported that those who had transferred from a special setting to mainstream provision were well able to articulate their experiences of schooling. In her study most pupils felt they had been welcome in mainstream schools, but were conscious of personal and academic pressures and at times feeling different and isolated in school. Pupils expressed similar views in the work of Rose and Shevlin (2004) with low expectations of teachers often resulting in a denial of curriculum access or involvement in assessment for accreditation. Once pupils do gain mainstream access they often make good social progress; most pupils report a positive attitude from teachers towards them as individuals, but perceive that this is not always supported by teaching which is wholly suited to their individual needs (Rose & Shevlin, 2004).

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2.5   Outcomes

International reviews of outcomes for pupils with special educational needs have tended to focus on national level data examined on a longitudinal basis (Cameto *et al*, 2004; Blackorby *et al*, 2007). However, this type of data is not routinely collected in most countries and as a result there is a dearth of studies examining factors that affect educational progress and outcomes for this specific cohort of pupils. In contrast, two US based studies (Cameto *et al*, 2004; Blackorby *et al*, 2007) and one UK study (Sammons *et al*, 2011) provide extensive national evidence on the educational progress of pupils with special educational needs. There is general agreement from both studies that:

- Overall, this cohort of pupils achieve low academic outcomes.
- Participation in extracurricular activities/community groups was strongly correlated to positive outcomes during school and in early post school years.
- High quality pre-school provision had a positive impact on intellectual and social outcomes for this cohort of pupils and it was still apparent at age 14.
- Positive school and parental expectations were influential in promoting positive outcomes.
- Individualised programmes were essential in enabling positive outcomes.
- Young people with special educational needs were less likely to progress to post-secondary educational courses compared to their peers and were more likely to enrol in two-year community college programmes than four-year university courses.
- Significant differences were evident among SEN categories in achieving positive outcomes, for example young people with visual/hearing impairments were more likely to attend post-secondary education settings than those with speech/language difficulties, emotional disturbances or general learning disabilities.

Variations in performance were most strongly influenced by family factors and the characteristics of the SEN experienced (Blackorby *et al*, 2007). However, schools can influence academic attainment levels experienced by this cohort of pupils. Positive academic outcomes were most consistently reported where these children and young people participated alongside their peers in classrooms characterised by higher scores in maths and reading. Smaller classes were also associated with higher grades overall and particularly in growth of oral reading fluency. Higher grades were achieved by those who consistently completed classroom tasks, followed teacher instructions and completed homework on time.

Detailed information on educational provision and student characteristics are often available at national level and collated by international organisations such as OECD and EADSNE; however, information appears limited for pupil engagement, progress and outcomes (Douglas *et al*, 2012). National data tend to concentrate on attainment and attendance based outcome measures with little attention to assessing levels of pupil engagement. Douglas *et al* (2012) argue strongly for a system of inclusive assessment focusing on a range of pupil outcomes including attainment, engagement, happiness and independence related outcomes. The authors contend that all pupils (with/without special educational needs) can benefit from this type of classroom assessment that is accessible, appropriate and relevant. Douglas *et al* (2012) also argue that standard assessment procedures can prevent pupils with special educational needs from demonstrating their knowledge and skills. They also noted that the PISA international assessment programme provided little insight into their educational progress and outcomes.

The Achievement for All (AfA) initiative (Humphrey & Squires, 2011) piloted in the UK attempted to address the dearth of quality data on pupil engagement and progress at individual and school level. The authors established that one or more pupil outcomes improved when: teachers and parents were more frequently involved in reviewing individual pupil targets; a greater range of methods of communicating information to

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parents about pupils' progress was used; a greater range of professionals had access to pupil information and the AfA initiative was led by a senior member of school management. Schools used a 'structured conversation with parents' model to facilitate greater communication and collaboration with parents.

Ireland, in common with many of its European counterparts, has no established system for collecting data on the academic and social outcomes of pupils with special educational needs. Research on academic and social outcomes tends to be dominated by small-scale studies offering little in terms of generalisability or coherence. These studies include Hardiman *et al* (2009) who concluded that pupils with moderate general learning difficulties in mainstream and special settings demonstrated similar levels of social performance. In addition, Ring and Travers (2005) examined provision for a pupil with severe learning difficulties in a mainstream primary school and observed that despite high levels of teacher support there was limited evidence of progress and the pupil remained isolated from his peers. Other studies, while not directly addressing pupil outcomes, have observations on conditions necessary for a positive learning environment, including the importance of positive teacher expectations (Scanlon & Mc Gilloway, 2006); the need to foster positive relationships between teachers and pupils (McCoy & Banks, 2012); teacher knowledge about appropriate educational provision to facilitate pupil engagement with school and teacher beliefs about their capacity to respond effectively to diverse learning needs (Shevlin *et al*, 2013).

In summary, it can be concluded that the longitudinal studies examined above provide valuable information on how the educational progress of pupils with special educational needs can be assessed over time at an individual level. In addition, many critical factors influencing pupil progress have been identified. However, it is evident that countries need to develop national and local level data that will provide a comprehensive account of pupil progress across academic and social domains which can inform future provision for this cohort of pupils.

2.6   Summary

This chapter has considered special and inclusive education within Ireland in the context of national and international literature. The four themes of policy, provision, experience and outcomes that permeate this report have been used as a framework within which issues emerging from the literature have been discussed. The literature review as presented here has been used to inform the methods deployed for fieldwork and to discuss the findings from this longitudinal study.

3   Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methods deployed by the research team for data collection and analysis. Examples of research instruments can be found in Appendix 1.

The research team utilised a mixed methods approach to provide detailed insights into the operation of schools and to obtain the insights of professionals, parents and pupils. A national survey enabled an understanding of how special educational needs issues are addressed across the country. It also assisted in identifying issues for more detailed investigation through the development of school focused case studies. The survey provided quantitative data on issues affecting schools and provided the foundations for a more detailed analysis of these services obtained through fieldwork in schools.

3.1   Ethical Management of the Research

The conduct of the research was monitored by the University of Northampton ethics committee which scrutinised examples of data collection instruments and other documentation to ensure the work adhered to clear ethical guidelines. All researchers involved had completed Garda clearance or in the case of UK-based researchers Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance.

3.2   Stages of the Research

A five-stage approach to data collection (presented in Table 5 below) enabled researchers to follow a progression of instrument development, data collection analysis and interpretation and provided the basis of a research timetable.

Table 5: A five-stage approach to data collection

Stages of the Research	Actions Taken	Timescale
Stage 1		
Desk-based research Instrument development Data collection from professionals and interest groups	Initial critical reviews of Irish and international literature Development, piloting and implementation of focus groups with service users and providers Identification of school sample for case study visits	2009-10
Stage 2		
Focus upon primary and special schools Instrument development Data analysis	Electronic survey of primary and special schools across Ireland Case study visits to primary and special schools In-school interviews with professionals, parents and pupils Collection of school documentation In-school observation	2010-11
Stage 3		
Focus on post primary schools Instrument development Data analysis	Analysis of data from Stage 2 Construction of primary pupil illustrative profiles Electronic survey of post primary schools across Ireland Case study visits to post primary schools In-school interviews with professionals, parents and pupils Collection of school documentation In-school observation	2011-12
Stage 4		
	Analysis of data from Stage 3 Construction of post primary illustrative pupil profiles Return visits to primary, post primary and special schools Further in-school interviews with professionals, parents and pupils Production of interim report	2012-13
Stage 5		
	Final analysis of data from return visits Production of final report	2013-14

The methodology was specifically designed to address each of the research questions (see below). The national survey provided an overview of support provision for pupils with special educational needs, for example, the development and deployment of individual education plans (IEPs) and access to HSE professionals. A scrutiny of documentation, observations of school activities and interviews with professionals, parents and pupils in schools enabled a more detailed understanding of how services were being developed and utilised and informed the development of narrative case studies.

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3.3   Primary Research Questions

NCSE identified seven research questions to be addressed, as follows.

1. What are the educational experiences of pupils/students with a variety of SEN in the classroom in different cycles of education and school type?

2. How do school policies and practices affect this experience?

3. How is the curriculum applied and delivered to these pupils/students?

4. How does the school use SEN resources and other support services in providing an inclusive education?

5. How are individual education plans developed and applied?

6. How does the school interact and coordinate with other stakeholders and the community in the delivery of education, for example health professionals?

7. What are the outcomes (including formal and informal outcomes) and associated benefits and drawbacks for the pupil/student from their educational experience?

3.4   Literature Reviews

An analysis of the development and implementation of special education and inclusion in Irish and International contexts was addressed through the development of literature reviews.

An initial purpose of these reviews was to place the research within the context of other studies of special and inclusive education in Ireland and internationally. The reviews were used to identify gaps in knowledge, and aspects of the implementation and impact of SEN procedures lacking in a firm empirical base. This latter purpose was essential in ensuring that the Project IRIS research, in addition to replicating earlier studies, provided the research team with questions which might lead to the acquisition of new knowledge. The initial review resulted in the emergence of four key themes in which the literature was arranged: policy, provision, experience and outcomes established a focus through which a detailed narrative was constructed and applied to both Irish and international literature.

The four themes, used throughout the research process are defined as:

Policy: evidence on development and implementation of policy related to special and inclusive education at either a) the macro (national policy) level or b) the micro (local or school policy) level.

Provision: evidence of resources or places allocated to pupils by government or other agencies and the means by which these are distributed/utilised in schools and consideration of their impact.

Experience: evidence indicating the experiences of pupils with special educational needs in school, including experiences related to attitudes, relationships, access and learning.

Outcomes: evidence of the learning outcomes, social and academic, of pupils with special educational needs in the school system.

3.5   Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with a range of service users and providers. Their primary purpose was to ensure that 'key informants' who understand specific aspects of SEN provision in Ireland could articulate their experiences and understanding from their own perspectives. The groups were established in several parts of the country and the data collected informed the development of interview schedules used during case study visits to schools in addition to providing unique insights that informed research findings.

The following focus groups provided data to this project.

Table 6: Focus group membership

	Group Membership	Number of Participants
1	Principals (primary)	5
2	Teachers (primary)	7
3	Principals (primary)	6
4	Principals (primary)	4
5	HSE professionals (speech and language therapists, physiotherapist, occupational therapist)	5
6	Special needs assistants from across educational phases	11
7	Special educational needs organisers (SENO) (Group 1)	3
8	Special educational needs organisers SENO (Group 2)	4
9	National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) (Group 1)	7
10	National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) (Group 2)	6
11	Disability Federation of Ireland	3
12	Teacher educators (working cross phase)	5
13	Teacher educators (providers of SEN courses for teachers)	9
14	Teacher educators (primary education courses)	4
15	Teacher educators (providers of in-service courses for SNAs)	5
	Total Number of Respondents	**84**

3.6   Survey

The stratified national sample of primary and post primary schools and all special schools provided data from a survey that was managed through an online self-completion process to collect both demographic data and that related to the provision of special education around the four key themes: policy, provision, experience and outcomes in primary, post primary and special schools. This model allowed the data collected to be compared to, and combined with, data from other phases of the study, to create a comprehensive picture of special education in Irish schools. The survey provided qualitative and quantitative data, enabling emerging themes to be viewed from a different perspective and allowing respondents to provide individual opinions and perspectives in their own words. Schools without a specific designated population of pupils with special educational needs (e.g. hospital schools) were not included.

Survey participants were school staff directly involved in special education including principals, deputy principals, resource teachers and special education coordinators. The advantage of this approach was the provision of informed data from individuals conversant in SEN policy and provision within the schools, though this expertise may have been inconsistent across all professionals within each of the respondent schools. Due to their unique pupil populations and profiles, primary, post primary and special schools were treated as separate (qualitative data were subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS computer package. Following completion of a frequency analysis for each question further interrogation of the data was conducted using non-parametric statistical tests. For data comparisons involving three or more variables, a Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA for ordinal data was applied).

The survey had a comparatively low response rate as outlined below in Table 7. As a result, findings must be treated with caution as they may not fully represent the views of school principals and SEN professionals in Irish schools. The high levels of non-responses, particularly in the primary school sector, could produce skewed findings which may not represent the complexity of SEN provision views among school professionals in Ireland. The authors made every attempt to ensure that all these limitations were taken into account in reporting survey findings.

Table 7: Sample size and response rates for school survey

School Type	Total Number of Schools (N)	Total Sample (N)	% of Total Schools	Total Responses	% of Total Schools	% of Sample
Primary	3160	750	23.7%	187	5.9%	24.9%
Post primary	729	328	45%	149	20.4%	45.4%
Special	125	100	80%	37	29.6%	37%

3.7   Case Studies

3.7.1   School Samples

Using data available on school variables from the DES and NCSE, case study schools were randomly selected from stratified categories as listed below to represent the profile of provision in Ireland. The school range reflected variables in school size; single sex and co-educational provision; school type (e.g. Educate Together school, Gaelscoileanna); school context (e.g. urban, regional, rural); and DEIS classification. Across the country some categories of schools are clearly more numerous than others. Examples from each category are included rather than attempt to obtain a sample reflective of the proportion of schools within each category as it was not possible to have a representative sample within the case studies. Because of the limited number of schools visited it is not possible to say the case study schools provide a truly representative picture of schools across Ireland. But data collected during fieldwork in these facilities have been combined with that from the survey and documentary analysis to provide a fair overview of provision.

Case study visits to ten primary schools, ten post primary schools, and four special schools (two mild general learning difficulties, one moderate, severe and profound general learning difficulties and one autism/emotional behavioural difficulties) were conducted to gain a whole-school perspective of SEN provision and to gather information on experiences of pupils, parents and school staff members.

3.7.2   Pupil Sampling

Within each of the 24 case study schools a sample of pupils with special educational needs was identified and followed throughout the project's duration. Pupil numbers within each varied according to school population size and SEN range. Pupils were selected with the assistance of the school principals and resource teachers to be representative of the range of needs within each school designation and also to provide an overview of experiences and outcomes in relation to pupil age, gender and provision type. This purposive sample enabled the research team to gain insights into how SEN provision was made for pupils of varying need and ability. While this sampling process provided no ideal random sample of pupils it was essential that the school acted as a broker to facilitate contact between the research team and families. Each pupil had a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. While the research team expected some attrition and loss of individual pupils from the sample between visits, only two from the original sample were unavailable at the second visit. The sample pupils forming the hub for the case studies are outlined in Table 8 on the next page.

Table 8: Pupil sample in case study schools

Primary School Pupil Details

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year group (From First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Post Primary School	Move to Other Primary School
School-1	Student-1	F	Senior infant	HI		
	Student-2	M	Sixth class	Asperger's syndrome/ADHD/MGLD	Vocational post primary	
	Student-3	M	Fifth class	MGLD	Special school	
	Student-4	M	Senior infant	ASD/MGLD		
	Student-5	M	Junior infant	Asperger's syndrome		
	Student-6	M	Fourth class	MGLD		
	Student-7	M	Third class	SSLD		
	Student-8	M	Sixth class	SSLD/EBD	Vocational post primary	
School-2	Student-1	F	Fourth class	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)	
	Student-2	F	Fourth class	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)	
	Student-3	F	Fourth class	EBD		
	Student-4	F	Third class	Dyslexia		
	Student-5	F	First class	HI		
	Student-6	F	Fourth class	Dyslexia		
	Student-7	F	Fourth class	ASD		
	Student-8	F	Third class	SLD		
	Student-9	F	Third class	HI		Educate Together
School-3	Student-1	F	Senior infant	SSLD		
	Student-2	M	Second class	SLD		
	Student-3	M	First class	ADHD		
	Student-4	M	First class	ASD		
	Student-5	F	Junior infant	MGLD		
	Student-6	M	First class	ASD		
	Student-7	M	Second class	ASD		
	Student-8	F	Senior infant	MGLD		

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year group (From First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Post Primary School	Move to Other Primary School
School-4	Student-1	F	Junior infant	PD		
	Student-2	M	Third class	EBD		
	Student-3	M	First class	SSLD		Primary (DEIS)
	Student-4	M	Sixth class	SSLD	Vocational Post primary (DEIS)	
	Student-5	M	First class	MGLD		
	Student-6	M	First class	BMGLD		Educate Together
	Student-7	F	Fourth class	EBD		
School-5	Student-1	M	First class	Assessed Syndrome		
	Student-2	F	Second class	PD		
	Student-3	M	Third class	EBD		
	Student-4	M	Fourth class	EBD		
	Student-5	F	Senior infant	HI		
	Student-6	M	Fifth class	MD	Community school	
	Student-7	M	Sixth class	HI	Vocational post primary (DEIS)	
	Student-8	F	Fifth class	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)	
	Student-9	F	Fifth class	Dyslexia		
	Student-10	F	Second class	SLD		
	Student-11	F	Fifth class	Dyslexia		
	Student-12	F	Fifth class	SLD		
School-6	Student-1	F	Senior infant	ASD		
	Student-2	F	Senior infant	ASD		
	Student-3	M	Sixth class	Dyslexia	Community School	
	Student-4	M	Third class	ASD		
	Student-5	F	First class	ASD		
	Student-6	M	Third class	ASD		
	Student-7	M	Junior infant	ASD		
	Student-8	M	First class	ASD		

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year group (From First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Post Primary School	Move to Other Primary School
School-7	Student-1	M	Senior infant	PD		
	Student-2	M	First class	PD		
	Student-3	F	Fourth class	SSLD		
	Student-4	M	Third class	SSLD		
School-8	Student-1	M	Fourth class	MD		
	Student-2	M	First class	ASD		
	Student-3	F	First class	MGLD		
	Student-4	M	Second class	EBD		
	Student-5	F	Second class	ADHD		
	Student-6	F	Third class	SSLD		
	Student-7	M	Fourth class	EBD		
School-9	Student-1	M	Sixth class	MD	Secondary (fee-paying)	
	Student-2	M	Sixth class	EBD	Comprehensive school	
	Student-3	M	Third class	EBD		
	Student-4	F	Senior infant	DS		
	Student-5	F	Second class	PD		
	Student-6	F	Junior infant	SSLD		
School-10	Student-1	M	Fourth class	ASD		
	Student-2	F	Fourth class	ASD		
	Student-3	F	Third class	PD		
	Student-4	F	Sixth class	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)	
	Student-5	F	First class	ASD		
	Student-6	M	Second class	SSLD		
	Student-7	F	First class	HI		
	Student-8	M	First class	MD		

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Post Primary School Student Details

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year Group (From the First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Special School	Transition to Other Post Primary School or to Further/ Higher Education
School-15	Student-1	F	Second year	PD	Special school (MGLD)	
	Student-2	F	Fourth year	PD		
	Student-3	M	Second year	Assessed syndrome		
	Student-4	F	Third year	DS		
School-16	Student-1	M	Second year	SLD; MGLD		
	Student-2	F	Fifth year	PD; MGLD		Voluntary work/ unemployed
	Student-3	M	Second year	SLD; dyspraxia		
	Student-4	F	Third year	SLD		
	Student-5	M	Fourth year	Asperger's syndrome		
	Student-6	F	Fourth year	HI		
School-17	Student-1	F	Transition year	MD		
	Student-2	F	Transition year	DS		
	Student-3	F	Fifth year	Asperger's syndrome		
	Student-4	F	Third year	PD		
	Student-5	F	Fifth year	MGLD		
School-18	Student-1	M	Third year	BMGLD		
	Student-2	M	Second year	SLD		
	Student-3	M	First year	MGLD		
	Student-4	M	First year	HI; SSLD		
	Student-5	M	Fourth year	SSLD		
	Student-6	M	Sixth year	EBD		PLC (FETAC Level 5)
	Student-7	M	Third year	MGLD		

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year Group (From the First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Special School	Transition to Other Post Primary School or to Further/ Higher Education
School-19	Student-1	M	Sixth year	DS; MGLD		Voluntary organisation (day programme)
	Student-2	M	Second year	BMGLD		
	Student-3	F	Sixth year	PD		National Learning Network
	Student-4	M	Second year	SSLD		
	Student-5	M	Second year	PD		
	Student-6	M	Sixth year	PD/dyspraxia		Third level (IT)
	Student-7	M	Second year	Dyspraxia		
School-20	Student-1	M	Second year	PD/dyspraxia		
	Student-2	M	Third year	Asperger's syndrome		
	Student-3	F	Fifth year	SLD		
	Student-4	F	Fifth year	EBD		
	Student-5	F	Fifth year	Asperger's syndrome		
School-21	Student-1	F	Fifth year	VI		
	Student-2	F	Second year	SSLD		
	Student-3	M	Second year	ASD		
	Student-4	F	Second year	EBD		
	Student-5	F	Second year	SLD		
	Student-6	M	Second year	PD		
School-22	Student-1	F	Second year	Assessed syndrome		
	Student-2	M	Third year	Asperger's syndrome		
	Student-3	M	Third year	MGLD		
	Student-4	M	Third year	SLD		
	Student-5	F	Fifth year	EBD		PLC (FETAC Level 5)
	Student-6	F	Second year	SLD		

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School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year Group (From the First Visit)	SEN	Transition to Special School	Transition to Other Post Primary School or to Further/Higher Education
School-23	Student-1	F	Sixth year	MGLD		
	Student-2	F	First year	PD/dyspraxia		
	Student-3	F	Sixth year	SEBD		PLC (FETAC Level 5)
	Student-4	F	Second year	SLD		
	Student-5	F	First year	ASD		
School-24	Student-1	M	First year	Assessed syndrome		
	Student-2	M	First year	EBD		
	Student-3	M	Fifth year	Dyspraxia		
	Student-4	M	Fifth year	MGLD; dyspraxia		
	Student-5	M	Fifth year	Dyspraxia		

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Special School Pupil Details

School Number	Student Number	Gender	Year Group (From First Visit)	SEN
School-11	Student 1	F	Infants	CD
	Student 2	M	Infants	MGLD
	Student 3	F	Infants	DD
	Student 4	M	Infants	ASD
	Student 5	M	Senior Primary (Inclusive of Junior Certificate)	DS
School-12	Student 1	F	Senior Primary (Inclusive of Junior Certificate)	ASD
	Student 2	M	Middle Primary	SLD
	Student 3	M	Early Primary	MGLD
	Student 4	M	Senior Class (Inclusive of Leaving Certificate)	MGLD
	Student 5	M	Middle Primary	SLD
School-13	Student 1	M	Senior Class (Inclusive of Leaving Certificate)	OCD
	Student 2	M	Senior Class (Inclusive of Leaving Certificate)	EBD
	Student 3	M	Infants	ADHD
	Student 4	M	Early Primary	MGLD
School-14	Student 1	M	Early Primary	SLD
	Student 2	M	Middle Primary	HI
	Student 3	F	Early Primary	ADHD/EBD
	Student 4	M	Senior Class (Inclusive of Leaving Certificate)	AS

Note: Special school classes are often multi-age settings and the designations assigned are explained below. Infants: 4-6 years approximately; Early Primary: 7-9 years approximately; Middle Primary: 8-11 years approximately; Senior Primary (Inclusive of Junior Certificate): 12-15 years approximately; Senior Class (Inclusive of Leaving Certificate): 16-18 years approximately.

Evidence from case study schools was compiled using data from two field visits to each. Each visit was undertaken over a minimum of two days (determined according to school size) and by a minimum of two researchers. Each school was visited twice during the project. Visits were about one year apart and the second visits gave researchers an opportunity to return to issues raised following analysis of first visit data and to investigate changes and progress over this period.

A model for the development of school case studies was developed and used consistently as a framework for data collection during school visits. This model ensured data were collected through interviews with key respondents, through observation and through a scrutiny of school documentation. By maintaining this consistent model and approach, it was possible to make comparisons across schools using similar data sets.

Figure 1: Case study model
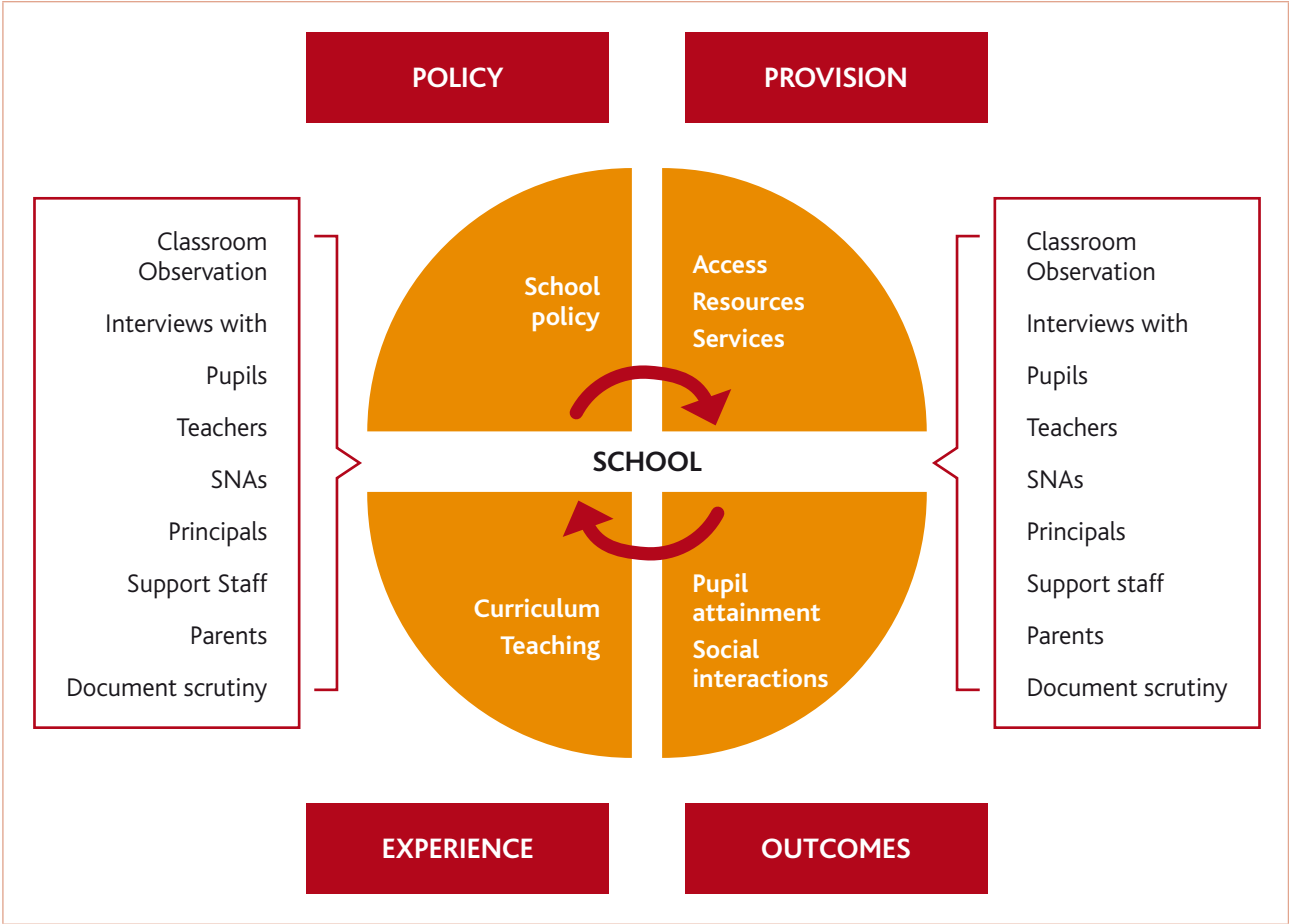
In addition to a focus on the four key areas of policy, provision, experience and outcomes, the researchers considered two other areas of particular importance: communication and relationships were at the heart of much of the work witnessed in schools and the researcher team acknowledged these throughout the study.

3.8   Data Collection During Case Study Visits

3.8.1   Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in schools with a broad range of professionals, parents and pupils. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. These interviews were developed with each sample pupil placed at the hub of data collection and interviews were conducted with those professionals most closely involved in delivering services to that pupil, along with the parents. Wherever possible an interview was conducted with the pupil in the presence of a known adult.

The number and designation of individuals interviewed over the course of two case study visits is provided in Table 9 below. Many respondents were interviewed more than once and the total data set is indicated in Table 10.

Table 9: Individuals interviewed in each case study school

Some individuals were interviewed several times during the course of two visits

	Parents	Pupils	Teachers	Resource/ Support Teachers	Principal/ Deputy Principal	SNAs	Other Professionals
Primary Schools							
1	18	2	3	6	1	3	0
2	5	7	7	2	2	3	0
3	7	6	5	3	1	5	0
4	6	7	8	5	1	6	0
5	8	8	12	1	2	4	0
6	3	4	3	4	1	3	0
7	4	2	4	4	1	2	0
8	2	6	3	0	1	2	0
9	6	4	6	4	1	5	0
10	6	6	4	1	1	3	1
Special Schools							
11	4	3	6	2	2	4	2
12	6	6	5	4	1	0	1
13	4	4	1	3	1	2	1
14	6	7	4	2	2	1	0
Post Primary Schools							
15	5	7	4	3	2	2	2
16	3	5	5	4	2	3	4
17	3	3	3	1	1	2	0
18	6	6	5	5	1	2	0
19	4	5	3	5	1	1	2
20	4	5	2	1	1	2	2
21	7	1	4	0	2	4	3
22	5	5	3	0	2	4	1
23	1	5	3	1	1	4	2
24	3	6	4	0	1	4	0
TOTALS	**126**	**120**	**107**	**61**	**32**	**71**	**21**

Total number of individuals interviewed for formulation of case studies = 538

Table 10: Total data set combined primary, special and post primary schools collated over two visits to each school

Total Data Set Combined Primary, Special And Post Primary Schools	
Interviews	943
Documents	1151
Observations	134
Photographs/pictures	260
Video	9
Website	27
Total Data Set	**2524**

3.8.2   Observations

Non-participant observations of pupils with special educational needs were conducted in a range of teaching and social situations. Observations focused on individual pupils and provided a narrative of activity over a timed period. The data from these observations were coded using codes consistent with those applied to other data sets throughout the fieldwork phase of the research. This helped develop pupil profiles and enabled researchers to see the use of specialist resources and approaches.

The observations conducted as part of the fieldwork within Project IRIS had two main purposes. The first was a process of verification and elaboration of understanding whereby the researchers visited classrooms or other school locations to observe how those ideas expressed in documentation or discussed at interview were being applied. For example where documentation and interviews suggested a particular approach to providing classroom support, possibly through use of SNAs or a specific classroom management strategy, researchers visited classrooms to clarify how these procedures were being implemented in situ.

A second purpose of observation was to ensure the researchers were fully conversant in the context in which the sample schools were operating. Time spent in classrooms afforded opportunities to gain insights into operational procedures, to understand organisational issues and to gain a clear picture of the school population.

3.8.3   Document Scrutiny

Researchers visiting schools were provided with a list of required documentation for analysis. This included policy documents, examples of planning and IEPS, assessment documentation, school newsletters, minutes of meetings and records of SEN resources and provision. Where permission was granted documents were copied and taken for scrutiny and analysis after the school visit. Where available school websites were visited and often provided additional information and in some cases documentation. Photographs were taken in schools to provide examples of specialist resources or approaches to supporting pupils with special educational needs. No photographs of children were taken. Some video materials showing pupils involved in a range of activities were provided by schools and scrutinised alongside documentation. The four main themes of policy, provision, experience, and outcomes were used as the basis for categorising documentation and further codes consistent with those used for other data sets within the project were applied.

Examples of data collection instruments and the full data set can be seen in Appendix 1.

3.8.4 Data Analysis

All data were analysed by research team members. Data from interviews, observations and documents were coded using criteria established under each of the four themes to allow comparison across schools and individual respondents. These codes were established based on an early scrutiny of data from focus groups, survey, interview and documentation. Each code was assigned a clear definition to assist in data analysis and interpretation. All transcripts, observations and documentation was coded independently by two researchers and where discrepancies of interpretation emerged these were discussed until consensus was reached. Where such consensus was not forthcoming arbitration was provided by a third team member. Codes were then grouped under the four main themes and provided to each researcher for categorisation of data. Multi-methods triangulation ensured data verification and enabled the team to interpret findings and come to conclusions based on an extensive data set. Examples of coding and analysis procedures can be found in Appendix 2.

To ensure consistency of interpretation of report data, it is important to have an understanding of terminology used for evidence gathered. Table 11 below demonstrates how data from interviews, observations and documentary analysis have been quantified throughout this report to discuss research findings. The terms most, many, some and few are used consistently to describe evidence derived from case study data. For example for school IEPs, where nine out of ten pupils have such plans this would be categorised as most pupils in that school having IEPs, whereas if four out of ten had plans this would be categorised as some pupils. Similarly, at school level among the ten primary schools in the case study sample, most would refer to eight to nine schools in agreement on a particular issue, many would comprise six to seven, some would relate to three to five schools while few would refer to one to two.

Table 11: Definition of terms

Most	Many	Some	Few
Eight to Ten Pupils	**Six to Seven Pupils**	**Three to Five Pupils**	**0 to Two Pupils**
e.g. eight out of ten pupils have SNA support. Therefore most have SNA support.	e.g. six out of ten pupils have SNA support. Therefore many have SNA support.	e.g. four out of ten pupils have SNA support. Therefore some have SNA support.	e.g. one out of ten pupils have SNA support. Therefore few have SNA support.
Eight to nine schools	**Six to seven schools**	**Three to five schools**	**One to two schools**
e.g. Eight schools have IEPs in place for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore most schools have IEPs in place.	e.g. six schools have IEPs in place for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore many schools have IEPs in place.	e.g. four schools have IEPs in place for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore some schools have IEPs in place.	e.g. two schools have IEPs in place for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore few schools have IEPs in place.

3.9 Summary

The findings presented in the following chapters are based on a large data set compiled through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches. The early establishment of the four key themes of policy, provision, experience and outcomes and the development of codes for analysis, enabled the researchers to handle large quantities of data and to make fair comparisons across schools within each phase of education. The use of Irish and international literature informed development of research instruments and enabled interpretations to be made alongside previously conducted studies related to the specific research questions.

The development of narrative case studies provided researchers with a unique insight into the lives of teachers, pupils, parents and other professionals in a range of contexts and assisted in expanding on survey findings and scrutiny of documentation. Data interpretation was secured by ensuring it was analysed by more than one researcher independently to verify findings and establish trustworthiness.

It is evident that some of the study's findings challenge aspects of DES policy. This reflects the fact that the research provides the overview of the situation at the specific time of data collection and in a stratified sample of schools.

4 Findings

Introduction to Findings from the Research

Research findings are presented in four chapters each addressing one of the four established themes of policy, provision, experience and outcomes. The findings presented are based on a national survey, data from case study schools, scrutiny of relevant documentation and focus groups conducted with service providers.

4.1 Policy Findings: School Special Educational Needs Policies

The policy focus within mainstream schools tended to be on enrolment issues and concerns about securing adequate and appropriate resources to support students with special educational needs in schools. This was evident in primary and post primary schools. Admission to special schools is generally managed on a referral basis where resource issues are less of a concern. Other policies related to SEN and focused on specific procedures or aspects of SEN management, such as IEP deployment and provision organisation, are considered within other findings chapters of this report addressing provision, experience and outcomes.

Most primary (91 per cent) (N=170) and post primary schools (92 per cent) (N=137) responding to the survey reported having a written SEN policy, with many post primary schools commenting that their policy was currently under review, and that it regularly updated. These documents generally reference legislation, including the Education of Persons With Special Educational Needs (EPSEN Act 2004), and many take their reference for defining SEN from the Education Act (1998). Schools also reported taking a whole-school approach when drafting SEN policy and that it was written with the assistance of the school's SEN team.

The proportion of special schools with written SEN policies was slightly less (70 per cent) (N=26), although for many the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is the core ethos as they cater only for this cohort.

> This is a special school so all are included. We actively involve our pupils in events in the wider community. (Principal, special school – survey data)

Figure 2: Proportion of schools with written SEN policies by school type
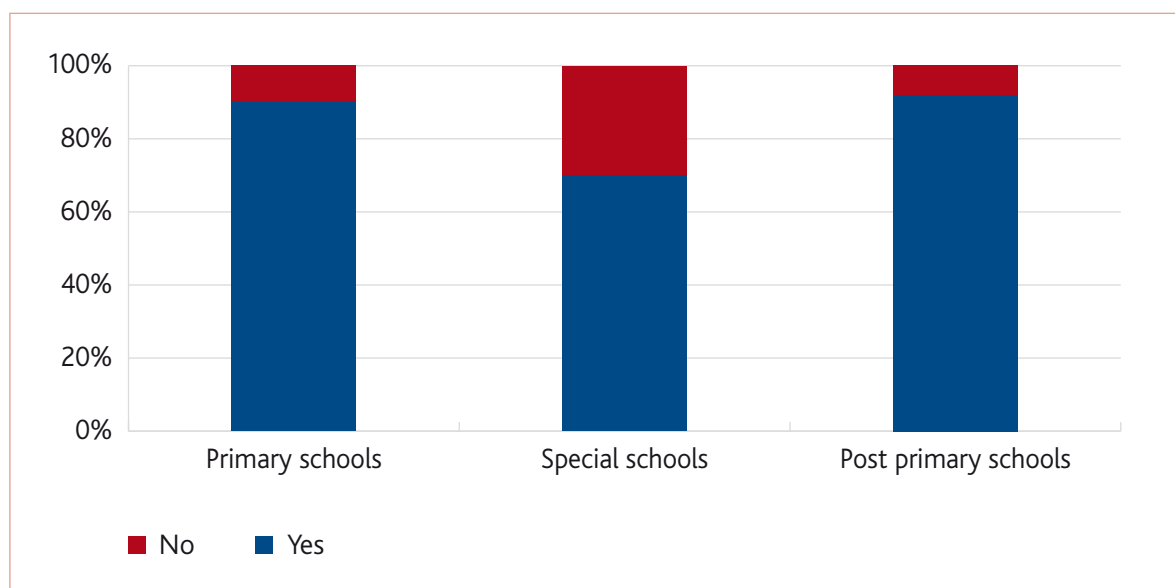
■ N = 17   ■ N = 11   ■ N = 12
■ N = 170   ■ N = 26   ■ N = 137

The SEN policies seen in the case study schools often begin with a statement of commitment and beliefs followed by a description of the framework through which the policy will be deployed. An initial statement reiterating the school's ethos of fostering equal opportunities and developing learner self-esteem was a common feature.

> The aim of [the school] is to provide a Christian, caring learning environment, which facilitates the nurturing of each pupil's full educational potential. The achievement of this aim informs all of the planning processes and activities which occur in our school … Equality of access is the key value that determines the enrolment of children to our school. No child residing within the parish is refused admission for reasons of ethnicity, special educational needs, disability, language/accent, gender, Traveller status, asylum-seeker/refugee status, religious or political beliefs and values, family or social circumstances. (SEN policy document, school 1 mainstream primary)

> We are dedicated to helping each pupil to achieve his/her individual potential with the provision of a quality system of special educational needs being central to this commitment. This educational endeavour and initiative in the Special Needs domain concurs completely with the projected objectives of the school's Mission Statement. (SEN policy document, school 15 mainstream post primary)

In primary schools SEN policies are usually referenced to admissions and enrolment policies describing procedures to be adopted in admitting pupils with special educational needs. These typically define requirements for providing assessment information and, in many instances, specify resources required before admission. In the policies examined it was clear that schools perceive it is the responsibility of the DES to provide appropriate levels of resourcing and that admission of pupils with special educational needs depends on this provision being made.

At post primary level all case study schools accept the responsibility for re-assessment of pupils on entry, recognising that the post primary environment may differ considerably from primary.

In some post primary schools parents must complete an information form before admission detailing their child's needs and progress.

4.1.1   Access to Schools' SEN Policy

Primary, post primary, and special schools reported in the school survey that they often provided copies of the SEN policy to specialist teachers, such as learning support and resource teachers, and to classroom teachers. Copies were also made available to SNAs and to parents, although in many cases they stated that this was only on request.

Figure 3: Dissemination of school's SEN policy to key stakeholders by school type
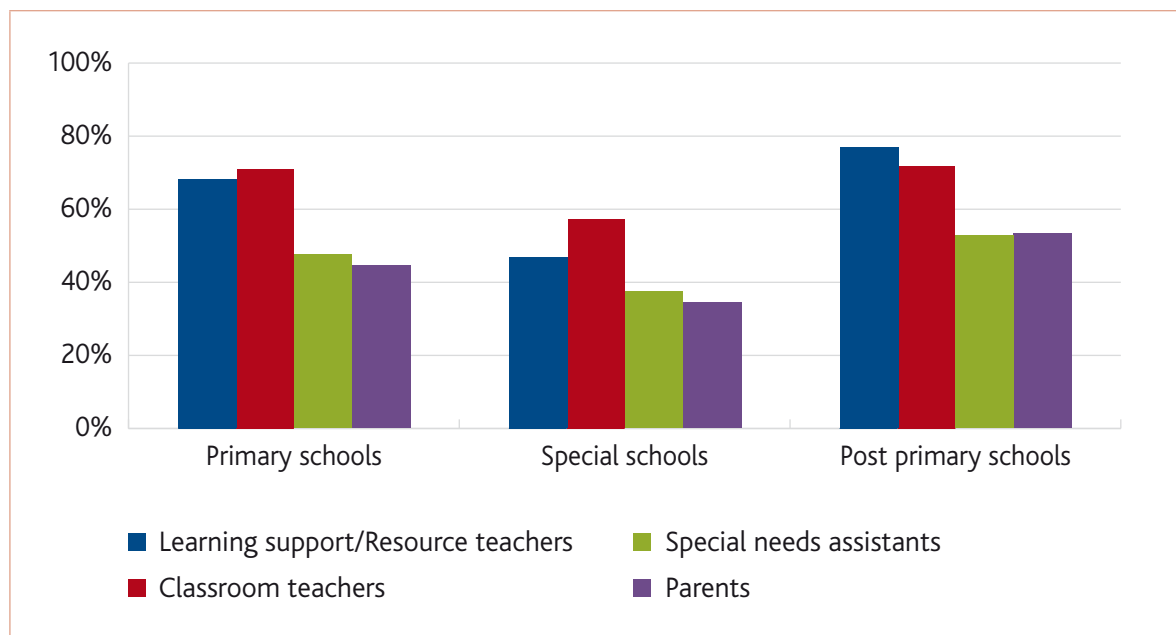
- N = 127 ■ N = 17 ■ N = 115
- N = 133 ■ N = 21 ■ N = 107
- N = 90   ■ N = 14 ■ N = 79
- N = 84   ■ N = 13 ■ N = 80

4.1.2   Implementation of Policy

The challenges of implementing SEN policies were often revealed in school admissions and enrolment policies. The survey revealed a large proportion of primary (82 per cent) (N=153), post primary (82 per cent) (N=122), and special schools (100 per cent) (N=37) agreed their admissions policies gave clear criteria for admission of pupils with special educational needs. However, although mainstream primary and post primary schools showed a commitment to inclusive enrolment, many were concerned at being unable to provide the resources necessary to support these pupils.

> ... schools are reluctant to refuse admission to pupils with special educational needs even when it is not possible to fully meet the child's needs. Often it is not possible to access resources from the NCSE until after the child has started school (Principal, mainstream primary – survey data).

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Figure 4: Proportion of schools who agreed their admissions policy provides clear criteria on admission of pupils with special educational needs by school type
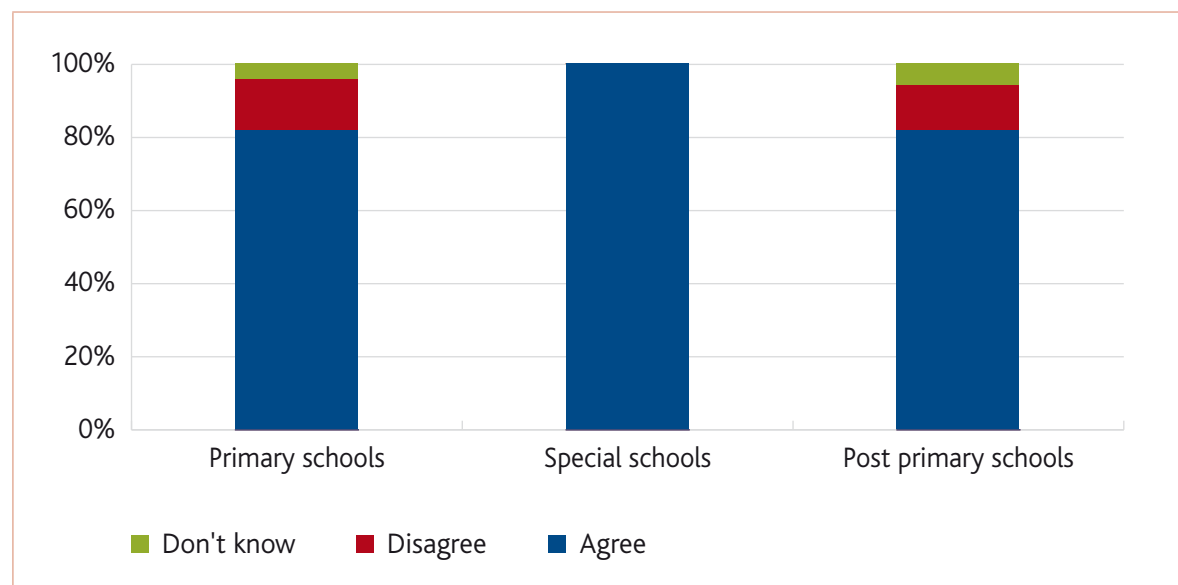
■ N = 7 ■ N = 9
■ N = 26 ■ N = 18
■ N = 153 ■ N = 37 ■ N = 122

While case study schools' SEN and enrolment policies are positive about their role in supporting all learners, many contain clauses that identify reasons why some pupils may not be accepted. Some refer to admission of pupils with special educational needs as included in policy.

> ... unless that would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child. (Admissions policy, school 2 mainstream primary)

Primary and post primary case study schools also seemed to have concerns about their legal position should they be unable to cater for the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

> Recent review process has instructed that questions regarding SEN of children applying for places may not be asked until after a place in school has been offered. Therefore the school must depend on the constitution should a child with SEN be offered a place and it becomes apparent that the school will be unable to meet the needs of the child. (Principal, school 2 mainstream primary)

Some case study school principals and other school professionals expressed the belief that there were some pupils whose presence in the school might distract teachers from teaching or other pupils from learning and reserved the right to refuse admission to such individuals. This is reflected in some policy statements which state admission may be refused if the presence of a pupil with special educational needs might be:

> inconsistent with both the best interests of the pupil concerned and the effective provision of education for other pupils with whom the pupil concerned is to be educated (Admissions policy, school 15 mainstream post primary)

One primary case study school also raised concerns on the impact of including pupils with special educational needs in the classroom without adequate resources and the impact this might have on other pupils.

> What worries me is at present we are obliged to take children in but nobody is obliged to grant them any supports thus infringing on the rights of the other children who are losing out and suffering needlessly. (Principal, school 5 mainstream primary)

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Some SEN policies in case study schools provide advice to teachers on managing children with diagnosed needs. For example, in one post primary (school 21) the policy draws staff attention to an internally developed SEN booklet that gives brief introductions to a number of diagnosed conditions (ADHD, Asperger's syndrome, Down syndrome, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and general learning disabilities). The document advises teachers on appropriate teaching strategies and identifies the challenges pupils are likely to face. Some SEN detail is taken directly from legislation and advisory documents such as DES Circular 08/02.

In all schools visited the responsibilities of specific individuals for implementing SEN policy were well defined. In particular the responsibilities of resource and learning support teachers were clearly stated. In post primary schools there were many instances of clearly defined team processes involving guidance counsellors, and on occasions the chaplain, in providing specific support for individuals considered at risk of educational failure or in social need.

Admission to special schools visited was generally on the basis of reports provided by professionals, including educational psychologists and HSE professionals. All of these schools offered helpful information to parents outlining the resources available and the range of specialist class provision (e.g. ASD classes), and the categories of SEN for which the school is seen as appropriate.

4.1.3   School Evaluation of SEN Policies

Few case study schools have established criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of their SEN policies. Where these do exist they tend to be based on broad statements related to sources of evidence but which do not state the criteria whereby effective judgement of policy success may be made. Statements such as the two presented below indicate recognition of the need to evaluate policy but were far from typical of the documents reviewed during this research.

- Evidence of greater inclusion of pupils with less withdrawal from classroom.
- Evidence of greater communication between class and support teacher.
- Progress of pupils with special needs monitored through assessment.
- Feedback from teachers and parents.
- Inspector's reports.

(SEN policy, school 10 mainstream primary)

- Pupils with special educational needs are identified, assessed and receive appropriate provision.
- Suitable programmes are in place for individual pupils and for groups of pupils at both junior and senior cycle.
- Targets are set for each individual availing of special needs provision and their progress is measurable and measured regularly.
- Parents and the school authorities are informed of progress as appropriate.
- Pupils receive appropriate professional support and that support is available on site where possible.
- Teachers receive appropriate professional development support.

(SEN policy, school 17 mainstream post primary)

4.1.4 Policy within Special Schools

All four case study special schools displayed evidence of established policies relating to admissions and enrolment. Decisions on enrolment were made by a team comprising professionals (SENO, school principal, multi-agency) and the school board of management. All four schools accommodated parental choice and explored educational options available while assisting their decision-making in advice provision. Admission criteria for school 11 were based on the Education Act 1998 and Education Welfare Act 2000. Schools 11, 12, 13 and 14 had enrolment policies which outlined their nature and the range of specialist provision within them. Schools 11 and 13 outlined additional specialist class provision catering for children in specialist ASD/early intervention provision emphasising those pupils for whom the school was deemed appropriate. One special school in the study, with a population that includes pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD), was perceived by parents and school staff as more tolerant and accepting of difficult behaviours than might otherwise be associated with a mainstream school.

The principal of special school 14 referred to the recent fluidity around the pupil profile in terms of intake. Their intake is based on professional advice and previous schooling experiences.

> Recommendation from the psychologist for our school, that it would be suitable, and this is quite often due to the setting that they've been in prior to coming here. (Principal, school 14 special school)

Children within all four case study special schools were seen by staff as unlikely to cope in a mainstream environment which would place too many academic pressures on them. While not explicitly cited in their policies, some teachers interviewed indicated that schools frequently accommodated pupils previously in mainstream who had been subjected to bullying. The paradox of inclusion and the role of the special school were paramount in respondents' justification of the special school's ability to facilitate the disaffected pupil as well as the pupil who may have severe autism; specifically pupils who by account cannot function in the mainstream setting.

> I think there'll always be a role for a special school and a very prominent role. We can talk about inclusivity, but the special needs are so wide and so varied, that it's very hard to say special needs should be included in the mainstream, because special needs, like, what is normal, what is special? It's such… I suppose an abstract term, in that regard. (Principal, school 13, special school)

The conundrum of separate provision versus inclusion was addressed by a teacher in special school 13 who had previously worked in a mainstream school with three additional special units. Having witnessed positive experiences for pupils there in relation to access to typical peers and choice he suggested that the separate setting may not be the most appropriate for those with behavioural issues. Based on his experience of both settings, he considered the mainstream settings with additional units had benefits for the pupil with EBD by having typical peers as role models. Respondents in all four special schools saw these schools as appropriate to pupils' needs and advantageous in terms of low teacher pupil ratio, availability of resources, and availability of SNAs.

> … often I'd see children coming in here that would get made worse with time if they, you know, I think they're sort of thinking that other children and, you know, they may be copying them. So, certainly it has its advantages but I've always said that this would be better as a unit in a mainstream. (Teacher, school 13, special school)

This teacher and several respondents in this school highlighted difficulties associated with the large catchment area, in particular the journey times experienced by pupils:

> Every day he's going to be up at seven, half seven, and, you know, and doesn't get home till 5 o'clock. It's a very, very long day. Whereas if the support's in place within his primary school in his local town with local kids that he can play with and things like that, you know, I think that would be a better option. (Teacher, school 13, special school)

Two of the four special schools provide specialised preschool education (special schools 11 & 13). Relevant policies define the function of these pre-school units (admission to which requires a confirmed or working diagnosis of ASD). Enrolment is decided by a combination of professionals (SENO, school principal and multi-agency) and the school board of management. One deputy principal described how preschool provision may be a temporary feature in the child's life:

> We have a preschool and some of those children, they won't stay with us, they are just being prepared to go to whichever is the best setting for themselves. (Deputy principal, school 11 special school)

4.1.5   Changes in School Policies between First and Second School Visits

Few policy changes were observed in the case study schools over the course of the project. In some instances enrolment and SEN policies were updated, often with further clarification or advice provided for parents. For example, primary school 1, in an updated enrolment policy, elaborated on the conditions for admission of a pupil with special educational needs and also suggested that for some parents consideration of a special school placement might be appropriate.

> Children with special needs will be resourced in accordance with the level of resources provided by the Department of Education and Science to the Board of Management. Educational resources and facilities as outlined by a professional and/or medical report should be put in place prior to the child's first day in the school. Notwithstanding the availability of such resources, parents of children who are unsatisfied with the level of educational provision in our school, are advised to consider a special school which is designed and resourced to specifically cater for the needs of children with specific learning/behavioural difficulties. (Enrolment policy, school 1 mainstream primary)

These reservations abpit pupil admissions were common across primary and post primary schools with similar statements regarding pupils who may not be suitable for enrolment evident in many of the school policy documents seen (post primary school 15; post primary school 19; post primary school 18; primary school 3; primary school 6).

In some instances (primary school 1) enrolment policies stated that they would be updated regularly, but the dating of policies suggested this often did not happen. In one primary school (primary school 7) an enrolment policy identified as being in draft form during the first visit was in a similar position at the second visit. This lack of policy development may reflect uncertainties around the EPSEN Act and in some instances schools reported that they were awaiting leadership in policy initiatives at national level before implementing major policy shifts (primary school 1; primary school 4; post primary school 19).

The special schools within the study tended to have enrolment policies that attempted to identify those pupils for whom the school was deemed most appropriate (special school 11; special school 13). There was no change in these policies during the period of the research.

4.2 Summary

Based on survey data and that obtained from case study schools it is clear that most schools have SEN policies. Those scrutinised indicate that the criteria for enrolment of students with special educational needs could act as a barrier to inclusion of some, in particular those with complex needs or challenging behaviours. The Draft General Scheme of an Education (Admission to Schools) Bill (Government of Ireland, 2013, pp6-7), if fully implemented should address the exclusionary clause in policies. In case study schools it was evident that not all stakeholders, in particular parents, had ready access to or were involved in developing SEN policies. There is no evidence of a systematic approach to reviewing and updating school SEN related policies.

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5   Provision Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the national survey and from the case study schools. It offers details on provision for pupils with special educational needs and how this affects their education. Such provision in mainstream primary and post primary schools is presented early in this chapter under a series of headings dealing with key themes that emerged from the data. Special school provision is addressed in a discrete section later in the chapter and also considers key themes and issues that emerged.

The chapter is structured under the following sub-headings:
- School perspectives on provision for students with special educational needs.
- Assessment and identification of SEN in mainstream schools.
- Testing and assessment in mainstream schools.
- Mainstream school resource organisation and models of student support.
- Curriculum access.
- Individual education plans.
- Support for therapeutic needs.
- Guidance counsellors.
- Training and professional development.
- Special school provision.
- Transition between phases of education.

5.1   School Perspectives on Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs

Within the survey data a small majority of primary (56 per cent) (N=105) and post primary schools (53 per cent) (N=79) agreed that their current SEN provision was satisfactory. A slightly larger percentage of special schools (66 per cent) (N=24) reported satisfaction with provision in their schools.

Figure 5: School respondents satisfaction with provision for pupils with special educational needs in their schools
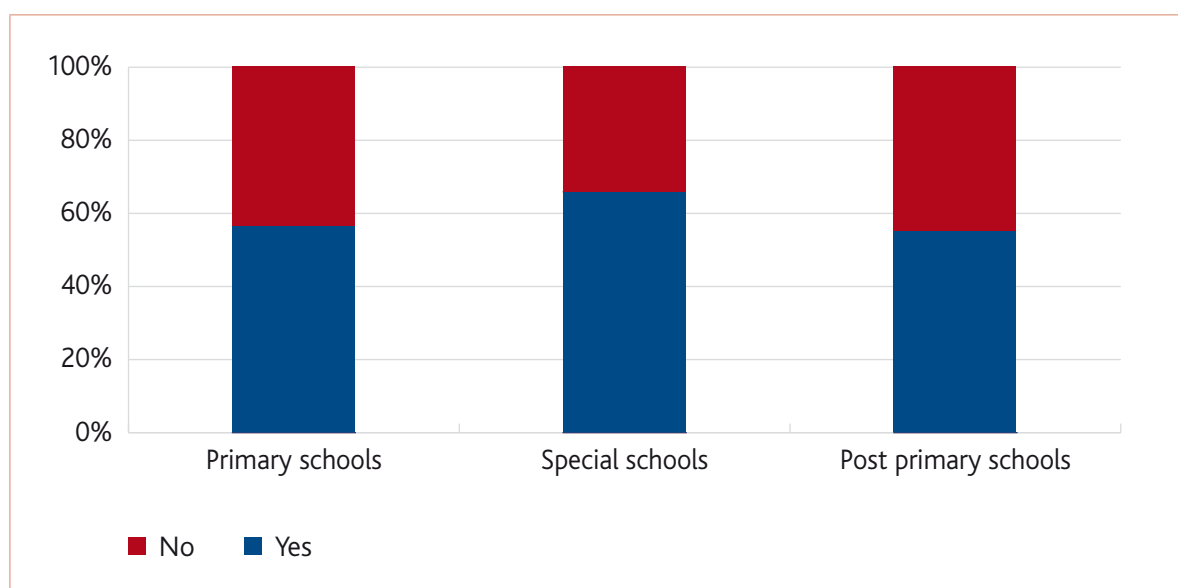
N = 82   N = 13   N = 70
N = 105   N = 24   N = 79

Those not satisfied with their provision were concerned about maintaining current levels of support, given cutbacks in resources and funding and the growth in pupil numbers year after year.

> Our GA (General Allocation) is based on old figures and does not take into account modest growth in pupil numbers which would see us gaining an extra 1/2 teacher by my estimate. Also we had SNA hours halved in review and though on a care basis it is the correct decision on an educational basis that child needs and will continue to need and would benefit from the extra time. This wasn't taken into account. (Primary school, principal – survey data)

Such concerns were also evident during case study school visits with some giving examples of where financial measures taken by the Department for Education and Skills had affected their capacity to deliver the service they desired. Issues were raised about the challenges faced by SENOs who are employed by the NCSE and are responsible for deciding resource allocation for schools in relation to students with low incidence disabilities.

> The SENO has a very thankless job, and he is restricted by the remit of what is put before him by the Department and by Department laws. The SENO tries his best to be fair within the laws that pertain, which unfortunately is restrictive. But there isn't much, neither he nor I nor any teachers can do about it. I do think that it's not a job that anyone would take on lightly, because the amount of cutbacks have been so enormous, that schools and parents I'm sure have become very irate because they see that children do lose out, but it's not the fault of the SENO. The SENO is only implementing what is put before him. (Principal, school 6 mainstream primary)

A similar statement came from a post primary principal who felt current financial difficulties were placing a strain on the relationship between school and SENO.

> … the relationship [with the SENO] is always quite fraught because of the resource allocation behind the scenes going on with it. So it wouldn't be the most productive of relationships at times and certainly the students would be getting very little if any benefit from our work with the SENO. (Principal, school 15 mainstream post primary)

However a high proportion of primary (87 per cent) (N=163), post primary (87 per cent) (N=130) and special schools (76 per cent) (N=28) who responded to the survey felt the resources allocated by the NCSE had a positive impact on teachers working with students with special educational needs. Primary and special schools cited the importance of additional staffing as being most important for ensuring students with special educational needs are included in mainstream education.

> Staffing is critical in our school. The children have very high behavioural and medical needs as well as complex educational needs, so both teaching and SNA numbers are fundamental to the educational service we provide. (Primary school, principal – survey data)

Figure 6: **School respondent level of agreement on whether NCSE allocated resources have significant impact on teachers of pupils with special educational needs**
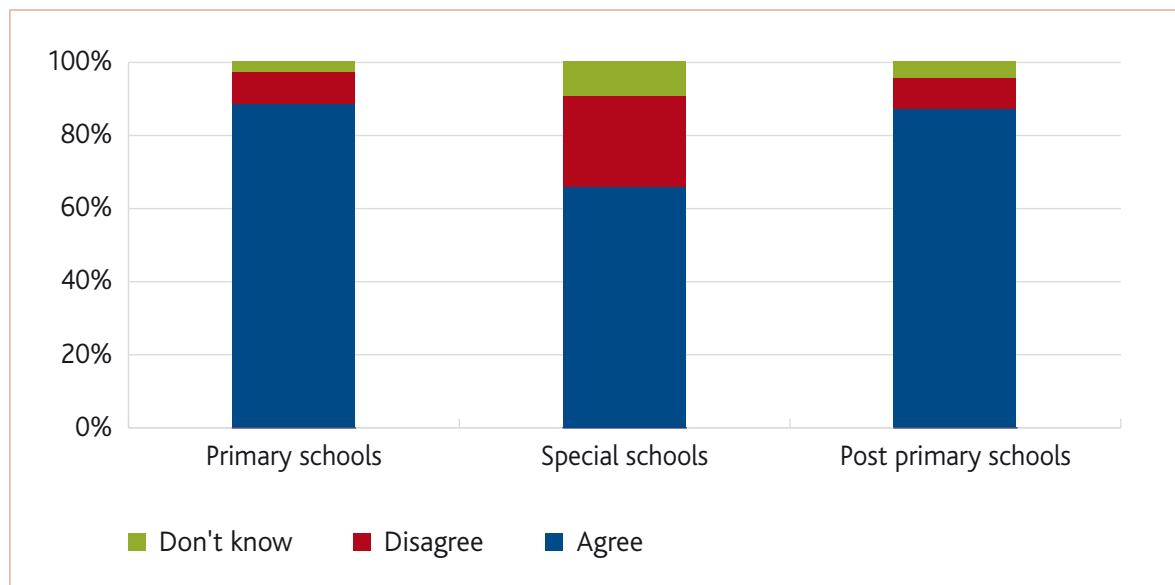
■ N = 6   ■ N = 3   ■ N = 6
■ N = 18   ■ N = 6   ■ N = 13
■ N = 163   ■ N = 28   ■ N = 130

All post primary schools commented on the importance of not just staffing, but additional resources in general – the level of resourcing was a common theme throughout the sector. One principal articulated a belief that for some pupils it was critical to identify the impact of appropriate resourcing.

> We had one student in particular, we couldn't have managed. And it was becoming, it was just becoming a nightmare if that's the right word, where without betraying anything about the student, he just used to run out of class, he trashed rooms, he trashed the learning support department, he climbed up on top of lockers, he hid in corners, he struck, he physically assaulted his SNA, and we do not have the resources to manage that ... He's subsequently in another institution, where his needs have been well met, I met his mother the other day, his brother's coming here next year, lovely guy, and he's found some happiness in life, but we just couldn't meet his needs, we just hadn't got the resources. (Principal, school 19 mainstream post primary)

5.2   Assessment and Identification of SEN in Mainstream Schools

The initial assessment of a child's needs is critical to ensuring that appropriate provision for teaching is made and resources provided. According to the case study data from primary schools obtaining an initial assessment in order to access resources is seen as problematic by parents and professionals. There was a general consensus that the length of time it takes to obtain an assessment can inhibit the progress of children on entry to school and that they may not be afforded the required support and teachers may have inadequate assessment detail to inform planning. The restrictions in the number of psychological assessments allocated to each school per year along with the volume of paperwork required and the essential time commitment needed to get a pupil assessed are perceived as barriers in the process. A similar challenge relates to the difficulties of acquiring timely assessments from health service professionals.

A parent of a child with Asperger's syndrome described the importance of early assessment procedures and clearly links this to the provision of resources to address his needs in school.

> Carl is 7 years old. He was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when he was around four, he started the process of being diagnosed around two and a half, he was sent for assessments and they took two years to assess him, and when he started school then we got the final diagnosis that he has Asperger's syndrome, and from then on he had a special needs assistant in school, and he's been progressing since then. (Parent 4, child with Asperger's Syndrome, school 1 mainstream primary)

Some parents in the case study primary schools expressed frustration with the bureaucratic nature of the resource allocation model and its dependence on obtaining timely assessments. Both they and school principals emphasise the fact that parents often pay for a service or seek financial support from the school. The principal of one primary school described having sought financial support from the St Vincent de Paul charitable fund to assist parents paying for assessments. As an example she presented evidence of a pupil for whom a trail of paperwork in trying to obtain necessary assessments from HSE professionals, psychologists and other clinicians stretched over a four-year period. Parents and school professionals expressed unease about an inequitable situation in which parents who can afford to do so feel pushed to pay for private assessments while others have no means to pursue this action.

Because of the time required to obtain an assessment many resource teachers were concerned that some pupils with difficulties could leave primary without obtaining the appropriate assessments. They therefore prioritised pupils at the upper end of school to ensure they had assessments completed before transition to post primary.

Even when appropriate assessments have been obtained, many perceive accessing therapeutic services as a challenge. Opportunities for physiotherapy and occupational therapy appear limited in some instances, with pupils who require this service having to wait a considerable time. One parent of a child attending a special school reported having received a physiotherapist assessment a year prior to interview but was still awaiting the service which she was told her son required. In this case the school principal emphasised that while all therapeutic services were provided on site, with so many children requiring therapies it was impossible to provide adequately to meet all needs.

The transfer of assessment information between primary and post primary schools is a critical factor in ensuring continuity of support and provision. Post primary case study schools reported good relationships with primary and valued the quality of the assessment information they provide.

> We've a very strong link with the primary school and a very strong link with the resource department in the primary school, and that's your building block. Once you've that link, then you can develop it into coming into second level. (Principal, school 17 mainstream post primary)

The role of the SENO was often cited as critical in this process and post primary case study schools welcomed their interventions. Some concerns were expressed about the time lag between initial assessments and provision of necessary resources. Similarly, there were occasional delays while post primary schools took pupils through their own assessment procedures.

> Yes, well my communication with her [SENO] anyway, on paper or by phone is very effective, and she's very available, and sometimes, alright there can be delays in response, and I don't, I have never studied where it's at, maybe whether it's been recommendations or maybe department level, or being processed at NCSE level. But there can be a significant time delay by the time you make the application, to getting the resource, particularly if it's hardware or software support. And of course there's greater scrutiny and pull back I feel upon our resource hours sanctioned, you know, and there's also, maybe more in depth critical appraisal of even the retention of a special needs assistance,

particularly going from full time to shared, if anything we have seen that support being diminished. (Principal, School 23 mainstream post primary)

5.3 Testing and Assessment in Mainstream Schools

Data from the case study schools revealed that a wide range of formal and informal assessments are being used. Types of assessment included standardised tests, whole school screening, diagnostic testing of literacy skills and whole school formative assessment. Assessment among the schools can be considered across three main purposes: whole school screening tests; diagnostic testing and assessment for learning practices. Whole school assessment practices are evident in both primary and post primary.

5.3.1 Primary Schools Level Testing and Assessment

On whole school screening, nine out of ten primary schools use the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) in senior infants. One school used the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) in junior infants and also used the MIST in senior infants. MIST aims to give a profile of class performance and to screen for children who are in the lowest 20-25 per cent of their peer group in reading and writing. An intervention programme (Forward Together) is designed as a follow-up for children identified with significant difficulties in reading and writing though there was no evidence that this programme had been used in any of the schools. At the end of senior infants and beginning of first class the Drumcondra Test of Early Literacy-Screening (DTEL-S) is used in a small number of schools. This assesses children's word recognition and early reading comprehension where the child already has some reading ability.

All primary schools reported using standardised reading tests throughout the school. Seven out of ten use the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (DPRT), three use the MICRA T reading test. For maths assessment the SIGMA T is preferred by seven out of ten, the Drumcondra Primary Maths Test is used by three schools. Since implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) schools are required to report standardised results for English, Irish and maths annually to parents, school boards and the DES. One case study school reported also using the Drumcondra Primary Spelling Test on an annual basis.

Diagnostic testing included the Non Word Intelligence Test (NWIT) which is used by many schools. This group test, presented orally by the teacher, enables general ability to be assessed independently of reading. Three schools use the NWIT in first class, four schools in second class, three at fourth and two at fifth. The NWIT tests assess aspects of language and thinking not necessarily represented in measures of pupil attainments, and pinpoint low-achieving and slow-reading pupils who may have high underlying ability. Four schools reported using diagnostic assessment tests throughout the school, two of these reported using diagnostic tests 'as needed'. A wide range of reported tests included: Jackson Phonics tests (two schools); Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA)(1); Aston Index (one); Schonell word recognition/spelling tests (one); Lucid COPS (one); Dolch words (one). Miscue analysis is used by one school – at first and at third class.

Among the case study schools there was some evidence of formative assessments used by class teachers to monitor progress and inform planning. Teachers used observation checklists in one primary school (school 1). These are a good example of using an annotated checklist 'window' to gather, record and use information about a child's progress. One school reported using Running Records to monitor children's reading fluency, followed by Miscue Analysis to record strategies a child uses while reading. Another school uses the Drumcondra Primary Spelling Test. This test includes both words that pupils would be likely to encounter during the reading, spelling and writing instruction in school, and others that are of high utility (high-frequency words). DPST tracks pupils' progress from year to year. It is linked to the learning objectives of the Primary School English Curriculum (NCCA, 1999). A portfolio of work samples was reported to be in use by

one school. Teacher observation of a pupil's use of reading strategies involved a pupil with dyslexia in a small group setting where following independent reading of a chapter in a novel each child is given a role of checker, questioner, summariser or predictor. A recording sheet is used by pupils to record his/her response to reading. The class and learning support teachers circulate around groups and keep anecdotal notes of pupil responses. (Observation, school 10 mainstream primary).

Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches were not in evidence in most schools though two reported using teacher observation and teacher designed tests to monitor pupil progress. This was limited to junior infants in one school, but in the other, AfL practices were reported to be used across all classes. This included teacher observation and teacher designed tests and other examples such as using pupils' work samples, portfolios, curriculum profiles and self-assessments to monitor progress and inform planning.

The reliance on standardised testing as a useful means of assessing outcomes for pupils with special educational needs was questioned by professionals during the research school visits. As an example, the principal of school 1 challenged the message given to parents through what he perceived to be a naïve use of testing.

> You should be measuring are they reaching their potential, not how they measure up against the national average. So there is a problem with that. The emphasis upon standardised scores and parents asking for them. And it's very difficult for parents whose children don't achieve, because those children might be working just as hard as other people. You don't get ninety per cent in a test just because you're good, because you study hard. You get ninety per cent because you have the ability to do it, you know. (Principal, school 1 mainstream primary)

Within the same school the resource teacher had concerns that a focus on academic outcomes might not be wholly appropriate as an indicator of progress being made by some pupils:

> The tests are probably the easiest to get something concrete on [in terms of measuring progress]. But, no, we'd say in the likes of, it'd be, how are they participating in class, their behaviour. If there was a behaviour problem, has that improved, or has their attention span increased, little by little, little steps, and definitely are they happier? I mean there must be nothing more miserable than coming to school and not being happy, you know (Resource teacher, school 1 mainstream primary)

5.3.2   Post Primary Testing and Assessment

Summative mainstream assessment at post primary level includes the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP); the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). One post primary had introduced the ASDAN accreditation scheme.

Most post primary schools reported regular use of three main tests: WRAT4; Group Reading Test and CAT3. The WRAT4 was reported to be used by six schools across all the years; the Group Reading Test and the CAT3 were each used by five in first year only. It is not clear if these are used as part of the school's entrance procedures and transition programme or if they form part of ongoing assessment for students during their first year in post primary.

The Wide Range Achievement Test (4th Ed.) (WRAT 4) is a norm-referenced achievement test that measures the basic skills of word reading, sentence comprehension, spelling and maths computation. Ease of administration and scoring makes this a popular test with teachers. WRAT 4 identifies areas of strengths and weaknesses among pupils and can identify those with learning difficulties. Schools varied when they used WRAT 4; six schools used it in first and second year; four in third year; three schools in transition year. Six

schools used the WRAT 4 in fifth year while four schools used it in sixth year. This variation is likely to be linked to the need for information among first year pupils and again in fifth year as schools compile assessment information for applying for examination accommodations for Leaving Certificate.

Group Reading Test 11 (GRT 11) suitable for ages 6.0 to 15.3 is recommended for use as a group screening test to identify pupils who need individual assessment or additional support. The test assesses student knowledge of phonics, sentence completion and reading comprehension in a single test. It also measures how a student is performing compared to their peers at a national level. The tasks include sentence completion and passage comprehension at all levels. One post primary reported using this across all the years, five schools use it with first years.

CAT 4 (Cognitive Abilities Test, 4th Ed.) suitable for ages 7.0 to 17+ is a widely used test of reasoning abilities. It covers four areas of cognitive abilities – verbal reasoning (verbal classification/verbal analogies); quantitative reasoning (number analogies/number series); non-verbal reasoning (figure classification/figure matrices) and spatial ability (figure analysis/figure recognition). The results give a group profile of the class and individual feedback provides pupils with a summary of their strengths and weaknesses. Five schools used this test in first year and two schools used it in second year. One used CAT 4 across all age groups in post primary. Career guidance support can be linked with information from the CAT 4 for older pupils linking their profile of strengths and abilities to career choice.

The Differential Aptitude Test (DAT, 1995) consists of eight subtests: verbal reasoning, abstract reasoning, perceptual speed + accuracy, mechanical reasoning, space relations, spelling + language usage. It is suitable for pre Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate pupils and Irish norms are listed. Three schools reported using this test in third year.

A limited range of formative assessment procedures were evident in schools; work samples in two; portfolios in one (in fourth year only); school-based literacy and maths tests were used by a single school.

5.4   Mainstream School Resource Organisation and Models of Student Support

Professionals in the case study schools agreed that a team approach to meeting pupils' special educational needs was essential. While accepting this principle primary schools organised their SEN provision in a variety of ways including the development of a dedicated SEN team; whole school approaches; rotation of support and mainstream teachers.

Many schools combined the GAM assigned hours with the resource hours allocated to create a SEN team consisting of learning support and resource teachers who had a shared workload. In one school the SEN team members were assigned to year/class groupings such as infants, first and second class, third and fourth and fifth and sixth. This system was developed to ensure the diverse needs of children with difficulties in all years were addressed. In another school an assistant principal was given a SEN post that involved a limited area of responsibility:

> … her post is really about helping identifying the children who are maybe starting to struggle, seeing what they need, if they need assessment, arranging for them to get assessed. (Deputy principal, school 10 mainstream primary)

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One principal emphasised the necessity for a whole-school approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs:

> … it has to be a team approach and I mean the whole team and it has to be how each staff member greets that child, including the secretary, including the cleaner … and everybody knowing what the needs of the children are, and we would have a section on our staff meeting, where particular needs that children have, because everybody's meeting the kids on the yard, everybody's meeting them. (Principal, school 3 mainstream primary)

Schools used a number of strategies to support the SEN team in their work including assigning weeks for testing, enabling the team to regularly meet and plan and facilitating contact between the SEN team and classroom teachers. In two schools Friday afternoons were assigned to SEN team meetings and planning as these teachers were not required to teach at that time. Another school was proactive in facilitating communication between the SEN team and classroom teachers:

> … depending on whose day it is, so that resource teacher would see each member of staff that they have to deal with for ten minutes, either in the morning or the afternoon, and then on the Friday, the class teacher puts their work, their plans, into the special needs department pigeon hole, so at least they know what's being taught in the class. (Principal, school 9 mainstream primary)

While the use of withdrawal from class for support was the commonly seen approach, one school offers support to pupils almost exclusively within the classroom setting:

> For us, that's a centralised area because first the classroom should be the centre of the child's day rather than outside the classroom, and all children are supported within the classroom at that level … we try to do it inside the classroom rather than outside. (Principal, school 10 mainstream primary)

In one primary visited the school operated a system whereby resource teachers remained in post for a limited number of years before returning to general classroom duties. In this way it is suggested that they take the experience and expertise they have gained during their time as resource teachers back into the classroom for the benefit of a wider range of pupils.

A class teacher commented on the advantages her experiences as a support teacher brought to her current practice:

> I have certain characters in my class, who I would have went in, and who would have, before I had done learning support and before I had done resource teaching, I wouldn't have known how to handle them. And I might have thought they were actually weak, or their behaviour was poor behaviour, whereas now I don't think it is. It has given me a completely different perspective on children who are weaker and our expectations of them in a room and how to deal with them. I think all teachers should get the opportunity to go into that area. (Teacher 5, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 1 mainstream primary)

Support for pupils with special educational needs in primary and post primary case study schools is generally co-ordinated by an individual allocated specific responsibility. Despite the lack of official designation of a SEN co-ordinator (SENCo) within Irish legislation, this title is used in many schools to describe an individual with management responsibilities for pupils with special educational needs. Resource and learning support teachers observed during the research were well organised and provided most interventions with individual pupils. There is a clear focus on individual pupils with much of the support provided in primary and post primary being specifically targeted at individual needs rather than addressing the development of whole class planning and support to ensure recognition of diversity. During research visits it was evident this support was provided through a number of approaches including withdrawal from mainstream class; small group support; and in-class support.

Observation in schools and interview data collected during visits indicated that withdrawal from lessons for either individual tuition or work in small groups tended to be a dominant model of support at primary and post primary. Many schools visited had policies outlining the types of support provided and the responsibilities of staff for their management. Decisions about which pupils should get individual support were often made on the basis of psychological and other standardised assessment procedures with allocation of time given to pupils seen as in need of this support. The expertise developed by resource and learning support teachers was focused on generating learning programmes for pupils and there were fewer instances when they were seen to provide in-class support. Resource and learning support teachers perceived individual support as important in providing an opportunity to address pupils' individual needs even when acknowledging that this may not conform wholly to an inclusion agenda.

> … inclusion and all's grand and I agree with it, but if there's a child here with specific learning difficulties and they need one on one, and that is what has made the difference to my weans this year, some of the children like, you would have been working in a group with children that have the same ability, but they're not, they still need an individualised programme. So I have been working with two girls I've been working with individually, I was working with them in a group last year, and they would not have made near as much progress as they've made this year, because the programmes' tailored to meet their needs and not the person sitting beside them like, so I know in some cases that's important, but I definitely think you need the one on one as well. (Support teacher 1, student with SSLD, school 3 mainstream primary).

Some schools had moved towards developing approaches to providing in-class support with an intention of moving away from withdrawal as a default model. In some instances concerns were expressed that pupils may be becoming dependent on individual support and that their ability to cope in classroom or other social situations was impeded through use of withdrawal. Where efforts were made to increase in-class as opposed to individual withdrawn support, however, staff acknowledged it took time and that a number of challenges needed to be addressed.

> It's [support given] generally in the classroom setting. We have found now with Bradley that he can get very dependent on one on one, and it's better maybe to have him involved in the class, it's better to keep him at his desk, and to keep reminding him. Even, I might sit beside him for an hour or two, you know, just to. But it's better, he gets very dependent, we have found that, and he'll do nothing on his own then. (Resource teacher 4, student with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

The theme of dependency around use of individual withdrawn support was one that emerged in several post primary schools. For example a teacher described student lack of confidence when individual support is not provided as a major inhibiting factor in his learning:

> … he has to be prepared to do it himself, because when I sit there and say to him 'no' because I'm sitting beside him and I say 'no, go back and look at these examples,' and he like says 'I can't do it,' and I say go on and try something. If you are sitting an exam what are you going to do? Try something, and then he will get it right, and he will be able to do it. But the thing is that exam motivation is something we are trying to foster in that kind of way and that sort of stuff directly. (Teacher 6, student with physical dyspraxia, school 19 mainstream post primary)

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5.4.1   Small Group Support

At post primary level learning support allocation was generally used for small group teaching that brought students with special educational needs together. Only a small proportion of support teacher time was devoted to individual sessions. Some students reported liking smaller group sessions which positively affected their ability to learn.

> Putting me into smaller classes so I can like, get it, talk about problems better and that. And it's not like it's crowded and you can get help easier if you are stuck on something. (Student 7, student dyspraxia, school 19 mainstream post primary)

At post primary level some teachers were often aware that their students disliked being taught in individual withdrawal sessions and could be self-conscious about how others perceive them.

> Sometimes we find students don't like one-to-one. They like being in small groups, maybe a group of two or three. They don't like it when they are just on their own, because they are standing outside a door and they feel everybody's looking at them. "Why are you going in with her?" Stuff like that. (Learning support teacher 1, school 21 mainstream post primary)

In some instances groups were withdrawn for support from across different classes within the same year group in school on the basis of their special educational need. Post primary students were often withdrawn from Irish lessons for support from a specialist teacher.

> They just set up learning support for me because I don't do Irish. And I am in learning support at the moment because I don't do Irish and it really helps me because teachers do revision with maths and English and history and geography. (Student 2, student with BMGLD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

Often when students were withdrawn the resource or learning support teachers made use of specialist resources specifically designed for use with pupils with special educational needs. In post primary withdrawal often takes place with groups of students who work together on specifically focused learning needs. On several occasions (as below) students were observed working in resource rooms with a specialist teacher who had prepared resources for their needs.

> Observation takes place in a resource class during English lesson. It is a small room, with lots of charts on the walls and books on shelves. There are 3 pupils sitting at a round table. The resource teacher sits with the girls. The group is working on a SNIP reading exercise. The girls have a list of words that they read out for the teacher. As the first girl reads, the others follow the words on their own list. The teacher goes through the list of words that the girls are to practise for tonight's homework. She calls out each word and the girls repeat it together. The teacher moves onto revision work that the girls will be doing in the last weeks of term. (Observation – mainstream post primary)

In small group support sessions resource teachers made good use of student interests to ensure engagement with learning materials. An example of this was a post primary teacher being observed using reports from a football match to encourage reading and discussion in a session with five students.

Most post primary students appreciated their learning support sessions and believed they were helping them to make progress:

> The support was excellent because it just helps me understand what the maths is about. (Student 2, student with BMGLD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

5.4.2 In-Class Support

In many primary and post primary schools moving away from withdrawn support to support in the classroom is a topic of discussion. The perception is that this model is preferred by the Department for Education and Skills and several schools, primary and post primary, have experimented with developing in-class support from resource and learning support teachers.

Some principals acknowledged the importance of moving towards a more in-class means of providing support, though they suggested there were challenges to achieving this.

> In a way, I think the Department [of Education and Skills], just hearing about a WSE [whole school evaluation] that was on recently, where they were saying that they want resource teachers to be working in class more than withdrawing the children from the class, which is something we probably haven't achieved enough of yet, but that's the next change that needs to come. (Principal, school 1 mainstream primary)

It is evident in this regard that the influence of training and policy is having an impact on how principals consider support provision in schools.

> Again going to the courses I'd been going to, I was bringing back the message as well that's it to try to be inclusive, to try to have it in class, rather than withdrawing the whole time, and rather than working specifically with one pupil, or specifically for X number of hours with one pupil, but to meet the needs of the child, so even if a child has four hours resource, maybe those, say one member of the team might feel that that child has to get four hours out here, whereas I'd like us to be open to the possibility of seeing well maybe two of those hours can be met within the class with the support. … we have started making changes, I'm hoping that we can continue to make more changes, but it's easier to make changes from within the system rather than outside it and trying to say well, people think we should do this and we should do that. (Principal, school 2 mainstream primary)

Some school staff, having received training and been involved in discussions about the Irish educational commitment to inclusion, had introduced models of in-class support. There was often agreement within schools that this was the correct direction but also that progress may be slow as tradition and practice embedded in schools will need to be changed.

Teachers recognised that pupils were often more comfortable receiving support in class rather than being withdrawn and having attention focused on their special educational needs.

> At the moment she's happy to remain in the class, be part of the whole class learning, and then when the children are off to do their tasks related to that learning, whatever the task is, I would differentiate it so that she could access it (Teacher 1, school 3 mainstream primary)

5.4.3 Support from Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

Several schools visited had policies on SNA management that reiterated their care role and referred specifically to the legislative framework. SNAs play an important role in providing care as, for example, in one primary school where an SNA reported supporting a pupil with cystic fibrosis with taking his medication and managing his diet. A secondary colleague reported supporting students with personal hygiene needs such as toileting and helping them to negotiate their way around classrooms with limited space. Such examples were reiterated in many schools. Research evidence suggests the role has changed considerably in recent years, however, and no longer reflects that envisaged in policy documentation. Staff, parents and pupils all valued the work of SNAs and the research findings indicate they play a vital role in enabling children with SEN to be maintained in inclusive environments. During data collection SNAs were observed carrying out a range

of duties under the direction of teachers. On many occasions they were seen to fulfil a care role but more commonly were directly involved in pedagogical activity in support of individual pupils or small groups.

There were many instances of good liaison between teachers and SNAs that benefit pupil learning and sociability. In some schools teachers involved SNAs in planning, target setting and pupil evaluation. However, this level of communication was not consistent across schools and in some instances SNAs felt their experiences with children were not greatly valued.

Many SNAs were seen to assist pupils by providing directions which ensured they had an understanding of teacher expectations and were prepared for the required tasks. In some instances SNAs worked with individuals or small groups of pupils using adapted materials to enable them to participate within lessons. Generally, the teacher had prepared these materials as part of a differentiated approach to learning. There were instances, however, where SNAs had themselves developed resources. For example, in a primary school a SNA adapted materials for a pupil with a visual impairment by enlarging print and working alongside him in a reading lesson. Elsewhere, a post primary pupil working in Braille was instructed by a SNA who was proficient in Braille. It was common practice in post primary schools for SNAs to write down homework requirements posted on boards for pupils and it was also reported that in some instances they worked as amanuensis during examinations.

Most SNAs in primary and post primary when interviewed referred to the provision of support to individual pupils in written tasks.

> So, there's a lot of note taking really in Spanish. And then we have English which is non-stop note taking. All the time, and it's very fast, great teacher, and constantly taking notes. So that's continuous taking notes. So she [student] will participate in kind of … you ask questions, she'll vocally give an answer, but I'm taking whatever notes have to be taken. (SNA 1, student with HI, school 21 mainstream post primary)

A post primary resource teacher described how SNA support has been important for a boy with dyspraxia. She regarded the SNA's work to support this student's handwriting as essential for his progress. This positive view of SNA work was common across schools in all phases of education.

In primary schools many SNAs managed groups of pupils engaged in a variety of learning activities. For example playing maths games, working on reading exercises or computer programmes such as Word Shark and going through homework. Both primary and post primary SNAs were involved in carrying out programmes set by speech and language therapists.

At post primary level direct intervention in lessons was common. For example, in one English lesson SNA support was important in enabling a student who used assistive technology to participate in the teacher's planned activity. The SNA observed was confident in using the technology and providing instruction.

A primary SNA supported a pupil with hearing impairment during maths lessons, giving her guidance and working with her at a pace that was slower than that expected of the rest of the class. An observation at the same school provided an example of a SNA supporting a pupil and enabling her to follow numbers on a chart and participate in a maths lesson. A post primary student with Down's syndrome indicated that SNA support was essential to her participation in a class activity by assisting her to understand teacher directions and giving guidance throughout the lesson. Many SNAs, while acknowledging their care role, perceive their task as being much wider.

So my work basically is mainly to make sure that a special needs child has the full inclusion of the day, that he has access to everything, and that means the whole curriculum and the social and emotional side as well. When he [pupil] takes a strop during the day, I have more time to be able to find out exactly what is wrong, where in a normal day a teacher wouldn't have a huge amount of time to find out exactly what his problem is. I just make sure that his education is a full education just like every other child. (SNA 4, student with ASD/MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

Pupils saw the SNA role as critical to learning and indicated the close relationship established between teachers and SNAs for the promotion of learning.

I have an SNA, that definitely helps, specially in like the big class, you know. Because, like you could just ask the SNA like, instead of always asking the teacher. (Student 4, student with EBD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

Another pupil said he always needed a SNA with him during maths lessons but was able to manage in other subjects. Teachers and the SNA endorsed this view.

Some post primary teachers were aware of the need to ensure that SNA use did not create dependency. Some students knew their need for support changed as they progressed through the school.

When I was in first year I needed her [SNA] a lot more than I do today. I needed her in most classes and in second year I only needed her in less classes. Today she's only in one or two of my classes because she knows that because I don't need her as much anymore she goes and spends time in other classes (Student 2, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 20 mainstream post primary)

SNAs were also aware that for some students, provision of individual support could be problematic. When asked about how a student felt about receiving support, a SNA commented:

Absolutely hates it. And I'm sure if you were to interview her she'll tell you I'm the worst in the world. Some days we get on really well and she'll ask me to help her. Other days she just does not want me there, she will argue with me. Very often teachers have to come down to us and say, what's wrong? (SNA 4, student with EBD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

Interestingly, the student to whom this SNA referred had a less negative view of support as might have been expected:

Well, I have an SNA and that definitely helps, specially in like the big class (SNA 4, student with EBD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

As with other post primary students interviewed, the difficulties are less about being provided with SNA support and more about being withdrawn from class for this support. SNAs often play a crucial role in managing pupil behaviour. This is usually overseen by teachers who value SNA experience in this area. An example was seen in a primary school where a SNA described how a pupil she supported needed particular attention at the beginning of the day to ensure he was organised for the activities ahead. She provided this support and could usually prevent conflict with others or withdrawal of the pupil. A similar example was given of a pupil who disliked coming to school and was particularly challenging at the beginning of the week. Again the SNA spent time helping the pupil to acclimatise to the beginning of the school week. She liaised with the class teacher to be clear about the timetable and forthcoming activities so she could share these with the pupil.

Further examples were also recorded from primary schools. For example, a teacher of a pupil with Asperger's syndrome saw the relationship between the SNA and the pupil as a stabilising factor in the pupil's life and critical to her participation in class. This teacher suggested that without SNA support a significant part of her own time would be spent managing pupil behaviour. At times an emphasis on SNA support for individual

pupils is the norm. For example, in a primary school, the work of the SNA was described as essential in supporting a pupil with ADHD to ensure he could remain on task throughout the lesson.

Post primary teachers reported that for some students being able to participate socially was problematic and they depended on SNAs to provide support in sessions that involved interactions with peers. The careers guidance teacher in one school stressed the advantages of SNA support for a student with cerebral palsy perceived to be difficult to manage when this support was not available. He further identified a student who regularly required SNA intervention to 'calm her down' so she could participate in lessons.

Some school principals suggest the SNA role had evolved to an extent where it would be advisable to review it and how classroom support was used. In particular there was a perception that providing SNAs to individual pupils, rather than allowing teachers greater flexibility in their deployment, created dependency or unrealistic expectations of the potential progress of the supported individual.

> A classroom assistant should be applied at junior infant level and if the term classroom assistant was applied to that role, where special needs children were, then there would be less ownership of it to a child … I think a classroom assistant model would be a more mature and an easier system to manage, and it would be less hysterical. I don't mean to be derogatory about people, but there's certain amount of hysteria about, you know. If you put an SNA beside somebody, suddenly their need dissipates. They can have them, but they don't dissipate their needs. (Principal, school 1 mainstream primary)

SNAs are valued by parents who express confidence in the support they give their children. However, difficulties in maintaining this support were raised in interviews with parents across all phases of schooling. Many described the period of transition from primary to post primary as stressful. Parents of a girl with significant learning difficulties recounted their experiences of having good SNA support for their daughter in primary with none in post primary. This, they believed, had had a detrimental effect upon her learning.

Another parent described how she had considered sending her daughter with a moderate general learning disability to a special school. However, the student herself had been adamant that she wanted to transfer from primary with her friends and therefore moved to a mainstream post primary. (The parent later believed this decision was right for the girl who had settled and maintained a good social network.) This parent believed SNAs played a vital role in enabling her daughter to understand what was happening in lessons and to gain access to difficult aspects of learning, and that her daughter could not remain in school without this support.

Principals were concerned that decisions about which pupils should receive SNA support were not as transparent as they might be. For example, one primary principal cited occasions when a NEPS psychologist supported by HSE professionals recommended that a pupil should be provided with SNA support but was overruled by the SENO.

5.5   Curriculum Access

Most survey respondents from primary (85 per cent) (N=159), just over half at post primary (54 per cent) (N=80) and a majority from special schools (77 per cent) (N=28) agreed that all teachers are implementing guidelines for access to the curriculum. Most schools commented that staff were committed to providing curriculum access for students with special educational needs

> The majority of teachers make huge efforts to provide access to the curriculum at the same time as dealing with all other students in their class, their expectations and those of their parents. (Post primary school, SEN coordinator – survey data)

Figure 7: **Proportion of schools where it was suggested all teachers are implementing guidelines for provision of access to curriculum for students with special educational needs, by school type**
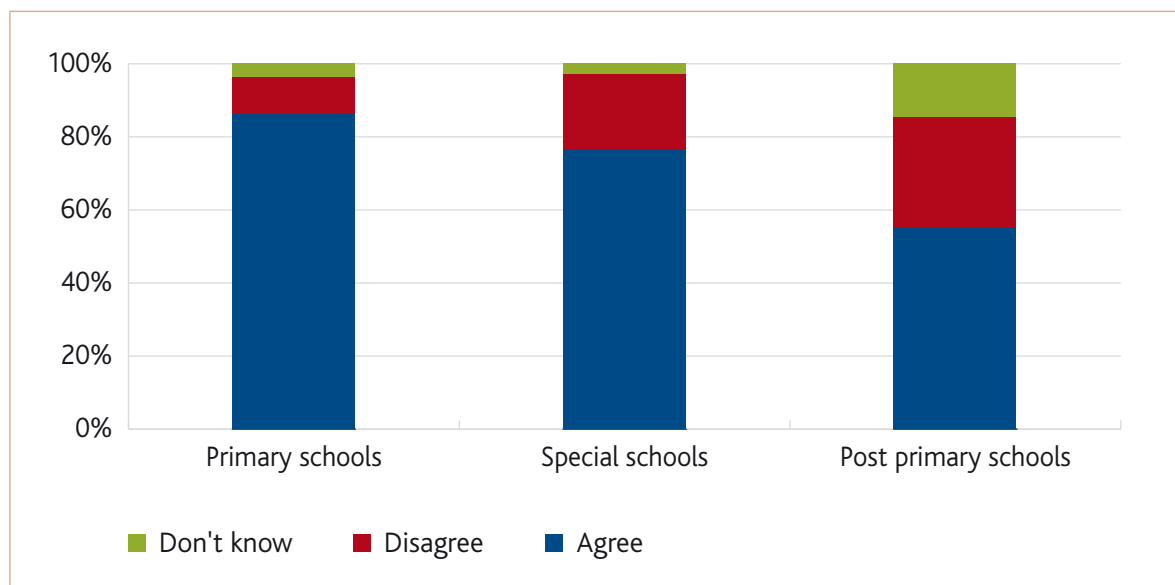
- N = 7   - N = 1   - N = 21
- N = 21   - N = 7   - N = 48
- N = 159   - N = 28   - N = 80

The survey indicated a number of schools where national guidelines were implemented to varying degrees, or on a limited basis, citing large class numbers and lack of awareness of the guidelines as possible reasons for limited implementation.

Some schools were also critical of the format of guideline delivery:

> I am sure that there are teachers who have forgotten of their existence and the fact that they were only issued on CD is also a problem. I think many teachers think they are only for the LS [learning support] or resource teacher (Principal, school 5 mainstream primary)

5.5.1   Differentiation

Examples of differentiated teaching and assessment were observed in all phases of education. It was inconsistent, however, and schools applied a limited approach to differentiating work for pupils. The national survey of schools suggests that confidence in providing differentiated learning is not high across all phases of schooling.

Figure 8: Proportion of schools who feel their teachers are confident in differentiating the curriculum to address the diverse needs of their students, by school type
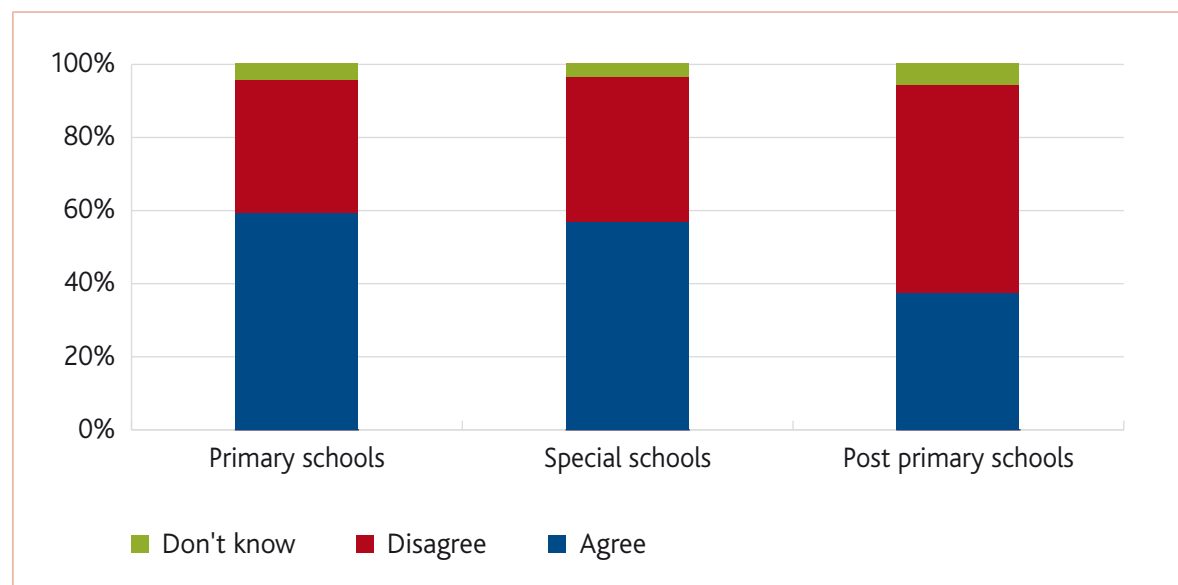
The survey indicates that while many teachers appreciate differentiation in theory, its practical application requires training and support. One special school principal suggested that newly qualified teachers were more aware of approaches to differentiation than their longer serving counterparts:

> Mainly new teachers have a greater understanding of differentiation but its practical implementation needs improvement (Principal, special school – survey data)

In primary schools teachers' plans often indicated the need to differentiate work. However, application of differentiated teaching was inconsistent, however, and often this followed a limited set of approaches focused on differentiation of access and outcomes. Teachers tended to use IEP targets as the basis of planning work for individual pupils. In some instances this resulted in pupils being given work that was different from that of their peers, but not always related. In some lessons a lack of differentiation resulted in pupils having minimal participation in activities. In some lessons pupils spent considerable time off task and were unable to participate in planned activities because of limited differentiation strategies. Differentiation was managed by giving some pupils less or different work (e.g. fewer spellings) however there was often no clear advice given in this area with teachers falling back on their own initiative. Some schools recognised this inconsistency with one primary principal saying she believed differentiation was happening in 'most classrooms', but acknowledging that this aspect of planning was difficult to achieve with any consistency. Several primary teachers identified differentiation as an area where they required further training.

Differentiation of task was the most common approach seen in primary schools with pupils given alternative or simplified work during lessons. For some pupils, differentiation of outcome – whereby teachers would accept that while some might complete a page of writing others might achieve only two sentences – was also seen in several schools. Differentiation by access was also provided in some instances, for example adaptation of activities in PE lessons for a pupil with a physical disability which included shortening of distance to be overed in a relay race.

In post primary schools it was noted that differentiation was often managed with groups of students withdrawn for activities and was less commonly applied in whole class situations. This finding corroborates those presented in a whole school evaluation report prepared by inspectors for a girls' post primary visited by researchers. The inspectors reported seeing differentiation by pace and the girls with special educational needs pursuing the same curriculum but at a less demanding rate. They recommended that other students getting learning support but not in the special class would benefit from a formal link with the SEN department to inform teachers of the most effective learning methods suitable for students.

Despite the evidence obtained through the survey and case study data, some post primary resource teachers perceived students to be well supported through differentiated activities.

> Certainly teachers by and large would be very good at including and differentiation for the weaker students in the classroom, to make sure that they include them in the class and ask them a question that they know ... (Resource teacher, school 21 mainstream post primary)

Some teacher interviewees agreed and gave examples of how they had modified their own subjects to accommodate a range of learning needs. Some perceived the post primary curriculum to be challenging to an extent that students could become excluded from learning.

> I feel it's just too difficult [history syllabus] and the volume of work in it for the weaker student is just ridiculous quite frankly, and it's far too much for them to cover. Now what I have done, is done an initial page and like a summary of the course in bullet points. Like an easy guide for the weaker ones, you know, who just couldn't read that volume of work. (Subject Teacher 1, school 22 mainstream post primary)

Some examples of differentiated assessments were seen in post primary schools. For example, one provided an ASDAN course for students with special educational needs to give them a route to accreditation and to prepare them for post school life. This course had less academic content and enabled students to focus on life skills and social needs while still affording opportunities for accreditation. This approach was not common, with many schools finding the provision of the Leaving Certificate Applied an adequate framework for students with special educational needs.

In the special schools because of the heterogeneity of classroom groups, teachers planned for the needs of individuals. This meant they were confident in differentiating lessons at several levels using a range of approaches. There was evidence of differentiation by input and output in all four schools. Teachers reported the implementation of different literacy and numeracy programmes simultaneously in all four special schools. Students gained academically when multi-grade approaches were employed. Students within low ratio classrooms required consistency of assessment and monitoring of pedagogical approaches. While this added to the teachers' time and challenges it was observed that when there were no linkages between classroom-based programmes students experienced the tedium of repeating a curricular area four times.

In one special school teachers talked about differentiation in terms of having to plan at three levels for each class to meet a diverse range of abilities. One teacher provided an example of having three levels of reading group and described how she planned for management of these and utilised the support of an SNA to deliver a reading lesson. This same teacher gave an example from a geography lesson about maps, describing how pupils were preparing labels on Velcro to apply to locations on a map. While most could write the labels, attach them to Velcro and put them in place, one pupil could only perform the final procedure of placing the label on the map but was supported in doing so independently. Another teacher was observed to differentiate at three levels in a maths lesson. She demonstrated how she had one group of pupils working at a basic level with numbers from 0 to 3, a second group was slightly more advanced, working up to ten, while a third dealt with totals up to 100. All pupils were engaged throughout the lesson achieving different learning outcomes whilst enjoying the activity.

5.6   Individual Education Plans

The highest proportion of survey respondents from primary (82 per cent) (N=153) and special schools (84 per cent) (N=31) stated that all pupils with special educational needs within their schools had individual education plans (IEPs). Just over half of the post primary respondents (53 per cent) (N=79) said only some students had IEPs, mainly those allocated resource hours and from low incidence categories of SEN.

Figure 9: Proportion of students within schools who have IEPs
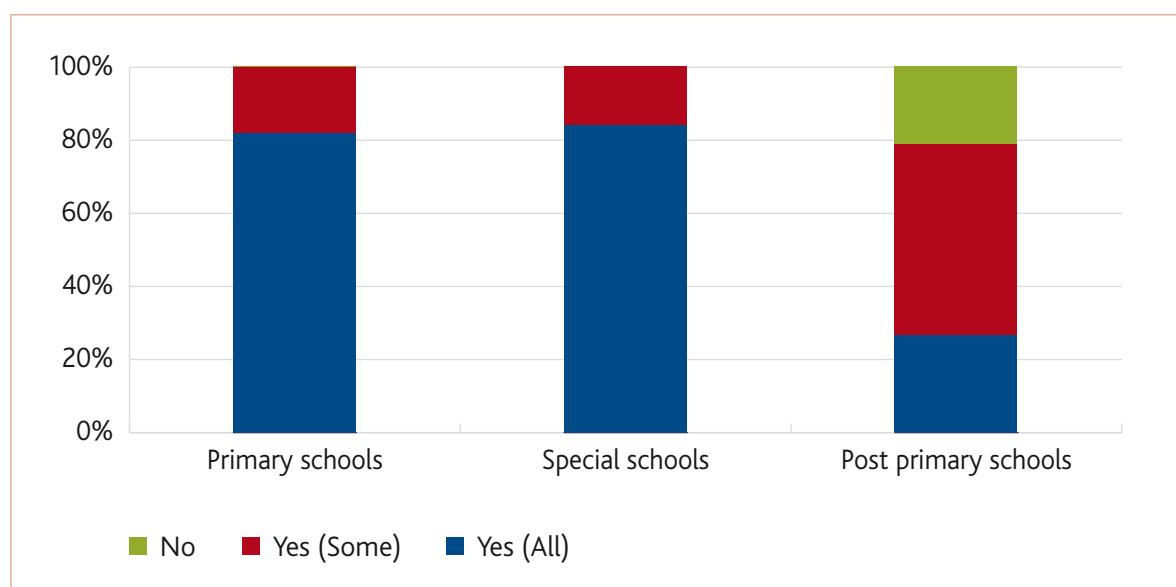
N = 0   N = 0   N = 31
N = 34   N = 6   N = 79
N = 153   N = 31   N = 39

Survey data showed that primary schools were more likely to have IEPs in place than post primary. However visits to case study schools confirmed the view that many of these in both phases of mainstream education had developed IEPs, though they varied in format and content and how they were deployed. Some school documentation did make specific reference to Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support (DES 2007) issued by the Department of Education and Science, which offers advice on planning for individual pupil needs and the maintenance of records of progress and attainment. However, the non-statutory status of this document is such that its influence has not permeated all schools. In special schools IEPs were well established and in those visited a clear team approach to their development and implementation was seen.

5.6.1   Individual Education Plans: Formats

Case study schools utilising IEPs for a while had often settled on a format that met their needs. It was apparent to the researchers that after a two-year period when second visits were made, approaches to IEP management had developed a greater level of consistency in many schools. However, in some schools this had not been achieved and in some several formats operated within a single school.

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Most IEPs have sections that identify targets for pupils and identify resource needs. In some schools criteria for target assessment had been provided but in others this sophistication was absent. This approach was common to special schools visited with detailed targets and established assessment criteria being the norm.

Some schools provide evidence of innovative approaches such as the use of 'group IEPs'. In one primary school pupils with similar needs had been identified and planning for them with a focus on a common target had been established. These were additional to individual targets set within pupils' personalised IEPs.

5.6.2 Expectations and Management of Individual Education Plans

Attitudes towards the development and use of IEPs within the case study schools had changed between visits. This had occurred largely because teachers had worked to develop systems which they perceived as supportive of pupils. The principal of one primary school commented:

> I think they were probably, you know … they were initially seen as a bureaucratic necessity to keep our friends the inspectors happy if they came in. Whereas I do think now, you know because teachers and resource teachers are more used to doing them and because there's been a change over in class, that I think there's a greater … I think we're all buying into them a bit more, that they are the guidelines for children's learning. And I think I can see the benefit of them more now than I did when they were brought in first. I have to say that we were probably, well we weren't brought kicking and screaming, but we did it because we had to do it. Whereas now I think they're done because people see there's a benefit. (Principal, school 1 mainstream primary)

IEP management often depends on the expectations and attitudes of resource teachers. Many were committed to their development but in some instances there were barriers to this. One resource teacher commented:

> I have to coordinate drawing up IEPs and there's a certain resistance to that because, with funding and all of that, some people are of the opinion that we haven't been given training, the legislation hasn't been enacted fully, and on the one part we're supposed to be having parents in and having support from home, and support from all the various experts, and yet in a lot of cases we're left on our own with these children. (Resource Teacher, school 5 mainstream primary)

Some teachers had received training related to IEP development, usually provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS). Schools appreciated this, commenting favourably on the quality of training. Where training had been provided schools were more likely to have adopted specific IEP formats and implemented them in a cohesive manner. In some cases IEPs were seen as working documents to be referred to regularly and modified to address changing needs.

> Well, first of all I suppose the most important thing for us is that we put children's needs first, ok. And like that, for example, when we draw up their IEP, we always talk about that as being a working document, and that the target that we might have set today might not necessarily … might need to be adjusted in a couple of weeks or so. (Resource teacher of student 1 [student with SSLD], student 4 [student with ASD], student 5 [student with MGLD], student 6 [student with ASD], student 7 [student ASD] and student 8 [student MGLD], school 3 mainstream primary)

5.6.3　Involvement in Planning

The survey asked respondents to list all those included in developing IEPs. For primary (83 per cent) (N=155) and special schools (78 per cent) (N=29) mainstream class teachers were included in the process. Post primary schools (76 per cent) (N=113) on the other hand most often relied on specialists such as learning support or resource teachers to assist in developing IEPs. Primary schools (80 per cent) (N=150) included specialist teachers in assembling IEPs, special schools (76 per cent) (N=28) included parents, and post primary schools (56 per cent) (N=83) included the students. The next most frequently consulted individuals in the process for primary (75 per cent) (N=140) were parents, for special schools (70 per cent) (N=26) were SNAs, and for post primary (55 per cent) (N=82) parents.

Table 12: Three most frequent individuals included in development of IEPS

School Type	First Most Frequent	Second Most Frequent	Third Most Frequent
Primary	Mainstream class teachers (83%) (N=155)	Learning support/resource teacher (80%) (N=150)	Parents (75%) (N=140)
Special	Mainstream class teachers (78%) (N=29)	Parents (76%) (N=28)	SNAs (70%) (N=26)
Post primary	Learning support/resource teacher (76%) (N=113)	Students (56%) (N=83)	Parents (55%) (N=82)

Participation in the IEP process in the case study schools confirmed survey findings in recognising that this varied from one where all professionals involved in the education and welfare of individual pupils with special educational needs were consulted and involved, to a situation where teachers developed, monitored and assessed IEPs with minimal consultation. In all schools teachers with responsibility for managing SEN (resource and learning support teachers) played the leading role in developing IEPs. In most primary schools they did so through consultation with class teachers with day-to-day responsibility for the pupils concerned. In most post primary schools this remains an emerging practice. In most primary schools regular meetings between specialist and class teachers were held during which targets were reviewed and modified. In many instances, however, meetings between teaching staff were infrequent and informal and based on a general discussion of the pupil rather than analysis of the IEP. The comment from a teacher in one school typifies many obtained during fieldwork.

> I worked out an individual education plan with the resource teacher and myself and made out a plan for him, and I suppose we concentrated more on the social, because that's what we felt he needed, and as I said, we were always aware of course that the learning is the important thing in the class situation. (Class teacher 8, student with SSLD/EBD, school 1 mainstream primary)

This is not distinctly different from that expressed by a post primary support teacher.

> It's really the special needs team that develop the plan for the student. But we are looking at that and we want to bring in definitely the mainstream teacher and definitely the student. And then I suppose the parent. But as you know yourself, everything is … it's time constraints for everything. (Support teacher 1, school 21 mainstream post primary)

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Social development was a focus of IEP planning in all schools. It is clear that decisions on pupil priorities are made by teaching staff and generally in isolation from other interested parties.

> Basically it's myself [support teacher] who work with her [pupil] (Resource teacher 4, student with dyslexia, school 10 mainstream primary)

Examples were seen of primary schools trying to make the IEP development process more collaborative. There was, for example, involvement of SNAs whose opinions and input to IEPs were valued in schools.

> It's not just me. There's a group of us. So there's myself and his SNA and the special needs teacher and the resource teacher and then we meet every term to do up his IEP. And then we see what he's achieved so far from the previous one, and then we work on what his new targets are. (Class teacher 6, student with BMGLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

In most schools, however, SNAs played no role in IEP planning despite being involved in delivering teaching programmes.

The use of the IEPs as a focus for discussion of pupil needs between teaching staff is an emerging trend across schools. Parents' involvement in the development and monitoring process varies. Survey results show most primary (85 per cent) (N=159), post primary (66 per cent) (N=98) and special schools (83 per cent) (N=31), suggested that parents were involved in setting learning targets for their child. They reported that this was mostly through inclusion in the IEP process.

Figure 10: Proportion of schools in agreement that parents collaborate in setting learning targets for their child
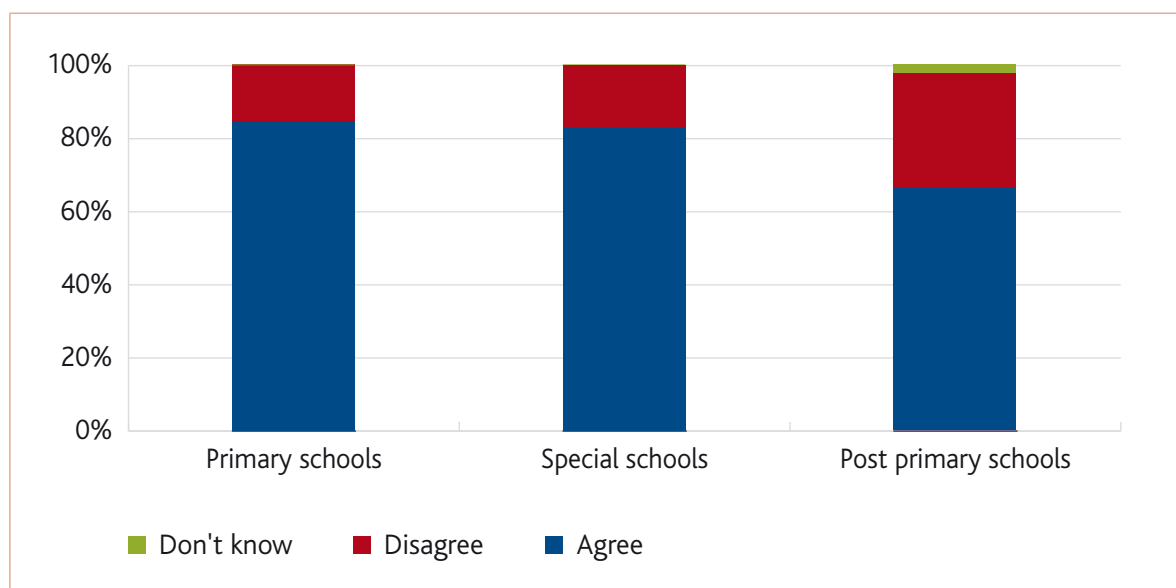
- ■ N = 2   ■ N=0   ■ N = 3
- ■ N = 26   ■ N = 6   ■ N = 48
- ■ N = 159   ■ N = 31   ■ N = 98

Research interviews revealed that parental participation and awareness levels were inconsistent in primary and post primary, however. Most schools suggested parents had an important role in the IEP process and indeed many stated this should be the case in policy documents. It was often the case, however, that while some parents were involved in development, target setting and monitoring procedures, within the same school others were not. In some schools participation depended on individual teachers and their relationship with parents, rather than a consistently applied school procedure.

Some parents believed the school was fully committed to their participation in the IEP process and their opinions and input were respected. An example of this was given by the parent of a child with autism in a primary school.

> It's usually done with teachers, parents, principal, SNA. So you've full involvement from the word go. And I would say with the system they have in the autistic unit, you're kept up to date constantly with it [IEP]. And really it's tailored to the child's need, because even though I have three children on the spectrum, they couldn't be more different from each other. You know, personality wise and academically and what their challenges are or what they need to be challenged at. So it's usually about twice a year you would have meetings, and maybe at the start of the year, October, November, once they've settled in. You'll have a plan going forward and then March, April, kind of a review. (Parent of child 1, 4 and 5, students with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

A similar experience was described by a parent from another school, though in this case it would appear she had been informed of the IEP rather than involved in its development:

> They generated an IEP. I went in and I had a meeting with the various staff, including his class teacher, his special needs teacher and the lady who looks after resources and we had a half hour discussion, which was useful. They took me through what they had written and the purpose of the report [IEP]. (Parent 3, child with ADHD, school 3 mainstream primary)

Elsewhere parents were either aware of IEPS but had not participated in their development or in some cases were unaware of their existence.

> I don't come across, what did you call them? An IEP and education plan. (Parent 4, child with SSLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

> And like I suppose it would be nice if I was involved with the IEP and if the SENO got in touch, to include the parent in the whole process, because I mean when she was assessed, that would be nice I'd say. (Parent 2, child with PD/dyspraxia, school 23 mainstream post primary)

Some frustration is expressed by parents who had become familiar with the IEP process when their child attended primary school but was not continued at post primary.

> And he would have had them [IEP targets] in primary school every year. I would have been involved in them and discussed what I wanted to get from them for him, what the school wanted and what we would work and plan it together. This year is the first year at a parent teacher meeting that one of the resource teachers had her own IEP, it was the first time I've actually seen one here. Which I was – it's something I should have looked into but because I thought things were, you know, we were moseying along, he was doing okay but really it should be there, it should be something that we put down at the start of every year and set our goals for Kyle, what we would like for him to achieve. (Parent 2, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 20 mainstream post primary)

In response to the survey primary (59 per cent) (N=110), post primary (59 per cent) (N=88) and special schools (63 per cent) (N=23) suggested that pupils with special educational needs were involved in setting their own learning targets. Most commented that this involvement depended on their age and maturity, and level of ability and understanding.

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Figure 11: **Proportion of schools who agreed that pupils with special educational needs are involved in setting their own learning targets**
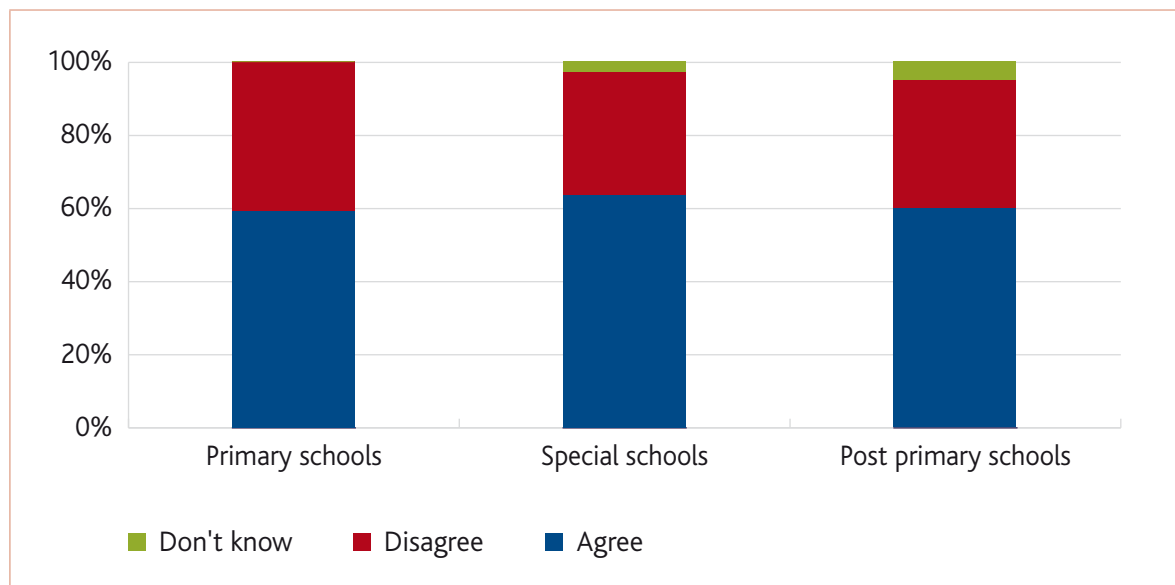
- N = 0   ■ N = 2   ■ N = 9
- N = 77   ■ N = 12   ■ N = 52
- N = 110   ■ N = 23   ■ N = 88

The involvement of pupils in planning and evaluation of IEPs is often complex. This was reflected in the data collected during school visits that challenged the levels of pupil involvement implied in the survey. At primary level it was not surprising to discover that just two of the ten schools had considered how this might be achieved. In one primary school a pupil could describe his involvement in discussions about his targets. The same pupil knew that when targets had been agreed the teacher typed them on the computer and printed them. At post primary level there was little evidence in the case study schools that students were routinely involved in the IEP process.

5.6.4   School Views on Effectiveness of IEPs

Most primary (90 per cent) (N=168), post primary (79 per cent) (N=118), and special schools (77 per cent) (N=28) agreed that IEP use was effective in ensuring the needs of pupils with special educational needs were addressed.

Figure 12: **School respondents level of agreement on whether IEPs are effective in ensuring the needs of pupils with special educational needs are addressed fully**
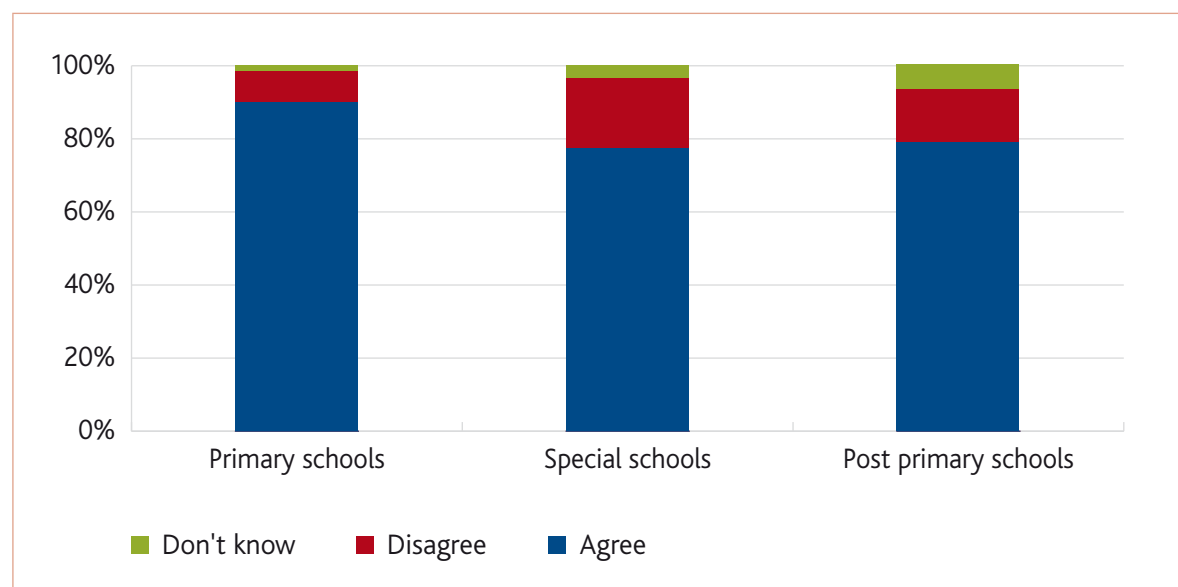
- ■ N = 2   ■ N = 2   ■ N = 9
- ■ N = 17   ■ N = 7   ■ N = 22
- ■ N = 168   ■ N = 28   ■ N = 118

Schools commented that although IEPs were effective in meeting pupil needs they had to be supported by appropriate resources.

> The IEP cannot fully address the needs of pupils unless there is multi-disciplinary involvement in both the development and the execution of the IEP (Special school, principal – survey data)

This view was also evident in the case study schools, with many expressing the need for greater training and professional development in this area for all teachers, not just specialists.

5.6.5   Involvement in Extra-Curricular Activity

The survey suggests that most primary (89 per cent) (N=166), post primary (70 per cent) (104) and special schools (73 per cent) (N=27) regularly included pupils with special educational needs in extra-curricular activities. Most made no distinction between pupils with special educational needs and their peers and all were included in the same activities.

> This goes without saying. We try to provide a very wide range of extra-curricular activities so that every child irrespective of their individual needs or circumstances finds an area which they can enjoy and have the potential to excel (Principal, School 1 mainstream primary)

Figure 13: How frequently schools include pupils with special educational needs in extracurricular activities, by school type
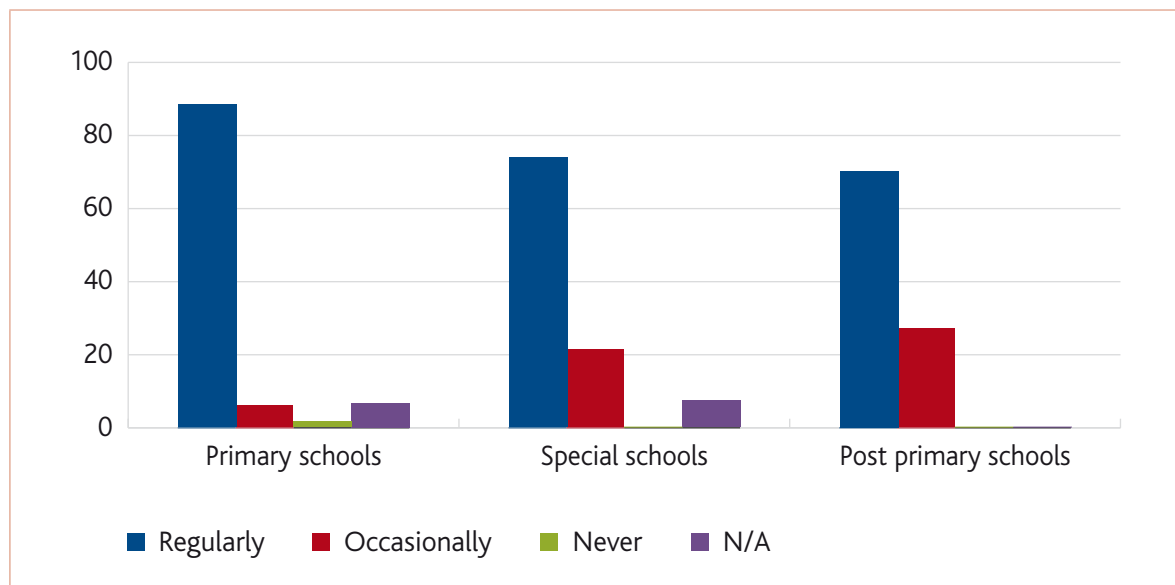
N = 166 ■ N = 27 ■ N = 104
N = 10 ■ N = 7 ■ N = 45
N = 2 ■ N = 0 ■ N = 0
N = 11 ■ N = 3 ■ N = 0

Evidence was seen of pupil involvement in sporting and cultural extra-curricular activities during and in some schools this was a way of ensuring that pupils who did not excel academically could demonstrate other abilities.

> We did try and join him in the football, he wasn't having any of it, so he has an interest at home, playing guitar, now they do guitar lessons here in the school, after school, which is brilliant for him. I think that starts this year. I think it only really starts for first class up, so for his year now, with this year joining the after school activities, plus he has an interest in swimming, so we're going to put him in swimming lessons, which I know the school does after school as well, which is brilliant. (Parent 4, child with ASD/MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

5.7 Support for Therapeutic Needs

In response to the survey primary (57 per cent) (N=107), post primary (61 per cent) (N=91), and special schools (62 per cent) (N=23) agreed that work conducted by other professionals (e.g. health services) with SEN students was communicated effectively to their class teachers. Many commented that communication was acilitated through regular meetings, while others found a database system to be useful.

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Figure 14: **School respondents' level of agreement on whether work conducted by other professionals was communicated effectively with class teachers**
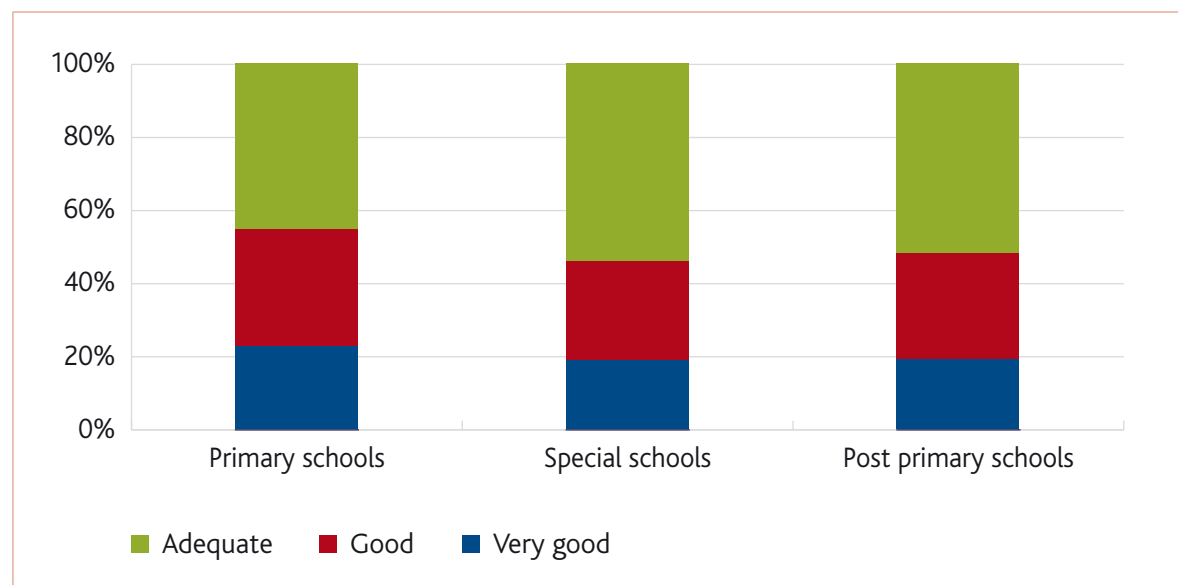
- N = 107 ■ N =23 ■ N = 91
- N = 41 ■ N = 7 ■ N = 30
- N = 39 ■ N = 7 ■ N = 28

For other schools communication between class teachers and outside agencies was variable and in many cases feedback from professionals was only available when requested. There were some issues around confidentiality of student records and sharing that information with class teachers:

> … I usually question them until I get the answers I need. The only problem is the delay in acquiring support and assessments (Primary school, principal – survey data)

Some schools questioned the value of information provided by outside professionals in terms of practice.

> Some of the recommendations are excellent but some are very "cut and paste" type as some of the professionals have never set foot in a classroom and are totally removed from the challenges of day-to-day teaching (Primary school, deputy principal – survey data)

Access to therapeutic support was seen as a challenge and was of major concern to school principals and parents as can be seen in Figures 15 to 17.

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Figure 15: Schools rating of access to speech and language therapy services
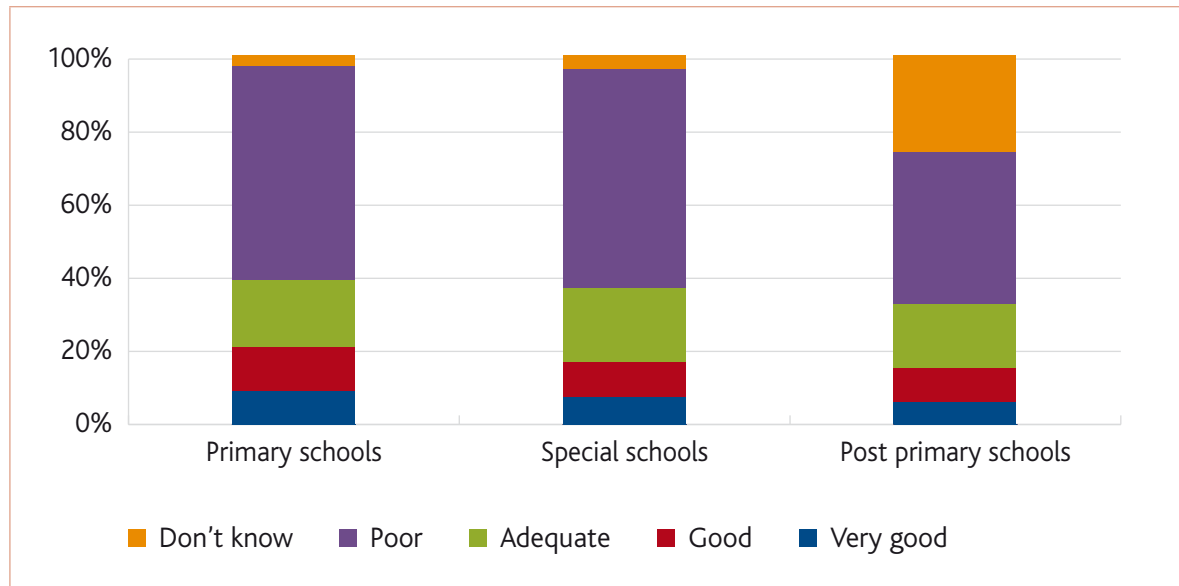
N = 4   N = 1   N = 39
N = 110   N = 22   N = 63
N = 34   N = 7   N = 25
N = 24   N = 4   N = 15
N = 17   N = 3   N = 9

Figure 16: Schools rating of access to occupational therapy services
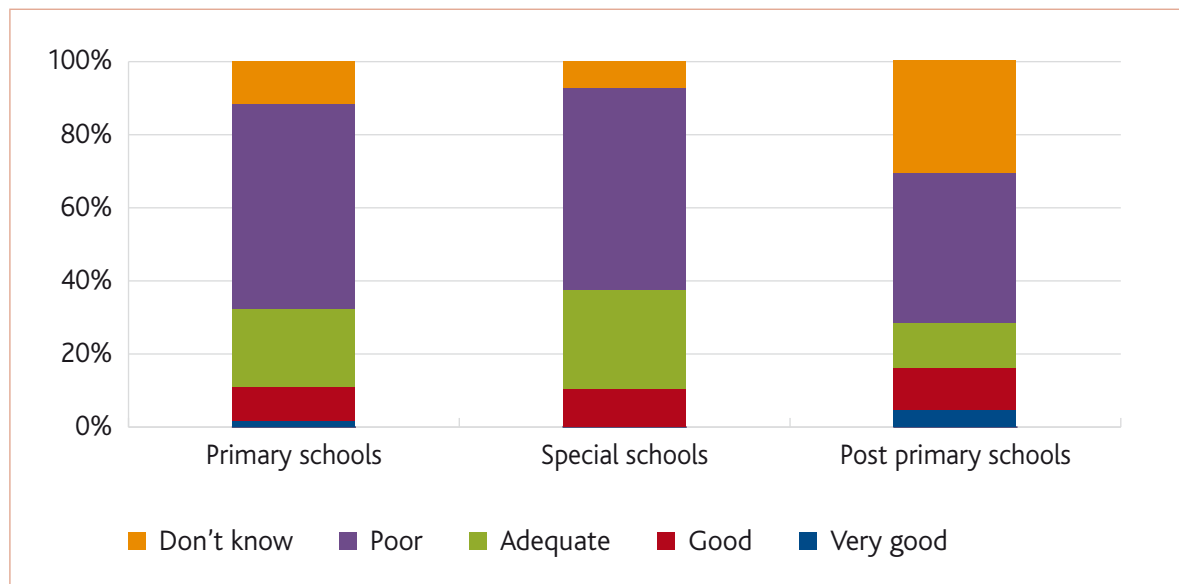
N = 21   N = 3   N = 46
N = 107   N = 20   N = 61
N = 39   N = 10   N = 18
N = 17   N = 4   N = 18
N = 3   N = 0   N = 6

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Figure 17: Schools rating of access to physical therapy services
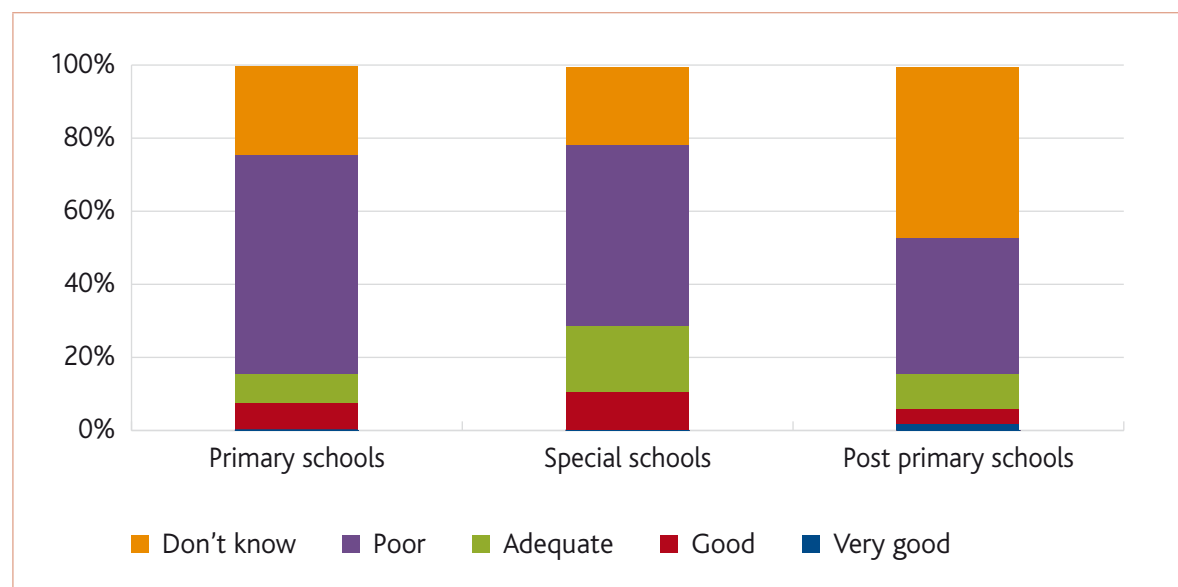
N = 45   N = 8   N = 70
N = 112   N = 19   N = 55
N = 15   N = 7   N = 13
N = 13   N = 4   N = 7
N = 0   N = 0   N = 1

It is evident from the survey that access to therapeutic services was seen as inadequate and requiring urgent attention. There were examples of the difficulties associated with access in some case study schools.

A primary school parent expressed concern that therapeutic services were overstretched and unable to maintain the support levels required.

> My daughter has had no speech and therapy for a year because her speech and language therapist went on maternity leave and there was nobody to cover her. (Parent 1, child with HI, school 1 mainstream primary)

Teaching staff expressed similar concerns. They felt under pressure and inadequately prepared to deliver therapeutic programmes without regular support from specialist professionals:

> It can be very slow really, sometimes they have very long waiting lists, but their language therapy, the speech therapy, used to be quite good, but in the last couple of years it's much more difficult to access. They used to have, say maybe the test sessions for six weeks and then the child would have a break and then they would have six weeks again, but in the last couple of years, that has become less frequent. (Learning support teacher 1, school 1 mainstream primary)

Parents of pupils attending primary schools regularly pay for private therapy sessions as they have become frustrated with attempts to obtain support through the school. At one primary two parents reported paying for private occupational therapy sessions, though in both cases they have since ceased this as they can no longer afford to pay. They believed their children continued to need the support of an occupational therapist and that the school had been helpful in pushing to obtain this service but with little success. At another school a parent reported paying for private occupational therapy as she was told it would otherwise have been unavailable through the normal channels.

Parents of post primary students have similarly sought private assessments to gain therapeutic help for their child. It was suggested that parents have difficulty accessing support clinics or other services and therefore resorted to private providers to gain more speedy results. One parent commented on speech and occupational therapy:

> … from a speech therapy perspective there was always very little anywhere and most of what she's had we've paid for privately. Occupational therapy, we tried to access that through [names a charitable organisation] because when she came into the secondary school they said, the school inspector – I can't think of his name now – but he said that it would be a good thing for her to have. So in the end we had to pay for that as well because they wouldn't accept her in the [names a clinic]. They said she was too old. It was just an excuse. (Parent 3, child with PD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

A primary principal suggested that if children receive therapeutic support before entering school this support was more likely to be maintained through primary years. She cited as an example two children with Down syndrome who were both receiving speech and language therapy and occupational therapy before school entry. This was maintained after entry, while she perceived it was more difficult to get access to such support if a pupil received a diagnosis after school entry.

In the case study schools where pupils received support from HSE professionals most parents, teachers and pupils saw the quality of the therapeutic interventions as supportive. Therapists communicated well with schools and provided programmes that were appreciated. Examples were seen of speech therapists and occupational therapists working in schools and these professionals reported that schools they worked in were supportive in providing information about pupils and space in which to work.

Examples were seen of good co-ordination of therapy services in schools. One primary school had regular access to an HSE-employed speech and language therapist who supported and advised teachers and prepares programmes for pupils. She worked with individuals and small groups. She also worked closely with a physiotherapist and delivered programmes set by this colleague to pupils. When interviewed she indicated how the phonic awareness of two pupils she worked with in spoken and written language had improved and that they were now beginning to form CVC words and demonstrating greater confidence in their speech.

In a post primary, an occupational therapy assessment was used to gauge accessibility issues. This school was committed to ensuring students were not disadvantaged as a result of the physical environment.

Two special schools experimented with joint speech and language and occupational therapy sessions. They regarded this as beneficial and it had enabled teachers to work with professional colleagues and to learn appropriate techniques from them through collaboration.

Therapeutic services are sometimes offered through clinics with parents required to take their children for appointments. This often means taking pupils out of school and is seen as challenging for many parents living in rural areas who may have no access to transport. In some instances therapists within clinics provide intervention programmes for parents and schools. For example, a clinic provided short-term programmes in occupational and play therapy for a school phobic pupil. The child's parent reported the school's support in this process. A teacher was prepared to attend an occupational therapy clinic with a parent to understand the exercises advocated.

All case study special schools reported that pupils had access to good support from therapeutic services. Speech and language therapy and occupational therapy were available in all four case study special schools. Additionally, physiotherapy was available in special school 11. In all schools therapeutic input was provided both within school and at specialist clinics. While satisfied with this provision parents reported inadequacies and felt their children would benefit from increased levels of input, a claim substantiated by staff within school 11.

While pupils in all four special schools had access to quality therapeutic support the availability of these resources was intermittent due to HSE staffing challenges. Notwithstanding staffing shortages, the physiotherapist in special school 11 reported having good resources available to him. Respondents in all schools reaffirmed the need for greater access to specialist services. In the interim, HSE professionals interviewed indicated that practice was driven by the Disability Act 2005 and while individually professionals endeavoured to support pupils, the emphasis was on assessment and diagnostic services rather than intervention.

Parents perceived gaining access to therapeutic services as a challenge in all special schools. In particular opportunities for physiotherapy and occupational therapy appeared limited, with parents who received no service being required to wait a considerable time.

In special school 11 parents expressed confidence about going into school to discuss the needs of their children with therapeutic professionals. Therapists worked closely with the school to assist parents in obtaining wheelchair assessments and fittings and similar services for other resources. Teachers benefited from on site access to services and had received training from the speech therapist in delivery of pupils' individual programmes.

There were examples of established relationships with a range of external agencies in three of the case study special schools (11, 12 & 13). In contrast to this good provision, school 14 provided limited evidence of external support. On a return visit to the school and when asked about challenges, the principal reported:

> The biggest hole is lack of access to psychological services; counselling services. (Principal, school 14 special school)

When referring to his request for improved psychological services he claimed:

> … it didn't get beyond the request. (Principal, school 14 special school)

One classroom teacher in school 13 had established a collaboration with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) professionals, and with the occupational therapist, physiotherapist and speech and language therapy service. As part of this collaboration these professionals visited the class settings and observed the teacher and SNA as proxy primary care givers, giving feedback on how they should interact with children.

Some parents interviewed believed the special school was the right place for their child partly because of the likelihood of receiving support from therapists. A parent whose child had attended mainstream primary school and eventually a specialist unit in that school stated that when she was offered a special school placement she was keen to take it, believing that it would be easier to gain access to speech and language and occupational therapy. This parent expressed the view that she, along with other parents known to her, now felt slightly guilty they had not made a decision to move to a special school earlier.

Some parents in special schools said their children had made good progress in speech and language and that this was as a result of both the therapy received and the persistence of teachers working in collaboration with therapists.

In some special schools, including two in the case study, nurses provided support for vulnerable children with medical needs. This included medication management and supervision of tube feeding. Without this support some children would be unable to attend school. The presence of nurses on site increased teacher and parent confidence in their ability to include pupils with complex medical needs.

5.7.1　Support from Educational Psychology Services

All case study schools recognised the crucial role the educational psychology service played in assessing pupils with special educational needs. However many primary and post primary schools expressed frustration in accessing the services of educational psychologists through NEPS and the delays this sometimes caused in obtaining assessments and the resources that often follow. Another source of frustration was the limitations on the number of assessments available to a school.

> What I would say is that we would have a good relationship with all of the agencies that we work with. But, they are constrained by time, as to when they can come and meet with us. So for example, NEPS psychologist, I think we're entitled to one assessment a year, which is absolutely ridiculous. (Deputy principal, school 3 mainstream primary)

However, when the case study schools did get access to NEPS they were pleased with the quality of the service and commented positively on the interactions between school staff and NEPS personnel.

The need for more NEPS psychologists was expressed consistently across education phases. Several principals expressed a belief that the NEPS role had become too focused on assessment and, in their view, this prevented it from fulfilling its stated objectives of providing greater levels of support to schools in managing individual pupils with difficulties.

5.8　Guidance Counsellors

At post primary, guidance counsellors play an important role as part of a team approach to supporting students with special educational needs. In some cases this begins during transition from primary to post primary school.

> What we do, after their entrance assessment is completed, we would make an appointment with the sixth class teacher in the primary school, and guidance and the resource lady and maybe the deputy principal, three of us would head off down to the school and we would go through the list of students who are coming our way, and they would just fill us in on what the specific needs are from many dimensions. (Guidance counsellor, school 17 mainstream post primary)

A guidance counsellor at a girl's post primary could clearly distinguish the role she played during transition and how this differed from that of the teachers involved.

> One teacher goes and visits the feeder schools, primary schools, to talk to the individual class teachers about special structures in force they have currently in primary school, and to see how much we can bring with them into secondary school. My role would be going to the same primary schools but to see them on a different level, to see the teachers about their social background, any issues that the teachers here need to be aware of before the students actually arrive. That happens about June, May, June of the previous academic year, and then when they arrive, actually for very local schools, groups tend to come up with their teacher, girls who have got special education needs come up with their teacher and are seen personally around the school, to familiarise themselves with the layout, to see the facilities, and to see where their classrooms will roughly be, as best we know, before September comes. (Guidance counsellor, school 23 mainstream post primary)

The role that guidance counsellors play when students with special educational needs are first admitted is seen as critical in some post primary schools with the communication of information to teachers and liaison between guidance counsellors and resource teachers seen to be strong in some schools.

> I suppose when any teacher who has a student with special needs in their class, they would be told about what the difficulties were and what the special needs where by either the year head or by guidance, or sometimes by me. (Resource co-ordinator, school 17 mainstream post primary)

The support they then provide generally continues with varying intensity depending on individual student needs. Schools generally had regular team meetings in which the guidance counsellor often played a significant role.

> If teachers feel that a student is struggling or they feel they might have … like we've had referrals with dyslexia that teachers might feel hasn't in worked and hasn't been recognised before, it would be brought to the special needs team, which would be myself, the learning support teacher, the guidance counsellor, the learning support teacher would then carry out some kind of screening test with the student that's been recommended by the teacher, so it is really teacher feedback, because the teachers are the ones that see the students on a day-to-day basis so they know what abilities they have and don't have I suppose. What we do then, is the guidance team are at every year tutor team meeting, which is every week. They have then children that are dyslexic or have any issues, they would come back to the year tutor meeting there, the year tutors then would take it to the class teachers, and the class teachers then would take it to subject teachers. And that's the system we use here. It's one of communication, but the policy would be the main guiding factor. [Names resource teacher], our resource teacher is always available, if people have difficulty in having to manage, she's quite willing to go through with them on how they may manage students with different learning difficulties. (Principal, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Teachers usually make counselling referrals. In one school teachers referred individual students to the counsellor, including those working in the SEN team, and a system existed whereby students might refer themselves or their peers. In respect of working with students with special educational needs this counsellor cited an example of a student with dyslexia who was having difficulties writing down homework from the board. At home this student could not read what was required and hence had difficulties. The student sought the assistance of the counsellor who intervened and improved the situation.

5.9   Training and Professional Development

Survey respondents were asked if they had specific SEN training. It was evident that higher numbers in post primary and special schools had this than their primary colleagues. It is important to note that as most respondents were likely to have been the principal or the specialist teacher, such professionals might have been more likely to have training in this area than general or mainstream class/subject teachers.

Figure 18: Proportion of survey respondents who have undertaken training in special education
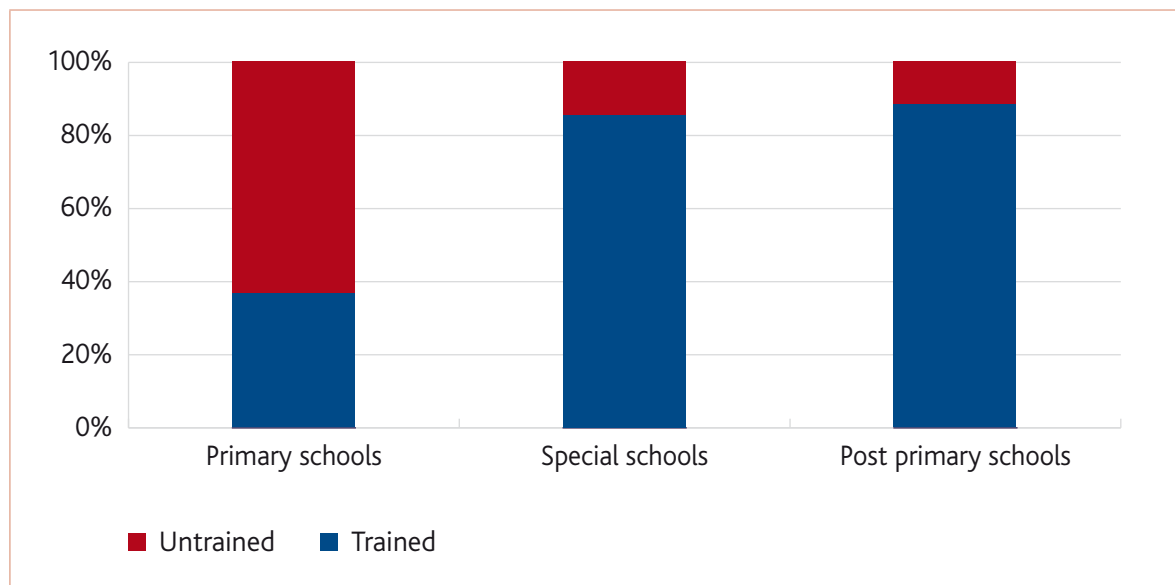
- N = 118   - N = 5   - N = 16
- N = 69   - N = 32   - N = 133

When mapped onto the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), however, much of the training received fell in the range of level 8 (bachelors degree/higher diploma) and level 9 (masters degree/post-graduate diploma), and those availing of training appeared to be doing so at a high level. For primary schools much of the training accessed by teachers included CPD and in-service training, which does not fall within the scope of the NFQ.

Figure 19: Qualification levels (under the NFQ model) of survey respondents who reported they had received SEN training
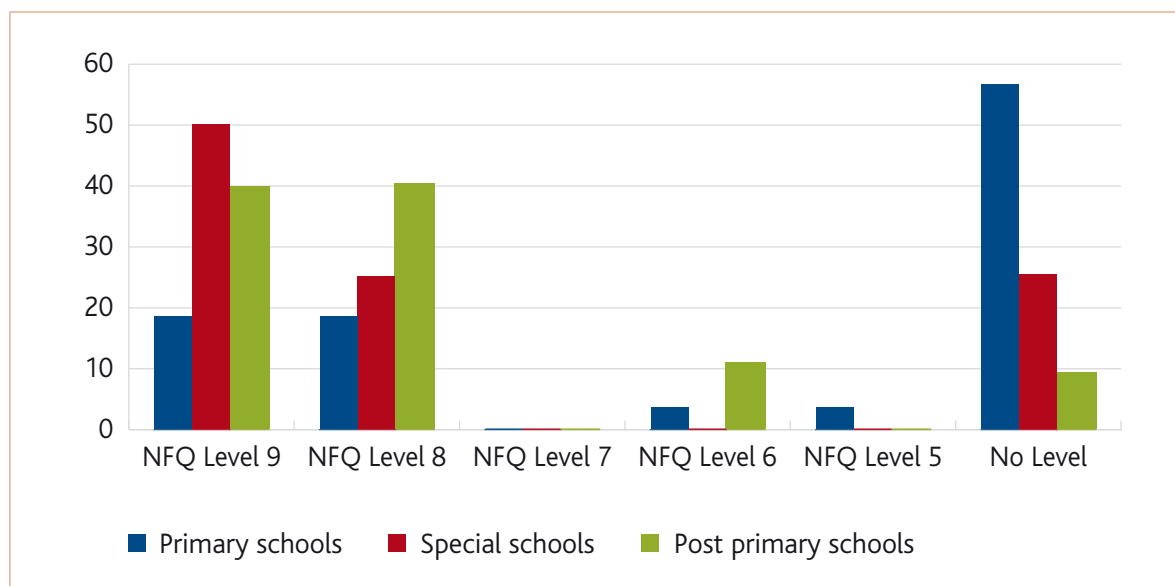
- N=18   - N=18   - N=0.5   - N=4   - N=4   - N=57
- N=50   - N=25   - N=0.5   - N=0.5   - N=0.5   - N=25
- N=40   - N=40   - N=0.5   - N=11   - N=0.5   - N=9

Primary school principals and NEPS psychologists in focus groups highlighted the benefits resulting from current training provision include raising awareness of SEN, enhancing knowledge, changing attitudes, increasing the mobility of staff, providing more opportunities for promotion and for teachers to reflect on teaching and learning. These practitioners viewed Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in SEN and inclusion as inconsistent across institutions, however, and, in some cases they believed there was little or no SEN input in these courses.

> There is a lot of apprehension on the part of the teacher because teachers… …there is no specific training for special needs education in teacher training. (Primary principals focus group)

A scrutiny of documentation, however, indicates that teacher training courses within Ireland do have SEN content though this is often limited.

Evidence from school visits provided a variable picture of teacher professional development. When asked about initial teacher training during visits to case study schools teachers generally agreed that their initial training did not adequately prepare them for work with pupils with special educational needs. School professionals viewed continuing professional development, where available, as highly beneficial although lacking a cohesive infrastructure across the country. Research respondents believed two particular areas needed specific and ongoing training: working with SNAs and developing IEPs.

There were many examples of individual teachers who had benefited from a range of SEN focused courses. In primary school 9 the resource teacher and a learning support teacher described having had an opportunity to train in the use of augmentative communication and had received training in handwriting for children with SEN. Both teachers described how this was influencing classroom practice. Similarly, primary school 7 had committed to support staff's professional development. In this school the principal has a SEN diploma and several other members of the teaching staff have undertaken specialist training. The resource teacher and support teachers also have post graduate diplomas in the area and described their training as having immediate application in their classrooms.

Teachers who make a commitment to professional development report that there are good quality courses available and they have an impact on classroom practice.

> We would have a lot of children with say Asperger's and autism, and I've done a few courses, and they definitely have, [been beneficial] actually his class teacher and myself we were there on Thursday and Friday we're in the college doing the one on TEACCH, and it was absolutely brilliant. It was boom, boom, boom, it was brilliant. I said, "oh god!" I'd only a smattering of it beforehand, and I said, you'd be doing little bits of it as you thought you were, but I said, "if only I knew this!", it's like me saying I wanted to do the course years ago, you know. (Resource teacher of student 1 and 2, students with MD and EBD, school 9 mainstream primary)

Staff in primary school 2 were supported by SESS through provision of reportedly beneficial courses. The resource teachers also attended the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) conference which they found helpful. Information obtained at these courses was disseminated through staff meetings. The resource and support teachers attended training in areas such as autism spectrum disorders (TEACCH course), dyslexia, dyspraxia and behaviour management.

A teacher from the reading unit in primary school 5 described training from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland which she found helpful in developing skills for her post. Another teacher in this school attended a course on working with a deaf child in the mainstream classroom run by SESS which she found useful. However the principal of primary school 3 indicated that geographical location made it difficult for some rural schools to attend professional development at the colleges of education.

Post primary school 21 maintained a record of professional SEN development undertaken by staff. These courses included those focused on strategies to support communication and reading in students on the autism spectrum, introductory courses on Asperger's syndrome, muscular dystrophy and visual impairment, and training on individualised planning. Following advice from inspectors, this school invested in training related to team teaching. The SEN team co-ordinated this and drew on the SESS. The principal believed this training and a move towards increased team teaching had been beneficial in particular for students with special educational needs.

Post primary school 17 provided an ASDAN course for some students with special educational needs to give them a route to accreditation and prepare them for post school life. One teacher was sent on a training course to apply this programme in school and disseminated information to colleagues.

In special schools the training available varied with good provision for specific areas including sign language, but teachers claimed that access was inhibited by lack of substitute cover and the need to travel to obtain training. Within one special school (12) a speech therapist had been active in providing training in augmentative communication and this was seen to have had benefits in terms of consistent application of approaches with pupils.

5.10   Special School Provision

Each case study special school was established to address specific categories of need, for example MGLD. It was evident, however, that each one was populated by students with a range of SEN, whatever their designated category. Special schools have unique features that distinguish them from mainstream schools and a discrete discussion of these is within this report.

5.10.1   Curriculum Content and Delivery in the Special Schools

Pupils in the four case study special schools followed a curriculum which ranged from subjects based on the personal interests of pupils to those associated with the national curriculum. In two special schools (12 & 14) evidence related to the teaching of handwriting and English, art, history, physical education, religious education home economics and science based on an understanding of pupil interests was seen. In special school 14 pupils could avail of English, maths, science, geography and history. Opportunities for practical and experiential elements of science were limited due to the lack of a science laboratory.

A teacher in special school 14 reported the need for flexibility in the curriculum and felt that as a special school they were less tied to text books. The general perception in these schools was that teaching and learning experience needed to prioritise student needs and be concrete and experiential.

> Learning by doing, like learning through play as well. We do, like it's one thing sitting down with the worksheets, but our kids really don't get much from it … now they do sit down with a worksheet with a pencil to start writing their letters. This has taken me – this is my third year with this class but they're like forming letters and writing words – oh, not all of them but most of them. Prior to that you were doing things like writing letters in the sand. Shaving foam on the table, writing the letters in the shaving foam. Using racing cars to go around a bit of laminate with the letters on it. Now we've got the computers its great to be able to use the interactive whiteboard because they see it in front of them. Like, they see that they're using a pen and it's like – oh, it's magical. (Teacher 3, student with ADHD/EBD, school 14 special school)

This teacher also stressed the importance of a good communication system in school. Facilitative relationships avoided the risk of pupils repeating the same curriculum when transitioning between classes. Having promoted a lesser emphasis on text book use to access the curriculum, she advocated a need for teachers to liaise on individual student's progress.

This need for liaison was more intense when students were making variable individual progress. Differentiated approaches to learning allowed them to engage with different reading programmes:

> It's very different because say even within my class there's seven pupils … but for my English I've four different reading programmes going at the same time so it's impossible to try and get around to do that once a week even, not to mind every day, you know. So that definitely needs to be improved. (Teacher 2, student with HI, school 14 special school)

Some use of symbols to aid communication was seen in three schools. This included personalised symbol communication systems, the use of Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and TEACCH – and demonstrated a visual orientation system to the environment and classroom activities. Directions at work stations for individual pupils were evident in special schools 11 and 12, and displays such as safety information related to fire evacuation procedures exhibited with symbols. During lessons symbols were seen to provide access to learning for pupils through use of a visual schedule which enabled them to understand teacher expectations, the organisation of information and the sequence of events. These schedules were used to discuss progress and enable pupils to participate in self-assessment of their progress against targets. One parent in special school 13 reported the use of social stories to aid communication, helping her daughter understand situations which she might find difficult. In special school 12 a speech and language therapist has an interest in augmentative communication and has trained staff in this.

Some communication support is provided through technical and computer assisted aides, though the speech and language therapist reports from special school 12 indicate this as an area which requires attention and development.

In some schools teachers were adept at encouraging independence and ensuring that pupils have time to complete activities with minimal adult intervention. In two schools (11 & 12) there were instances of teachers encouraging peer support enabling pupils to share activities and assist each other.

Teachers used a range of activities in lessons to increase attention and sustain pupil concentration. In many instances it appeared that pupils' needs actively encouraged differentiation by dictating the pace of lessons according to their ability to engage. At times when pupils showed no interest in materials teachers used strategies to achieve learning outcomes through the use of other resources or approaches. Much of the work seen was individualised and prepared by teachers or SNAs for individuals. The classrooms had colourful displays and use of visual learning was emphasised, however, the speech and language therapists in one school suggested use of interactive visual learning could be expanded.

Special schools involved pupils in a range of extra-curricular activities, many of these arranged around lunchtimes as pupils often depended on school transport and had little opportunity for participation in after school clubs.

Whole school assessment practices were evident in the special schools where a wide range of tests were in use. These included word recognition, spelling, phonics skills, sight vocabulary, reading comprehension and numeracy skills. There was inconclusive evidence as to the frequency of use of these tests and the monitoring of academic attainment over time through their use. For one special school, all assessment was performed by a multi-disciplinary team in collaboration with HSE. However, individual learning programmes were already in place in these schools for all pupils.

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In special schools SNAs played a role in curriculum delivery and are involved in pedagogical activity under teacher direction. At times SNAs took responsibility for managing pupils in one-to-one activity outside the classroom. They had a clear focus in this work and a good understanding of the needs of the pupils who responded well in this situation. In many instances SNAs were involved in planning learning activities with teachers and in working with pupils addressing their IEP targets.

The SNA's role was well established in supporting pupils with EBD as seen in special school 4. A strong relationship had been built up with identified students and where possible this school attempted to ensure consistency of management by continuing support from the same SNA year on year.

Some SNAs had undertaken training and valued this experience. Several cited accredited courses they had pursued at colleges of education which increased their levels of skills and knowledge and provided them with ideas that they had applied directly in classrooms.

5.11   Transition between Phases of Education

A number of pupils in this study (n=25) were involved in some form of transition either from primary to another primary school (n=4), primary to post primary (n=13) or from post primary to a post school placement (n=7) and one pupil (Leo, School 1) and his family had emigrated. Primary to post primary is the most common form of transition in this study and a review of the experiences and outcomes for pupils follows. At post primary the post school destinations of those involved will be provided.

5.11.1   Types of Transition

Figure 20 outlines the three types of transition experienced by pupils in this study.

Figure 20: Primary-primary transition: 2010-11 (year 2)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Transition placement
Sue (school 2)	Hearing impairment	Primary school (Educate Together)
Ella (school 3)	Speech and language	Primary school (non-DEIS)
Alex (school 4)	Speech and language	Primary school (DEIS)

Figure 21: Primary-post primary transition: 2010-11 (year 2)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Transition placement
Bob (school 1)	AS/ADHD/MGLD	Vocational school
Peter (school 1)	Speech and language	Vocational school
Alexander (school 4)	Speech and language	Vocational school (DEIS)
Jim (school 5)	Hearing impairment	Vocational school
Benjamin (school 6)	Dyslexia	Community school
Elliot (school 9)	Multiple disabilities	Secondary (fee-paying)
Ethan (school 9)	EBD	Comprehensive school
Jasmine (school 10)	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)

Figure 22: Primary-primary transition: 2011-12: (year 3)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Transition placement
* Ben (school 4)	Borderline MGLD	Educate Together

Figure 23: Primary-post primary transition: 2011-12 (year 3)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Transition placement
Jason (school 1)	MGLD	Special school
Zoe (school 2)	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)
Lily (school 2)	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)
Steve (school 5)	Multiple disabilities	Community school
Alicia (school 5)	Dyslexia	Secondary (girls)

Figure 24: Post primary to special school transition: 2011-12 (year 3)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Transition placement
Jolie (school 15)	Physical disability	Special school (MGLD)

Figure 25: Post primary to post-school transition: 2011-12 (year 3)

Pupil and school	SEN category	Post-school placement
Joe (school 18)	EBD	PLC (FETAC Level 5)
Jonathan (school 19)	Down syndrome	Voluntary organisation (day programme)
Kai (school 19)	EBD	Third level (IT)
Maisie (school 19)	Physical disability	National Learning Network
Natasha (school 23)	EBD	PLC (FETAC Level 5)
* Jodie (school 23)	MGLD	N/A
Molly (school 22)	EBD	PLC (FETAC Level 5)
Netta (school 16)	Physical disability	Voluntary work/unemployed

* Did not wish to participate in follow up interviews.

5.11.2 Primary to Post Primary Transition

Over the period of this study 13 pupils moved from primary to post primary school. While each transition had unique characteristics depending on context a number of common themes emerged including detailed preparation by schools involved, collaboration between home and schools, supports available within post primary setting and careful monitoring of academic and social progress. These general themes will be illustrated by reference to the experiences of the 13 pupils involved.

5.11.3 Preparation for Transition

All post primary schools involved in the transition of these pupils had developed a plan to facilitate all incoming pupils, including those with SEN. Post primary school personnel (usually the incoming first year head and support teacher) visited the main feeder primary schools to provide an introduction to their school to pupils and primary school staff where relevant. SEN specific information about pupils intending to attend the post primary school would be collated. Induction evenings and open days in the post primary schools to enable parents to meet school personnel were reported as common practice. In one an orientation day was organised for pupils intending to attend as reported by Peter's mother:

> They did a nice day down in the school, they brought the kids from here down to the school. Peter was on about how big the school was … he really loved it, he saw the science room, the cooking room and the art room (Parent 8, child with SSLD/EBD, school 1 mainstream primary)

Local knowledge of the school was reported as influential in choosing a school for a child with special educational needs, according to five parents (Peter, Bob [school 1], Zoe, Lily [school 2], Steve [school 5]). Three schools organised an induction programme specifically for these pupils who had an opportunity to meet their assigned SNA and resource teacher.

A common factor identified in school and parent perspectives is evidence of strong collaboration between all key stakeholders (primary and post primary school personnel, external agencies (when necessary), parents and pupils themselves. For example, Ethan's parents (Ethan has EBD) particularly appreciated the collaboration between primary and comprehensive school to provide resources to best meet their son's learning needs:

> To look at Ethan's needs, coming here, right. And again it was very supportive, it was very, it just inspired the confidence … meeting up in the primary school then later that year and he had a resource teacher … came up from the school and like because the people from the secondary school were in that week, just getting some background information for him. (Parent 2, child with EBD, school 9 mainstream primary)

The NEPS psychologist assigned to the post primary that Bob and Peter (School 1) planned to attend, liaised with their current primary to pass on practical information about the transition and to collate information on pupils with special educational needs intending to move to the post primary. The primary support teacher found this contact particularly helpful in preparing Bob and Peter for transition:

> I was talking to the psychologist that time when she came for filling in the forms … some forms are fantastic, it's just to work on the new timetable, and the way you would have to move in from classroom to different classroom, different teachers, making new friends and all that … plus there's forms that we fill in with their strengths, their weaknesses, the hours they've been getting for resource and all that, have they an SNA or not. (Support teacher of student 2 and 8, student with Asperger's syndrome/ADHD/MGLD and SSLD/EBD, school 1 mainstream primary)

One pupil (Jason, school 1) moved to a special school for his post primary education and his parents reported that the main reason for this placement was due to their belief, one shared by primary school support staff, that:

> … he wouldn't have been able to cope in secondary. (Parent 3, child with MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

In sixth class the preparation phase of transition was organised as a teacher and an SNA from the primary school visited the special school and gathered relevant information. Jason, accompanied by his support teacher and his SNA, later visited the special school.

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5.11.4   Initial Transition

From the post primary school perspective each primary school pupil had eventually achieved a positive transition with varying degrees of success. All transition pupils were reported to have made academic and social progress at their respective post primary schools. In some cases this progress might be quite slight but nevertheless progress was noted for all pupils. Four post primary schools operated a buddy system to support incoming first years and this was commented on positively by both parents and pupils involved. This buddy system usually consisted of senior pupils being assigned to first year classes and in the school attended by Alicia (school 5) each individual first year was paired with a senior pupil. In Jim's school (school 5) a traffic lights system was employed and pupils could indicate their level of understanding of a particular concept by holding up the relevant card (green – fully understood; orange – reasonable understanding but one/two areas not fully grasped; red – very little understanding and considerable confusion). Jim's mother reported that he had found this system very helpful especially as it removed the onus from the individual pupil to indicate their lack of understanding in front of their peers.

All parents commented positively on school support for their children. Ethan's mother was particularly pleased with the resource teacher's personable approach from the start with her son and that she had taken time to find out about him:

> So before he'd ever met her, before he went to the school, she knew his name, she knew his background and said, "look, if there's any difficulty doing the assessment, give me a call". And the first day in here, he met her for the second time, and she walked up from the corridor and said "hi Ethan, you made it, great", again, which was wonderful. (Parent 2, child with EBD, school 9 mainstream primary)

From each school's perspective, strong collaboration between it and home was reported as another critical factor in achieving successful transition outcomes. Depending on the nature of the school and pupil learning needs varying degrees of collaboration with external agencies were reported. The home school liaison officer in Alexander's school, for example, played a vital role in communicating between his mother and the school.

Academically, all pupils were reported to have made some progress between the two visits which the school personnel felt indicated a positive transition experience; again some more than others depending on their level at entry and their specific learning needs. All pupils performed reasonably well in recent exams and Alexander (school 4) exceeded expectations in his Christmas exams, according to his school principal:

> He did reasonably well on the tests … we had other kids with other special needs believe it or not, and Alexander was put into the upper lower band. (Principal, school 4 mainstream primary)

Alicia (school 5) was reported to be in the top half of the class and it was anticipated that she would take higher level in most subjects at Junior Certificate and a similar profile was reported for Jim (school 5) who had a hearing impairment. Benjamin (school 6) who had dyslexia was placed in the second (honours) stream for maths and the third stream (ordinary) for English. He was reported to be proficient in certain aspects of maths including the line and coordinate geometry. While Benjamin had oral proficiency he had difficulties in transferring his knowledge into a written format as reported by his support teacher:

> From an academic point of view Benjamin is quite good orally, he can grasp concepts, he's very good like that … but then when it comes to actually writing things out, you can see where he falls down. (Learning support teacher 3, student with dyslexia, school 6 mainstream primary)

Although academic progress was reported for all pupils areas of academic concern were ongoing, particularly for their specific learning needs. Despite some progress, maths continued to prove difficult for all the pupils. Since the first term, Ethan (school 9) had moved to foundation level and his resource teacher reported that he was enjoying the subject more now. Zoe's (school 2) maths teacher reported that she had real difficulties in maths:

> She's very weak at maths, struggles a lot. She wouldn't really put up her hand to ask a question even though she didn't understand it. (Maths teacher, student with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

Different aspects of the core subject, English was reported to be particularly challenging for several pupils due to their language comprehension difficulties related to dyslexia or language impairments (Zoe, Lily, Benjamin, Alexander, Ethan). Ethan's poor reading comprehension, for example, also affected other subjects as his history teacher reported:

> Written words he would find quite challenging. With history, there's a lot of information. (History teacher, student with EBD, school 9 mainstream primary)

Peter's class tutor reported that Peter could be left behind as he struggled to understand the class work:

> French, he's not as confident and not as able either, in French, there would be more chances for him to be sitting doing nothing, because he just didn't get it, and I moved on and he would still be sitting there doing nothing. (Class tutor, student with SSLD/EBD, school 1 mainstream primary)

Homework was reported to be a real difficulty for about half the pupils who made the transition. Steve's (school 5) mother, for example, reported that the workload had increased and that Steve:

> ... does find the homework challenging... he still hasn't got his head around the idea that there needs to be study done. (Parent 6, child with MD, school 5 mainstream primary)

For others such as Zoe and Lily the provision of a school homework club was very helpful as teacher support was available if they were struggling.

In terms of future education prospects each of these pupils was expected to experience some challenges with the curriculum but ultimately they were considered capable of completing Junior Certificate examinations. Ordinary level English was considered a more appropriate option for pupils with speech and language impairments. Benjamin's (school 6) mother was looking further ahead and hoped he would progress to higher education though she was concerned that not doing a language subject could prove a serious obstacle for him.

Eleven of the 13 pupils appeared to have settled in socially and were reported to be part of friendship networks. Ethan's (school 9) resource teacher, for example, reported that he had made a good transition socially:

> He's settled in very well ... he's very sociable, so he's just made friends at the start, straight away ... he was getting on very well in the yard and everything, you know, in the lunchroom or anything. (Resource teacher 2, student with EBD, school 9 mainstream primary)

Parents and teachers, in general, commented that those who had made social progress also demonstrated increased confidence and maturity, as reported by Zoe's (school 2) mother:

> ... she is mixing very well, and has one or two good friends in there as well, so she's happy in school ... she's grown up a lot in the last year ... she's definitely matured a lot, she's not as shy as she was. (Parent 2, child with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

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Two pupils, in particular, (Peter and Bob, school 1) experienced difficulties with name calling when they moved to their new school (small vocational post primary). The name calling lessened in intensity after an intervention by the class tutor but had not disappeared totally. Bob was a source of specific concern for his class tutor who observed that:

> … he wouldn't be making new friends he would basically go into the class and basically on his own … now he is friends with Peter and they do chat on and off … would seem to kind of rely on each other quite a lot … we've a lot of children as well who are just doing so well, and they're making new friends, and they noticed that Bob is different, and there's an issue. (Class tutor, student with Asperger's syndrome/ADHD/MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

His class tutor reported some progress, however, saying that he was beginning to trust her and report any bullying incidents to her:

> If there are any issues with somebody annoying him which did happen in the past, he'll come to me and he'll tell me, and he doesn't let it build up, he has no problems at all with telling the teacher, that somebody's annoying him and doing something about it, which is great (Class tutor, student with Asperger's syndrome/ADHD/MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

Alexander (school 4) experienced difficulties in settling into his new school (urban DEIS vocational) and was reported to be behaving inappropriately towards teachers:

> … fighting, shouting, screaming at teachers, this type of thing, not doing the homework, not engaging with the classes. (Member of NBSS, student with SSLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

The school's NBSS support worker was assigned to Alexander at an early stage and he reported that a change in behaviour had been achieved through a strategy of mirroring appropriate behaviour with a resulting positive outcome:

> … he's worked out extremely well as a student … it generally takes a long time to get small improvements … he took it all on board … with Alexander after five weeks I'm very very pleased with his work, as are his teachers, as far as I know … he was getting in trouble. He's not any more. (Member of NBSS, student with SSLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

Despite the overall positive transition experience reported for most pupils a few outstanding issues were difficult to resolve. For example, both Alexander's mother and his support teacher were frustrated and disappointed that the lack of transfer of SEN support from primary to post primary had left him without much needed one-to-one support in the first term:

> Even if the same SENO is dealing with the child in the primary school, nothing transfers. I have to make a completely new application, and I do that in May or earlier. And then I have to wait until the SENO comes out to the school, and then she's not coming out till December. So I'm left in limbo, so I've read all about the child, I know all about the child, I know that Alexander like has a speech and language difficulty, I know he needs help, I know there's recommendation for an SNA, I applied for all them. In Alexander's case, I didn't get an SNA, and it was December before I got anything, and I got four hours of resource for that problem. (Resource teacher, student with SSLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

Steve (school 5) had difficulties controlling his behaviour on initial transition to post primary school (community school) and was reported by his support teacher as very challenging, prone to temper outbursts and oppositional behaviour:

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> You can't have a conversation with him without him having an answer. You couldn't say to Steve, "Now can you do this for me now?" His response would be "Why? Why do I have to do that? You're not telling me to do that, why should I do that for you?" (Support teacher, student with MD, school 5 mainstream primary)

His mother was uncertain of the root cause of his defiant behaviour, whether it was the ODD or his lack of confidence in his subjects. There was also school concern that Steve was becoming over-reliant on his SNA and his support teacher and SNA were making a concerted effort to ensure he could gradually become more independent. Steve reported that his conflict with his support teacher was due to her insistence on him following her instructions in relation to solving a maths problem:

> And now Ms [ST] is very, "Do this now, do this now, do this now" and she won't let me try and figure it out. And I got frustrated and she just thinks that the way she learns is the way everybody else should learn. Which is kind of annoying. (Pupil 6, child with MD, School 5 mainstream primary)

Steve was participating in a peer support group organised by the CAMHS service. It was evident that enabling Steve to develop appropriate behaviour patterns would be a long-term project though he had established friendships and was particularly good at woodwork and liked the school.

Benjamin (school 6) was not considered eligible for resource support though he had it at primary level. He had maintained his exemption from Irish though this appeared of limited value as, according to his mother, when officially withdrawn from Irish he just sat in the back of the Irish class. He will have an assessment to determine his eligibility for reasonable accommodations and his mother was concerned that he should receive the appropriate accommodations as she reported that:

> His spelling is a disaster, when you read what he writes down … (Parent 3, child with dyslexia, school 6 mainstream primary)

Jason (school 1) was also reported to have made a successful transition to the special school. His class group was structured as a transition class from primary to post primary education within the special school and the class programme was based on the first class primary curriculum with a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and life skills. School personnel (class teacher, principal, SNA) agreed that Jason was very quiet and shy on entry though all were equally adamant that since Christmas he had gained confidence and 'blossomed'. Many examples illustrated his academic and social progress: Jason worked with a peer on a canal project identifying wildlife which was entered in a science competition; Jason became the star student the previous week and though initially reluctant to take on the role now really enjoyed the responsibility; his class teacher reported that Jason was better able to follow instructions, work independently and take an initiative; he had proven to be athletic and demonstrated skills in football and basketball. School personnel predicted that Jason would probably follow a restricted Junior Certificate programme consisting of one Junior Certificate subject and some FETAC level one programmes. His parents were happy with the school and reported that:

> It is a good school to have for kids that can't compete in mainstream schools. (Parent 3, child with MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

5.11.5   Pupil Response to Transition

Pupils were generally positive about their new school and reported that they believed they had settled in well with the exception of two, Bob and Peter, as reported above. Alicia (school 5) who had transferred to a girls' post-primary school reported that:

> I thought it [moving to secondary school] would be really hard but it's not, it's quite good and easy. (Pupil 8, child with dyslexia, school 5 mainstream primary)

This view was corroborated by Zoe (school 2) who said:

> Well I thought it was going to be way more scary [moving to secondary school], but it's not as scary as you think. Like, you'd be more afraid of harder work, but it's actually not that much harder. (Pupil 2, child with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

Benjamin (school 6) was also positive about his transition and he welcomed the opportunity to study new subjects:

> In primary school I was never able to do things like woodwork and engineering, it was all English, Irish, maths. (Pupil 3, child with dyslexia, school 6 mainstream primary)

5.11.6   Post Primary Transition

Seven pupils transitioned from post primary to post school placement (Joe, Jonathan, Kai, Maisie, Natasha, Molly and Jodie). Kai, Joe, Natasha, and Jodie all passed the traditional Leaving Certificate examination, Molly was successful in the LCA and Jonathan and Maisie had completed ASDAN (UK) certification. Three (Jonathan, Kai and Maisie) attended a large community college in a city location. Joe attended a boys' secondary in a rural location and Natasha and Jodie attended a girls' school on the outskirts of a city. Molly attended a rural community school which has DEIS status. One pupil, Jolie, who has a physical disability, moved from school 15 to a special school. Jolie's mother reported that this had been very successful and that Jolie was much happier in this setting.

Jonathan, who has Down syndrome and had been assessed in the moderate range of intellectual disability, was participating in a day programme delivered by a local voluntary organisation. Kai, assessed as having EBD, achieved his first choice course and was enrolled in an institute of technology close to his home. Maisie, who has a physical disability, attended a course organised by the National Learning Network. Joe, assessed as having EBD, was enrolled in a PLC (FETAC level 5) course. This was not his first choice though he hoped to access his desired course in an institute of technology when he finished his PLC course. Natasha, who has EBD, was participating in a PLC course (FETAC Level 5) in a college of further education. Molly had enrolled in a PLC course on childcare. One pupil (Jodie) chose not to continue in the research study so there is no post school placement information for her.

5.12   Summary

All pupils had made the transition from primary to a post primary placement. In general there was evidence that post primary schools and their primary counterparts liaised closely in organising the transition of pupils with special educational needs. First year head and SENCO in post primary had a critical role in facilitating support for pupils with special educational needs and ensuring that teachers were informed about their learning needs. Generally post primary school support personnel were aware of the importance of responding appropriately to the social needs of pupils with special educational needs though in one school this was less evident. Transition to a special school for one pupil had proven successful, academically and socially. Transition to post school placement was achieved by most pupils though it was not always evident that this was appropriate.

6 Experiences

6.1 Experiences of Parents and Pupils

This chapter presents the perceptions of parents and pupils of their experiences of provision made by case study schools to address learning needs. Perceptions at primary level and in special schools are presented first, followed by those at post primary level. They were gathered over the two research visits. Data analysis revealed few, if any, discernible differences between perceptions of parents and pupils over the timespan of these visits. As a result it was decided to present this material in terms of composite themes based on the two visits.

Researchers decided early to give pupils and parents opportunities to make a significant contribution to the data. Interview transcript excerpts have been used to illustrate research findings. Where these excerpts are used they are presented verbatim with no changes to wording. Parental and pupil experiences did not appear to vary according to type of school attended though the form of parent-school communication at post primary tended to be more structured and less informal than at primary.

Researchers have indicated the numbers of parent/pupil responses within the identified themes, where actual numbers are not used the designation of many, some, few (as outlined in the methodology) is used. In addition to this, when, for example, it is stated that parents in six primary schools agreed with a particular statement usually parents in the four remaining primary schools had not indicated a strong opinion either in support or against this statement. In addition, where appropriate, the SEN designation of children and young people is provided.

The themes of relationships and communication identified earlier in the report as cross-cutting themes across the four core domains of policy, provision, experience and outcomes were particularly important in understanding the parental and pupil responses to primary and post primary school experiences. Most parents were generally positive about their interactions with schools, especially at primary. Most pupils were positive about their experiences and how their learning needs were addressed. However, despite this overall satisfaction parents and pupils at primary and post primary expressed some concerns about aspects of SEN provision. In particular, many parents expressed serious concerns about the waiting time involved in identification and assessment process and a smaller number were critical that due to the limited availability of State sponsored assessments they had to pay for private assessments. This issue is extensively covered in Chapter 5 and as a result is not addressed here.

6.2 Primary Schools

Most parents of primary and special school pupils were generally positive about their children's experiences of the schools attended. Parents of special school pupils previously in mainstream commented on what they considered significant differences in provision in the respective settings. Parents of pupils in mainstream primary and post primary identified factors that contributed to their positive evaluation of school provision for their children: appropriate types of support offered to their children; positive attitudes of school personnel; the development of home-school relationships; and SNA support. Parents with children in special schools generally highlighted the benefits of this form of provision particularly in terms of increased access to therapeutic services. Parental concerns about aspects of school provision (mainstream/special) are documented in the final section.

6.2.1   Types of Support

Parents in eight primary schools reported their children had received appropriate support once their needs were identified. They offered a variety of examples ranging from specific support provision for children with particular types of special educational needs to the school's role in advocating for resources for them. They particularly valued how schools devised individual responses appropriate to their child's specific needs. In school 6, for example, the mother of a fifth class boy on the autism spectrum observed that his participation in mainstream education was made possible through his attendance at the school's autism unit. The expertise of the teacher in charge of the unit was appreciated and it was noted that she was well qualified in the education of children with ASD. This parent perceived that the autism unit in the school contributed to positive peer attitudes towards children with ASD:

> And the other kids within the school, because it's part of the school, it's never been anything other than part of the school, they don't see it as different. You're not bringing a special child in and trying to make a child fit in, it's just part of it, they just don't see what the big deal is which is great. (Parent 4, child with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

The parent of a sixth class girl assessed as having ADHD believed her school had positively contributed to her education after her move from another school at the beginning of fourth class:

> Anyway, then she came into school 2 … and they've been absolutely fantastic since, giving her all the hours that she needs, and she's been improving loads. She's just really unorganised … the same with her writing, and like her reading is ok, but writing and putting things down onto paper is just mad, organising herself, just, complete mess. (Parent 3, child with ADHD, school 2, mainstream primary)

Adapting the physical environment for her daughter, Abbie, who was in junior infants and has a physical disability, was a major concern for another mother in school 4. Ensuring access was achieved through collaboration between the school and health services:

> … it was positive, it was, there was no hesitation about it, it was easier than I expected really. So the physiotherapist and occupational therapist also came here, … look around, and they made some recommendations to the health board and some things were adjusted for her, like the ramp at the back there, and then they had the coat hook lowered and some adjustments were made just to make things easier for her, to make her as independent as her condition would allow. I'm happy with everything. (Parent 1, child with PD, school 4 mainstream primary)

Two parents of children in school 3 with widely different educational needs appreciated the school's advocacy role in securing resources for their children. One boy in second class on the first study visit had been experiencing difficulties in class work despite his evident oral ability and the school responded by securing a psychological assessment which identified him as having dyslexia. This school was also proactive in securing support for a second child in first class who was assessed as being on the ASD spectrum. In this case, his mother reported that:

> The school was pushing for us as well all right, I mean we couldn't go anywhere, we only met dead ends. I called on autism services and they can't help you till you get to the HSE … and when you're in there they're [autism services] great, I can see things actually happening now. (Parent 6, child with ASD, school 3 mainstream primary)

Parents in four schools mentioned support from DES and health services. In school 1, for example, the parents of a child with a hearing impairment appreciated the knowledge and hands-on practical support from the Visiting Teacher Service. In school 3 a mother valued the opportunity to discuss her son's needs (ADHD) with the SENO:

> … it was great to have the opportunity to explain what we required as parents, and the issues we had been dealing with, because otherwise you feel that sometimes there's a gap between you being able to get to the people who make the decisions, and we found that invaluable, she was extremely helpful. (Parent 3, child with ADHD, school 3 mainstream primary)

In school 5, a parent mentioned how her son's speech therapist linked with his class teacher to incorporate elements of the speech therapy programme into the curriculum to address some of his communication and social interaction challenges.

Pupils in all four special schools experience a range of teaching approaches including whole class, small group and individual instruction. Parents interviewed saw this variety as an advantage that could be provided in special schools but which may be more difficult to achieve in mainstream provision. When talking about the progress of her son who has MGLD a parent said:

> I think it's because it's a one-to-one, you know, they've only got a few in the class and it's after helping so much. I really am shocked at the way he's after coming on … More attention he's after getting, I think is absolutely brilliant. (Parent 4, child with MGLD, school 12 special school)

6.2.2   Positive Attitude of School Personnel

Parents in seven of the ten primary schools mentioned how the school had been proactive in ensuring that their children were included in the school's academic and social life. This reflected the importance parents placed on social achievement, a recurring theme throughout visits to case study schools and commented on elsewhere in this report. Responding to children's individual academic and social needs was considered critical in ensuring that they were not treated in ways that emphasised any differences from their peers. Three parents of children in school 3 observed that inclusion was considered an essential element in the school ethos:

> … everybody in that school is included in everything and they don't segregate or separate anybody. It's part of the ethos that everybody's looked after and everybody can, so inclusion is definitely a big part of school and I've never seen anybody not included in anything. (Parent 2, child with SLD, school 3 mainstream primary)

This positive school attitude was evident in other schools where parents reported an inclusive approach permeating many aspects of engagement with their children. This included an awareness of the impact of disability on a child's life; a clear focus on individual academic and social needs presented by pupils; and proactive approaches to encourage pupil participation. In school 7, for example, a mother said the school was understanding of her son's attendance which was variable due to his physical disability and medical interventions. In school 3, the mother of two children with ASD observed that the school had been supportive in addressing their complex needs:

> … I think that what they do here is marvellous, and I do think that the staff here have exercised an extreme amount of patience when it comes to my children, and I do think that they enjoy school, they enjoy coming to school. (Parent 6, child with ASD, school 3 mainstream primary)

In school 5, for example, the parents of a boy with Down syndrome complimented the school's efforts to include him in activities and not make inappropriate accommodations based on his special educational need:

> I think the main thing that they do is they actually treat him like all the other kids, which was my main thing when I first came here, that I just didn't want him to be treated separately or differently. So they do actually treat him exactly the same you know if he's bold or he misbehaves, he's treated exactly the same, which is good, because the other kids see that and they just treat him exactly the same as everyone else. So they just include him in everything. (Parent 1, child with AS, school 5 mainstream primary)

In the same school, a mother considered her son with a hearing impairment was fully included in the school:

> He just is included, he doesn't feel he is different and he said to me one time, he said, "mum, you know when the teacher wears the microphone, I don't have a clue who that's for", it wasn't made out that it was for anybody in particular, but he thought that was quite funny, it wasn't a big secret but it wasn't a big news project either (Parent 7, child with HI, school 5 mainstream primary)

In school 7, a Gaelscoil, a pupil with a physical disability was included in the academic programme through a planned intervention implemented by his SNA:

> … his special needs assistant is working to a very specific programme from the occupational therapist and speech and language, in terms of sequencing and language needs, motor skills needs. While it's tied in very much to what the other kids are doing, because he has socialisation issues as well, I think it's very well tailored within the curriculum to move him along. (Parent 1, child with PD, school 7 mainstream primary)

Another mother believed her son's teachers were including him despite some difficulties with his behaviour:

> There's a sense that his behaviour has made it very difficult for him to be integrated entirely with what goes on in class, and now because he's behind in many ways, his challenge is actually catching up, so I can appreciate that they're trying to address the vast bulk of the class and balance them with the needs of individuals and I think they're mindful of that and I think they're doing their best in the circumstances. (Parent 3, child with ADHD, school 3 mainstream primary)

All parents of pupils at the four special schools found staff supportive and understanding of the needs of their children and themselves as parents. When asked if the schoo was addressing the former this parent was positive about the experiences:

> Very well. I think we're working off the one hymn sheet, we know his capabilities and we know, and a lot of it depends on his form you see. You know when you can push him, and you know when you have to ease off. So that's where the IEP can take a while, it might never, some of the targets on it might never happen, some of them could happen quicker than they think. (Parent 2, child with ASD, school 11 special school)

The balance between an academic curriculum and one addressing social development was seen as important by parents of pupils attending all four special schools. When asked to describe her educational priorities for her daughter, a parent of a pupil with cerebral palsy and a visual impairment stated:

> More social skills really. I mean education-wise, yes, what she needs now to get her through day by day, but my main thing would be her social skills, and to be able to communicate without lashing out, and all that kind of area part of it. Really the social aspect of it was what made me get her [transfer her] from the mainstream school. (Parent 3, child with cerebral palsy and visual impairment, school 12 special school)

Many parents saw improvements in communication as key to more successful learning and sociability and discussed the importance of prioritising the experiences of their children in this area.

> Mine is speech, the first thing I think is speech and comprehension, because I think everything else is secondary, and if that comes up I think he will understand, the rest of it will come up by itself. But because that is so low and so poor, all his learning is just pulled up. That's it (Parent 5, child with cerebral palsy, school 12 special school)

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6.2.3   Home-School Relationships

Parents in seven out of the ten primary schools mentioned the quality of home-school communication. They described how schools actively engaged in facilitating supportive home-school relationships and regular communication was central to this process. A mother was helped to support her son's needs through regular daily contact with his SNA:

> I get a written report every day from the SNA, just in terms of how he's got on and all the rest of it, because we're really trying to keep on top of his behaviour and to keep him reinforced that he needs to do what he's told when he's told … but we just have to be really consistent with that, and I think the channel of communication is really good, and we follow up at home if there's been a problem and all the rest of it. (Parent 1, child with PD, school 7 mainstream primary)

Regular teacher reports reassured a mother who was anxious about how her daughter, who has a physical disability, would settle into junior infants:

> … the teacher has also been very helpful, she's always giving me progress reports if there's anything, and she's always asking me if there's anything bothering me, and I really feel comfortable with that. (Parent 1, child with PD, school 4 mainstream primary)

The following example from the mother of a child with Asperger's syndrome illustrates the value of a homework journal used effectively from an early stage of schooling. Her son, diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at age four, attends his local primary school in a small town (school 1). Since his arrival, it is apparent that a collaborative relationship has been established between school personnel and his parents. Communication between the two is facilitated through the use of a homework journal which the mother perceived as invaluable in supporting her child.

> I'd ask the teachers anything that had happened during the day, and I would write down anything that happens at home that is going to affect him at school that day. So between myself and the special needs assistant and his teacher, they have a journal for him, so I know what's been going on at school, and they know if there's a problem after happening at home … because I know then, say he'd had trouble in the yard, you know, they'd write down 'he's thrown stones in the yard, or got into difficulty in the yard, or wasn't happy playing with a boy', or something, I know then if he comes home in a humour, I'll give him his lunch and have a little chat with him … (Parent 4, child with ASD/MGLD, school 1 mainstream primary)

Parents in three schools specifically mentioned active collaboration between school personnel and parents in curriculum delivery and IEP development. There was limited evidence that parents in the other seven primary schools were as actively involved in this type of collaboration. Such collaboration had a positive impact on shaping school provision for a pupil with Asperger's syndrome who was concerned that a time-out strategy employed was having a negative impact on his learning so the parents suggested an alternative approach that his teacher adopted:

> … don't take him out of the classroom for time out, bring him to the bottom of the class, so that he's still hearing what's going on around him, because I don't want him missing out on certain things in the classroom. (Parent 2, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 3 mainstream primary)

The resource teacher worked with this pupil and his parents to improve his social skills through using social stories. His mother commented that social stories had proved very helpful in developing appropriate his social skills and observed that his great effort and the collaboration between home and school had been effective. Three other primary schools also commented posititvely on social stories.

In three schools parents specifically commented on their involvement in the development and review of IEPs for their children as explained by a parent in school 5:

> I genuinely think it's a great school and it's particularly when it comes to children that have any kind of needs, they just seem to have their finger on the buzzer, and they're very good to involve parents in IEPs, in the individual educational plans, and what do I want him to be doing in resource, like I'd meet with the resource teacher and the teacher and the SNA any number of times, and we'll discuss his progress. (Parent 3, child with EBD, school 5 mainstream primary)

Another parent, a recent immigrant to Ireland, described her experiences of planning to support her son who is in first class and has mild general learning difficulties:

> I do get them [IEP], like a goal, what they're going to do with him for this year, yes, they sit me down then and they're like, ok, this is what we're going to concentrate, yes. They always have a meeting I think, is it twice a year? And again, there's a parents-teacher meeting and a review. You feel great, you're like "oh my god so he's doing good"! You feel happy and you're "oh, they actually care", because you know, other schools they don't. (Parent 5, child with MGLD, school 4 mainstream primary)

Parents regarded communication between them and special schools as positive in all four schools and here extensive use was made of home-school diaries. This was seen as particularly important for parents of pupils who live some distance from the school and also by those whose children have communication difficulties. The home-school diaries also gave parents an opportunity to inform school personnel of events in their child's life, ask questions or express anxieties. They appreciated that pupils with complex communication difficulties were often supported through augmentative systems of communication or with computer assisted technology. This includes use of symbol systems, in particular Makaton and signing systems such as Lámh. Use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Objects of Reference was seen in the two schools for pupils with MGLD.

6.2.4   SNA Support

Parents in eight schools provided specific examples of how SNA support was essential to their children's participation in school. This perception of SNAs reinforce that of professionals working in schools. Parents appreciated SNAs who were knowledgeable about their child, provided consistent support and in some situations, where required, offered support discreetly. One parent described the value of SNA support for the emotional needs of her child who has ASD:

> He's very different from when he started school, he's a different child altogether, he got a full time SNA when he started and then he's had an SNA up until this year, they're trying to kind of phase it out, but I don't think he could have got this far without his SNA, do you know what I mean? It's kind of, it's not even academically he's fine, he's very clever, it's emotional support for him, you know that kind of thing. (Parent 1, child with ASD, school 10 mainstream primary)

Parents in two schools noted how the SNA had been deployed to ensure support could be offered discreetly and in school 5 the mother of a girl who has a hearing impairment said:

> We kind of didn't want Susan to feel that she was different when she got her SNA ... so the SNA would nearly assist the teacher in the classroom, and then if the teacher says something, and the SNA might go over to Susan and just reinforce what she's to do, or if she has any problems, or if anything happened to her device. (Parent 5, child with HI, school 5 mainstream primary)

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Consistency of SNA support was vital for one mother in addressing her son's behaviour challenges:

> … and for Mike what was essential and has proven to work is having some consistency, so we have somebody dedicated who works with him permanently and we think that will actually expedite improvements in his behaviour and his life generally. (Parent 3, child with ADHD, school 3 mainstream primary)

This was reinforced by another parent in school 6 who believed SNA support helped her daughter with ASD negotiate the school's physical environment:

> The SNA is absolutely essential to making it seamless if they have to change classrooms. She would be very nervous and she'd be nervous of small spaces, and without making that too obvious with the rest of the class, the SNA would be the link there. (Parent 5, child with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

Parental responses indicated that SNA support, where appropriately structured, along with knowledgeable SNAs make a valuable contribution to their child's inclusion in mainstream schooling.

6.2.5   Benefits of Special Schools

All parental experiences of special schools were positive and in some instances they contrasted their children's progress with that in a mainstream setting. When asked about experiences of the latter, one parent said she had negative memories:

> The way he was made to feel different I think. I mean whenever there was a school play, he was never picked for anything. You know, he's not the greatest, but you've got to pick them, you know they're not going to be great, but he was never picked for anything. But I found all the children that had special needs were all, the older they got the more excluded they got. (Parent 3, child with MGLD, school 14 special school)

Reflecting on her son's experience of transferring to a special school another parent said:

> He came home on his first day, and I was petrified, I was thinking, first day in a new school. "Oh it was lovely, I've got a new friend, I know this one, we done this", we never had, in the past. You'd say "oh what did you do at school today?" "Nothing. Nothing." Here, even now, he's still, "yes, I did this, I done that", and he talks about school, whereas he never did. So it is a big difference. Big. (Parent 2, child with MGLD, school 14 special school)

Another parent also expressed the beneficial experience of special schooling:

> When she was in mainstream school every day, every day was a struggle … and coming home then, tired from school day, it was lash out, she only lashed out at me and she lashed out at home. And it was stress. It was 24/7 stress but when we moved her here, there was less stress. There was relief from me, even people at school said "you look different", because it's like a weight taken off your shoulder. (Parent 3, child with cerebral palsy and visual impairment, school 12 special school)

The parent of a pupil with MGLD expressed the relief of finding a school that could provide experiences carefully focused on her son's needs:

> Like I had my son before he came to school [mainstream] thinking he was stupid and he was taken, he was behind in everything in school, and he thought that I hated him because I was giving out to him to learn. I knew there was something wrong with my son. Like he's just ever since he's here [special school], try to stop him from going to school! And he's like a completely different child. (Parent 4, child with MGLD, school 12 special school)

The parent of a pupil with ADHD said the experiences her son had had in the special school had changed his attitude towards schooling and this was evident in his progress:

> To be honest I think he's doing great. Like he's starting to do his letters and everything, it's just that you get times with him, as I said with homework, he can do it when he wants to, and his writing has improved absolutely brilliant, his reading has improved. He is really doing well that way. (Parent 2, child with ADHD, school 13 special school)

6.2.6   Parental Concerns

While parents were positive about school provision a few were aware their children faced ongoing challenges in progressing through primary school. In one school there was disagreement over whether the child was best suited to a mainstream placement with the parents adamant that they wanted the child to remain there:

> We're happy enough to leave her here and you know, do their best with her, and they've been very good, they have, they've done a lot for her and they've brought her on well. But we know she's not going to be at the levels of the rest of the children, we know that, but they seem to be just asking us to say, well maybe she shouldn't be here, she might have to go to that school … but this school feels that she'd be better looked after at that school and her needs would be met better. (Parent 8, child with MGLD, school 3 mainstream primary)

Two parents reported bullying of their child in school or the fear that he/she might be bullied. A parent described a serious case of physical bullying of her daughter which had occurred despite staff vigilance in the playground and the school reacted quickly to resolve the situation. Despite the school response this parent perceived that her daughter was still very vulnerable. Another parent was worried that her son could be bullied in his new post primary as he had experienced name calling in his primary.

6.2.7   Pupil Experiences of Support

Most pupils interviewed in this research were generally positive about school and the support they received. They could explain how support helped their learning, recognised improvements and were aware of, and able to describe, the support strategies used. Pupils particularly appreciated specific support that addressed their needs. A girl with dyslexia said:

> … the resource is very good in the school, whereas, you see I moved from a Gaelscoil, and the resource wasn't really happening in that school because I have dyslexia, so it was really difficult with the Irish. (Pupil 1, child with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

Pupils acknowledged the support they received and gave examples of how teachers and SNAs helped, such as a boy in school 6 with ASD:

> … like if you're stuck on maths challenge or any other stuff they help us. (Pupil 4, child with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

A pupil with dyslexia valued technical support to access the curriculum:

> The resource teachers, Mrs K, helps me do stuff, she's got a programme for a laptop and also I can speak into it and it'll write for me. (Pupil 3, child with dyslexia, school 6 mainstream primary)

Two pupils in school 5 felt happier in a smaller class, as one reported:

> … it was better because when you came in here there was only eight people or nine, and it was really good because in like your old classroom it was a big class and you couldn't get much help. (Pupils from reading unit, school 5 mainstream primary)

Pupils commented rarely on being withdrawn from regular class for support, though one was positive:

> I think it's good the way we get to go out and get extra help with a different teacher. (Pupil 1, child with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

Another with dyslexia reported a negative experience of being labelled by a peer as a result of withdrawal. She managed to demonstrate the learning she had acquired during the support sessions with her resource teacher, however:

> I go out for English and someone said to me that "oh you go out for extra help, you always get everything wrong", and then one day someone said that to me and I came back to the classroom like we were filling in the blanks the same as the girls, and the girl that said that to me got three wrong, and I got all of them right, and after she's saying to me that I knew that all wrong. (Pupil 4, child with dyslexia, school 2 mainstream primary)

Most pupils were aware of the strategies used to support their learning and could describe their work in some detail as does this pupil:

> … we mostly do exercises, on a whole load of sheets of paper stapled onto each other and we flew through them! (Pupil 4, child with ASD, school 9 mainstream primary)

Another pupil said:

> Reading books she gives me, and she sees how my reading gets on every week. And we do games on the computer and we do like, she does like tests (Pupil 7, child with HI, school 5 mainstream primary)

When asked about their experiences of learning in the special school pupils often referred to the level of support they received and modifications to teaching approaches. Those with behaviour difficulties appreciated the approaches taken by teachers to ensure they learned in an environment that recognised their difficulties with managing their behaviour:

> My teacher says I'm getting on real great with everything, but everything just jumbles up in my head and I try my best. She thinks that I am doing great, and I haven't like spilled the jar. But I'm really trying to keep it together. (Pupil 3, child with EBD, school 13 special school)

6.2.8   Summary

Most parents were very positive about their experiences and those of their children in the primary and special schools attended. Key factors in this positive evaluation of SEN provision included positive school and teacher attitude to their child; the development of individualised responses to their child's specific needs; provision of opportunities to collaborate with school staff on development of support programmes for their children; facilitation of their child's participation in curricular and extracurricular activities and the positive quality of home-school communication were particularly appreciated. Many parents saw SNA support as essential in ensuring their child's participation in school life and many valued the academic/social progress their children made. Most pupils were positive about their school experiences: many particularly appreciated specific, targeted support that addressed their needs and demonstrated knowledge of the support strategies their teachers used; many reported being happy in school and a small number commented on the benefits of smaller support classes in helping them with their learning.

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6.3   Post Primary Schools

Most parents were generally positive about the post primary schools their children attended and an acceptance of pupils with special educational needs was particularly appreciated. They identified factors that contributed to their evaluation: school capacity to support pupils with special educational needs; positive attitudes of school personnel towards their children; and SNA support. Aspects of school provision also caused them concern, however.

Parents in four schools valued and commented on school capacity to support pupils with special educational needs. Positive teacher attitudes towards pupils with special educational needs were considered essential. Parents in seven schools considered the SNA role in supporting their child was a valuable component of SEN provision though others expressed concerns about the lack or loss of SNA support. Parents in six schools raised concerns about how aspects of school life had affected their child's participation in school.

6.3.1   School Capacity to Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Parents in all ten schools commented positively on the efforts of personnel to provide an appropriate education for their children. Choice of school had been influenced by parental perceptions of whether the facility was positively disposed towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs as illustrated by a parent from school 23 whose daughter has dyslexia:

> … catered more specially than the feeder school … this school could offer her more opportunities … the other school, from what I picked up was more of an academic school whereas there were more remedial teachers here … and in the other school she would basically be sitting in a room on her own. (Parent 4, child with dyslexia, school 23 mainstream post primary)

One parent believed the school's mixed ability system was a critical factor in ensuring her daughter with dyslexia felt included:

> What I like about it is at the start they are not separated on their ability as such … I know Jennifer has little friends that have no special needs but she is in their class and there is no difference basically, that's what I like about it. (Parent 6, child with dyslexia, school 22 mainstream post primary)

Most parents evaluated the school capacity to respond appropriately by assessing school and teacher responsiveness to a child's individual needs – this was commented on in four schools. For example, in school 22 with almost 1,000 pupils on roll, one parent whose child has dyslexia was reassured because:

> … the principal knew every child by name as soon as he had met them and I think that is lovely you know and he would have known the parents. (Parent 4, child with dyslexia, school 22 mainstream post-primary)

In another school where a pupil with ADHD actively resisted having an SNA and receiving learning support though it was evident that he needed a substantial level of support to survive in the school, the support teacher negotiated a compromise:

> … he comes to learning support five minutes late and he leaves five minutes early … he nearly kills everyone trying not to be seen and she [support teacher] was so clued into that how important that was for him and I thought, "you've got it right". (Parent 5, child with ADHD, school 19 mainstream post primary).

Another parent valued the extra support available to her daughter with ADHD who is in her Junior Certificate year:

> … to be fair the school, they have pulled out all the stops and they have put on extra resource classes for her this year. (Parent 4, child with EBD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

School understanding of the difficulties of a pupil with an assessed syndrome with associated behaviour problems was appreciated by this pupil's parents:

> … they've had a tough time with my son, because he is not an easy with this problem he has, he is a handful, but the school are doing brilliant … I don't think they could do any more than what they are doing. They're really doing their best for him. (Parent 1, child with AS, school 24 mainstream post primary)

Parents also valued provision of certification programmes appropriate to their children's learning capacity. In school 18, for example, the LCA programme had a positive impact on two pupils who disliked school. A boy with dyslexia and ADHD enjoyed practical subjects and his mother found the LCA programme appropriate for someone with his aptitudes. She judged it was suitable for a boy with MGLD from a farming background who comfortably engaged in outdoor activities:

> Yes, he likes LCA because he absolutely hates school and he hates homework! Being honest, that's it. So LCA suits him down to the ground, even his teachers have told me that he's very happy in it, getting on fine. (Parent 7, child with MGLD, school 18 mainstream post primary)

The parent of a pupil with Down syndrome in school 17 knew the traditional Leaving Certificate programme would be beyond her daughter's capacity. The school shared this concern and provided the alternative ASDAN[3] programme which was deemed more appropriate for her learning needs. The flexibility seen in schools which enabled alternative forms of accreditation to be sought was significant in enabling pupils and parents to feel comfortable with the provision made. Many realised that the routes followed by most pupils were likely to provide obstacles to achievement and therefore welcomed these alternatives, though it should be noted that a large majority in this study participated in mainstream curricula and assessment regimes.

6.3.2   Positive Attitudes of School Personnel

Most parents recognised the importance of school personnel who encouraged their children to engage with the curriculum and school life. Supportive teachers were valued and this was commented on in seven schools as illustrated by the following:

> Well the teachers seem to be very, they're down to earth and they treat them as adults really as such, not as, they treat them on an equal, well that's my impression anyway. They seem to get on very well with them, you know. (Parent 5, child with SSLD, school 18 mainstream post primary)

> I would say that any discussions I have with the teachers are always with a view to hoping to get the best out of him or the most out of him because the fact that he has difficulties with reading or whatever, it makes every subject that he does a bit of a struggle. (Parent 1, child with SLD/MGLD, school 16 mainstream post primary)

> Yes they're (support teachers) good they are there if I need them and they are there to help me in every way because with Asperger's you need to be 100 per cent behind them and there to focus on him and not just to keep an eye on him. (Parent 5, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 16 mainstream post primary)

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[3]   ASDAN is an accreditation system that recognises the social and emotional achievements of students in addition to their academic outcomes.

Adaptations to the curriculum to ensure access were also mentioned as was evident in school 17's PE programme which was modified to suit the needs of a pupil with a physical disability:

> ... he [PE teacher] has been fantastic doing, getting involved in the PE class and you know encouraging Lydia to be involved and showing her how she can play volleyball and all that in your chair and there is another stage where a girl in a wheelchair association came in and got them all into wheelchairs and played wheelchair basketball and just let them all see what it is like, that's great, you wouldn't get that in every school now I'd say. (Parent 4, child with PD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Parents valued the opportunity for their children to participate in extracurricular activities, as illustrated in the first excerpt below which refers to a pupil who has Down syndrome and in the second excerpt which concerns a pupil with EBD:

> ... here they include her in everything ... they have the fashion show in the second year and she took part in the fashion show and Christmas concert they involved her in that you know they involve her in all the activities that's going on in school which is a good thing. (Parent 4, child with AS, school 15 mainstream post primary)

> She is fully included in the school, they've had their ups and downs but they have never excluded her for anything, like now there is a trip coming up to Barcelona, I thought she'll never get to go on that, but she is going and she can't wait. (Parent 1, child with EBD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

6.3.3   SNA Support

SNA provision featured strongly in parental thinking on special needs support and there was general agreement it was invaluable as illustrated by this comment:

> I have to say her old SNA was brilliant, and she really really pushed her. And her new SNA would be as good. (Parent 5, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 20 mainstream post primary)

There was a perception in five schools of reduced access to SNA support in post primary compared to primary school as summarised by this comment from a parent in school 15 whose child had Down syndrome with associated speech and language difficulties:

> He has an SNA ... it's definitely isn't full time. It is shared, I don't know whether he has an SNA all the time in the class, whether there's an SNA all the time in the classroom, I think there is, but how much time is spent with him, I don't know. I don't know whether he has an SNA in every subject, so I would certainly regard his support in secondary school is considerably less than what he was getting in his primary school. (Parent 3, child with AS, school 15 mainstream post primary)

6.3.4   Parental Concerns

Many parents were concerned about schooling for their child ranging from the inability to cope with the current senior cycle programme to the need for more individualised support. Parents in three schools shared a common concern that their children with Down syndrome had difficulties accessing the junior and senior cycle curriculum despite support:

> The only problem is that it's getting kind of coming on to Leaving Cert now. It's gone a bit over the top for her as such. Like her main subjects would be maths, English, French. They would be her main ones. The rest then like business, science, they are all kind of over her head like. (Parent 2, child with MGLD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Parents in two schools mentioned more individualised support and one in school 16 whose son has behaviour difficulties said this support class provision:

> Special education should be more individualised. This idea that ten or 12 children who for whatever reason don't attend Irish should be all going to the one class, they all don't have the same needs. I would like to see more coming out of the special education class. Maybe I am not being fair, I am not giving it credit but I don't see too much benefit from the class. (Parent 2, child with EBD, school 16 mainstream post primary)

Three parents were concerned that the provision of extra support could mark their children out as different and their children were keenly aware of this possibility. A second year pupil in school 23 with dyslexia was, according to her mother, conscious of being perceived as different:

> I know that last year she felt that she didn't want to be labelled as having special difficulties.
> (Parent 4, child with dyslexia, school 23 mainstream post primary)

In school 21 a pupil with ADHD was made to feel conscious of her difference from her peers by one or two teachers:

> Some teachers are very accepting of it and others are not. And some will make a point of constantly reminding her that she is doing something, working on something completely different to the others and that kind of alienates her and that's not good. (Parent 4, child with ADHD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

6.3.5   Pupil Experiences

All pupils in all schools reported positive experiences and an appreciation of the support received. A minority expressed a few reservations on receiving too little guidance on choosing subjects. Only one incidence of bullying was mentioned and a preference was expressed for more one-to-one rather than group support.

Pupils across all schools were positive and a selection of comments is presented below:

> The school is grand. It's just like a lot more kinder and more helpful type school. (Pupil 4, child with SSLD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

> They [the school] did a great job with me. (Pupil 45, child with EBD, school 22 mainstream post primary)

> I love the subjects and I love the school and I love the helpers because they help me. (Pupil 2, child with MGLD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

> It [the school] is very good. Teachers are very nice to me. I learn a lot in school and yes, basically I'm doing fine in school and it's going good for me. (Pupil 6, child with PD, school 21mainstream post primary)

Most pupil reports were characterised by a belief that support was readily available and easily accessed. The following comments indicate that pupils perceived support was core to their school lives:

> I have my special ed classes if I need help with that I'd just ask them. (Pupil 6, child with HI, school 16 mainstream post primary)

> I have some of my own teachers to help me in resource so if I get stuck on something I can ask them and they go through it with me again. (Pupil 4, child with SLD, school 23 mainstream post primary)

> If I'm stuck on a maths question my maths teacher will come up and ask me do I need any help and she'll help me get the question right. (Pupil 3, child with PD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

> The school helps with I suppose your education, that you are finding everything okay and that you are not on top of things and, you know, you can get help like if you want help with that and you can minimise your subjects if you are finding it hard or if you need a study plan you get the career guidance and they'll talk to you if you are finding it hard and they walk through step by step what you can do at home and stuff like that. (Pupil 5, child with MGLD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Many pupils could pinpoint how the support offered actually helped them. A pupil who had difficulties coming to school earlier in her school career valued the availability of support to help her with problems at home or school:

> You can go up and talk to them any time you want. If there's anything wrong at home you can go talk to them about it. If you need any extra help you can go talk to them about it any time whenever you want. And then, like, taking an exam they used to help at school as well. (Pupil 4, child with EBD, school 20 mainstream post primary)

Targeted support and encouragement were also seen as particularly beneficial for the following pupil in school 22 who has behaviour difficulties:

> They [support teachers] just praise me if anything I do, like if I do anything or I don't get on well they say it's alright. That gives me back my confidence. Again, praise me, because if I do anything wrong or something they don't just be like, "Oh, you're always getting it wrong". They just say, "This is one small part here that you have got wrong, don't worry about it". So that helps. (Pupil 5, child with EBD, school 22 mainstream post primary)

This pupil with dyslexia found smaller classes helpful:

> Putting me in smaller classes so I can, like, get it, talk about problems better and that it's not like crowded and you can get help easier if you are stuck on something. (Pupil 7, child with dyslexia, school 19 mainstream post primary)

Two pupils mentioned curriculum differentiation; one in school 16 who has dyslexia said:

> They [teachers] cut it down like in the book whatever subject we are doing, if we have a test or some questions to do, some teachers give us handouts like the questions shortened, it's easier to learn. (Pupil 3, child with dyslexia, school 20 mainstream post primary).

SNA support was specifically mentioned as helpful by pupils in five schools. A typical comment included:

> I have an SNA that sits in class with me and another pupil and she's just there to help me if I need help with questions … I am working well but if I'm confused or I don't understand I just ask her. (Pupil 3, child with EBD, school 23 mainstream post primary)

A pupil in school 20 with Asperger's syndrome recognised that he did not need the same level of SNA support as given in first year:

> When I was in first year I needed her [SNA] a lot more than I do today … I needed her in most classes … today she's only in one or two classes. (Pupil 2, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 20 mainstream post primary)

A minority of pupils across the schools reported some dissatisfaction with the support and this usually consisted of wanting more targeted support earlier in their school career, as this pupil explained:

> More focus on what the pupils want to do, instead of just teaching them different parts, … try to figure out what they want to do from a younger age. (Pupil 4, child with SLD, school 22 mainstream post primary)

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One pupil with behaviour difficulties was very disappointed the school did not take a strong enough stance on the bullying he had experienced:

> Teachers don't really pay enough attention to bullying, I think they have a policy of ignoring the bullying ... they don't give too much support to pupils being bullied they just try to ignore the bullying I guess. (Pupil 6, child with EBD, school 19 mainstream post primary)

Few reported incidents of bullying were noted during the research visits, however.

6.3.6   Summary

Most parents were positive about their post primary experiences and their child's interaction with school. This was based on the following key factors they identified: school capacity to respond appropriately to SEN; positive teacher attitudes to their children; the development of individualised responses to address the needs of their children. SNA support was considered a valuable aspect of support and some parents feared the negative consequences of lack of SNA support for their school and their children. Some parents, particularly those whose child had an intellectual disability, were concerned about their child's capacity to participate in senior cycle programmes. Most pupils were positive about their school experiences and appeared happy. Pupils commented positively on the availability and readily accessible nature of the support on offer and that it was targeted to meet their specific needs.

Approachable teachers were particularly appreciated. Pupils receiving SNA support appreciated how this helped them in their classwork but there was some evidence that some post primary aged pupils wanted their SNA support reduced and in a few cases this had occurred. Some would have liked support earlier in their post primary school career and a greater focus on planning for post-school future.

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7   Outcomes

7.1   Introduction

This chapter reports on the academic and social outcomes of pupils with special educational needs. A framework outlined in the recent NCSE commissioned report (Douglas *et al*, 2012) on educational outcomes was used to document in this study. Douglas *et al* (2012) grouped educational outcomes under the following headings: attainment-related; engagement-related; happiness-related; and independence-related outcomes. The first set focuses on academic achievements, particularly literacy and numeracy at primary, and school and national examinations at post primary. Engagement-related outcomes comprise regularity of school attendance, remaining in school, as well as the quality of pupil engagement with the learning tasks within the classroom. Happiness-related outcomes refer to development of social skills, confidence and the ability to build and sustain relationships. Independence-related outcomes encompass pupil ability to work independently. For pupils in specific categories of special educational need this may involve mobility and the ability to use specialised equipment (for pupils with physical and/or sensory disabilities) or the development of a system of social communication (for a pupil on the ASD spectrum).

While the four-domain framework developed by Douglas *et al* (2012) postdated the initial data collection phase of this study the researchers decided it could be used to document pupil progress across these domains in a readily accessible manner. The extensive focus on academic and social progress in the interview material combined with IEP documents where available provided a rich source of data on individual pupil progress over the lifetime of the study. It was clear to researchers that the study data fitted neatly within this four-domain framework and, as a result, it was decided that pupil outcomes would be documented according to it based on multiple perspectives including parents, support and subject teachers, special needs assistants, other school personnel and the pupils themselves.

This section of the report recognises that academic attainment provides only a limited focus when addressing learning outcomes of pupils with special educational needs. In some instances they may receive such a designation as a result of a physical or sensory disability that has minimal impact upon academic performance; others may be identified as a result of social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Because of this we have chosen to reflect on the research evidence that indicates positive individual pupil progress over a period of time along a pathway that incorporates academic and social learning.

Academic progress is generally measured through standardised tests administered nationally. This system has been recently established in Ireland in numeracy and literacy for primary pupils. We would argue, however, that it was not feasible within the current study to rely wholly on standardised tests to document progress of pupils with special educational needs because schools used a wide range of such testing procedures. While these record pupil attainment and progress in considerable detail, it was evident that they failed to recognise the diverse needs of pupils. As a result, the progress of the target group was not being accurately captured in standardised tests.

In schools which used IEPs it was possible to document pupil strengths and limitations in academic and social progress, and these IEPs formed the basis for discussion of pupil progress with school personnel, parents and the pupils themselves. It was not possible to rely solely on IEPs developed for pupils with special educational needs as a reliable source for documenting progress, however. As indicated earlier provision and development of IEPs in the study schools was found to be inconsistent within and across the study sample. In addition, there were examples of an IEP being in place for the pupil with neither parent nor pupil aware that it existed.

Data analysis for pupil outcomes is based in the main on the interviews with school personnel, parents and the pupils with special educational needs (see Table 10). On the first school visit the academic and social progress was established through an exploration of these domains with the school personnel, parents and the pupils themselves supported by documentation (IEPs) where available. Academic progress depending on age, class and setting comprised literacy and numeracy skills, acquisition of subject knowledge, scoring on class tests and pupil effort and participation in class activities. Social progress depending on age, class and setting comprised ability to interact with peers, establish friendships, and demonstrate independence skills in social interactions and in class work. The domain criteria were compiled and used to assess progress across each domain:

Attainment: development of literacy/numeracy skills; acquisition and understanding of subject knowledge; performance in school and national tests/examinations.

Engagement: regular attendance at school; participation in class activities; engagement with extra-curricular activities.

Happiness: capacity to interact with peers; ability to interact appropriately with school personnel; establishing age appropriate friendships; comfortable and settled in school.

Independence: ability to work independently; not over-dependent on SNA support.

The tables and discussion within this chapter are based on several sources of evidence the research team gathered over both school visits. On the first visit, interviewees were asked to comment on pupil progress in the four domains since entry into school and during movement between classes. This enabled the research team to establish a baseline from this visit against which progress could be assessed at visit two.

7.2   Sources of Evidence

Table 13: Primary sources of evidence

Attainment	Engagement	Happiness	Independence
Focused on academic achievements, in particular, on literacy and numeracy at primary level.	The regularity of school attendance, remaining in school, as well as the quality of the pupil's engagement with the learning tasks within the classroom.	The development of social skills, confidence and the ability to build and sustain relationships.	The ability of the pupil to work independently. Pupil not over dependent on SNA support.
Sources of Evidence			
Test results	Attendance records	Interview data (Parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Interview data (Parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)
Interview data (Parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers
IEPs*	Interview data (Parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	School reports	School reports
Pupil records			IEPs*
School reports			

* not all pupils have IEPs

NB: A sample of parents, teachers and pupils was interviewed during both school visits. Interviews with HSE and other outside agencies were conducted only once, either on the first or second visit.

Pupil progress in academic and social domains constituted a large portion of the data collected through interviews with school personnel, parents and pupils. These interview data combined with documentation such as IEPs and examples of pupil work were used to establish a baseline for pupil progress in the academic and social domains. In preparation for the second school visit a brief summary was compiled of pupil strengths, limitations and ongoing challenges based on first visit. This brief summary was used during the second school visit to examine progress in relation to limitations and challenges identified during the first school visit and in addition current pupil progress was discussed through the interviews with school personnel, parents and pupils themselves to identify any emerging issues.

Researchers were aware that the evidence on pupil progress across the four domains was mainly based on perspectives of school personnel, pupils and their parents. The interpretation of this evidence must be carefully nuanced to ensure that reports of progress are as accurate as possible especially when (for the reasons outlined above) we are not relying on standardised tests to monitor progress. A three-stage process was devised to address issues of reliability and validity of the findings reported.

At the first stage researchers discussed each domain in relation to content and developed an individual pupil profile based on the relevant transcripts. A three-point scale (less than satisfactory/satisfactory/very satisfactory) was developed to assess the type of progress the pupil had achieved across the four domains. The researchers discussed what constituted less than satisfactory, satisfactory or very satisfactory progress in relation to each domain and with the recognition that progress had to be considered on an individual pupil basis. For example at primary level pupils could be deemed to have made satisfactory progress in attainment when they were acquiring the requisite literacy and numeracy skills albeit at a slower pace than their peers. At post primary a pupil regularly passing within class tests and regular school-based examinations though perhaps at the borderline level could be deemed to be making satisfactory progress. Within the happiness domain a pupil could be deemed to be making satisfactory progress when he/she had established one or more viable friendships with peers and a positive relationship with school personnel.

Researchers were aware that progress had to be assessed for each pupil taking into account their particular special educational need and their personal circumstances and every effort was made to ensure this occurred. Pupils who engaged with others in classroom activities displayed a social/emotional dimension to the engagement/attendance domain and were observed to rate at a more satisfactory level in terms of the happiness rubric. Two researchers independently rated pupil progress across the four domains using the three-point scale outlined above and on completion the authors discussed the justification for ratings allocations. Where discrepancies occurred these were further discussed until consensus was gained. When this was not forthcoming a third researcher was consulted.

At the second stage a profile was developed for each pupil by the first researcher that encompassed the four key educational outcomes documented above. These were collated over the two research visits to ascertain whether the pupil had made progress in these educational outcomes over a two-year period (primary) or over one year (post primary). As the pupil profiles were being compiled the second researcher reviewed a selection of pupil profiles at regular intervals and discussed the ratings (satisfactory/less than satisfactory/very satisfactory) assigned with the first researcher. At the third stage a third researcher reviewed a selection of pupil profiles from primary, special and post primary schools and discussed the ratings assigned with the two researchers involved and tried to reach a consensus on ratings accuracy.

The following presentation of findings comments on pupil outcomes at each stage of education within primary. Where appropriate, reference is made to factors seen as having influenced progress with some description of their application. The chapter further identifies common factors that either support or impede the achievement of successful outcomes in the primary phase. Consistent with the rest of this report the current section uses the descriptors 'most', 'many', 'some', and 'few', which were elaborated on earlier as a means of quantifying the saliency of qualitative data (see methodology section).

7.3   Primary Schools

This section presents the findings on social and academic outcomes for students with special educational needs in primary mainstream schools. It considers specific students seen during the data collection phase of the research over three years and draws conclusions from their experiences and from analysis of a wider sample of school documents to illustrate the outcomes for them in primary.

Seventy-seven pupils, their families, teachers and support personnel participated in the primary section of this study for the academic years 2010-12. In this section we report on outcomes for 55 pupils from junior infants up to fourth class. Fifth and sixth class pupils on the first study visit had moved to post primary by the second study visit. Their experiences and outcomes are documented in section 5.11 earlier in this report.

The outcomes data for the 55 pupils will be presented on a cohort basis beginning with pupils in junior infants, followed by senior infants, first, second third and fourth classes. This approach was adopted as it became evident that learning outcomes varied according to year of study.

7.4 Junior Infants

Five pupils were in junior infants from five schools as outlined in Table 14.

Table 14: Junior infants sources of evidence

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
4	Abbie	PD	S	VS	S	S	VS	VS	S	LS
3	Ann	Dyslexia	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
1	David	Dyslexia	S	VS	LS	S	S	S	LS	S
9	Isabella	MGLD	LS	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
6	Charles	ASD	S	VS	S	VS	LS	S	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

7.4.1 Attainment

By the second visit, case study pupils in junior infants were all seen to have reached attainment levels considered satisfactory by teachers and parents. Four pupils were described as having made considerable improvements over this period. Of particular note is Isabella's progress. By the second visit her attainment was considered satisfactory compared to a less than satisfactory rating on the first visit. Her class teacher and parents agreed she had made considerable academic progress in the period between both visits. On the first visit it was apparent that speech and communication difficulties were significantly impeding Isabella's academic progress and social interactions. By the second visit many of the speech difficulties had been resolved as a result of direct intervention by her teacher. The teacher reported that she had focused on specific sounds and devised reinforcement strategies to support Isabella's speech and language development.

7.4.2 Engagement

All pupils had achieved satisfactory levels of engagement by the second visit. Isabella's attainment progress was similar to that recorded for her engagement in school. She was reported to be interacting more positively with her peers on group tasks though she became frustrated easily and could be oversensitive to misunderstandings. As with her attainment, attention given to Isabella's communication difficulties appeared to have had major benefits in this area. David had also made progress in engagement, though teachers stated that he continued to have difficulties with a limited attention span which they were addressing through a varied presentation of tasks to enable him to participate more fully. On the first visit Charles was described as eager to participate in class activities and this had improved by the second visit with evidence of positive interactions with a male teacher leading to a higher level of engagement.

7.4.3 Happiness

On the second visit all pupils were seen to have made satisfactory progress in terms of happiness. Charles's progress in engagement was also seen in terms of his happiness in school. On the first visit he was reported to demonstrate his frustration through physical aggression. This was not in evidence on the second visit as his class teacher, resource teacher and an early intervention specialist had devised interventions to address it. These focused on helping Charles to develop an understanding of his emotions and to enable him to express his feelings more appropriately.

7.4.4 Independence

With the exception of one pupil, all were seen to increase or maintain their levels of independence over the two visits. Two pupils, David and Charles, had made considerable strides in this area. Teachers said Charles's improved sociality had increased his ability to work independently on given tasks and had enabled his personal support levels to be lessened. On the first visit David had been described as a disruptive influence in class; by the second visit the allocation of SNA support with a focused programme of interventions had played a major role in lessening disruption and increasing his participation.

By contrast, Abbie, a pupil with physical disabilities, was reported as less independent. Teachers attributed this to the withdrawal of SNA support which meant she was not receiving the encouragement to complete tasks witnessed on the earlier visit.

7.5   Senior Infants

Nine pupils were in senior infants in six schools as outlined in Table 15.

Table 15: Senior infants sources of evidence

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
6	Freya	ASD	LS	S	S	VS	S	S	S	S
6	Emily	ASD	LS	VS	LS	S	S	S	S	VS
3	Daisy	MGLD	LS	LS	LS	S	S	S	S	LS
3	Ella	SLD	LS	*	LS	*	S	*	LS	*
5	Susan	HI	LS	S	S	S	LS	LS	S	LS
9	Hollie	DS	LS	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
7	Connor	PD/GLD	LS	S	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS
1	Lucy	HI	LS	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
1	Carl	ASD	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory * pupil left sample

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7.5.1   Attainment

With the exception of one pupil, all were described as achieving less than satisfactory attainment on the first visit. This situation changed significantly at the second visit, however. On the first visit Emily's hyperactivity and sensory dysregulation were observed to impede her learning. By the second visit her teacher reported that she had responded well to OT intervention and five hours of resource teaching a week. This had enabled her to gain a greater understanding of her own learning and to respond to the structured approach provided in her class.

The one pupil observed to make no progress was Daisy, a pupil with MGLD. On the first visit she experienced difficulties with organisation, motor skills and toileting and while she accessed a core curriculum similar to that of her peers, she was performing quite far behind them. On the second visit her teacher noted that she continued to experience difficulties despite a differentiated curriculum and the provision of a personal learning programme.

7.5.2   Engagement

The challenges Daisy experienced in attainment were mirrored in her lack of ability to engage in classroom activity during the first visit, when a teacher described her as 'non-compliant'. This was seen as detrimental to her ability to retain learning. At the second visit this situation was reportedly improved with Daisy being more sociable and willing to engage.

Carl who had also been making less than satisfactory progress on the first visit was reported to be making satisfactory progress on the second. This was attributed to an effective reward system based on his specific interests.

At the second visit one pupil with a physical disability (Connor) had made less than satisfactory progress. While his class remained accommodating and accepting of his differences, he was reported by his parent to have greater needs in terms of:

> Just kind of remaining seated in the classroom, paying attention, not disrupting other kids, more kind of behavioural issues ... (Parent 1, child with PD, school 7 mainstream primary)

Teachers confirmed this difficulty.

7.5.3   Happiness

On the first visit most pupils were recorded as achieving satisfactory levels of happiness. Susan, a pupil with a hearing impairment, was reported on both visits as being not very happy in school. Her teachers described her as a social girl. However, it was observed that she focused on developing relationships primarily with boys and, according to her class teacher, this had been instrumental in her isolation from female peers in her class.

On the first visit Connor appeared happy and outgoing and to be enjoying school. His teacher stated:

> I'm delighted to have Connor in the class, and I think it has a very positive effect on the class, because the other children, they understand maybe that he has special needs, but like they accept him as he is, and they enjoy him as well. So I think it's very good for the children, it's good for me as well. (Class teacher, student with PD, school 7 mainstream primary)

By the second visit Connor was said to be less engaged in school, had become isolated from his peers and less happy in his demeanour, however.

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7.5.4 Independence

While many pupils appeared to have achieved satisfactory levels of independence at the second visit, this was not true of all.

Connor's difficulties appear also to have affected negatively his ability to function independently in school. Daisy, on the first visit, used an individual work station and was supported by her SNA largely in the reinforcement of learning through the repetition of previous instruction. At the second visit this dependence on SNA support and a separate teaching arrangement had persisted.

Freya and Emily, both with a diagnosis of ASD, had made considerable progress in their independence. Emily originally experienced difficulties working independently; she had a tendency to wander off, but also displayed a need for emotional support though she displayed resistance towards SNA support. On the second visit Emily's success was measured in terms of her ability to support other children in her role as model reader during resource class. It was noted that she had a lesser requirement for SNA support. Lucy had also become quite independent and was responding well to resource teaching and appeared to respond to the use of hearing technology. She was also benefiting from in-class support and well-structured differentiation.

7.6 First Class

Twelve pupils attended first class in seven different schools.

Table 16: First class in seven different schools

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
8	Dominic	ASD & MGLD	LS	S	S	LS	LS	LS	S	S
3	Richard	ASD	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	LS
5	Josh	ASD	LS	S	S	S	S	LS	S	S
5	Bill	EBD	LS	S	VS	VS	S	S	S	VS
3	Adam	ASD	LS	S	LS	LS	S	LS	S	LS
10	Harry	MD	LS	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S	S
10	Jessica	HI	LS	S	S	LS	LS	LS	S	S
4	Andrew	MGLD	S	S	LS	LS	S	S	VS	S
6	Eva	ASD	S	VS	S	VS	S	VS	S	S
6	Christopher	ASD	S	S	S	VS	LS	S	S	S
7	Georgina	ASD & MGLD	S	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	S
4	Eve	MGLD & ADHD	LS	S	S	LS	S	LS	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

7.6.1 Attainment

In first class most pupils had reached satisfactory levels of attainment by the second visit. The exceptions were Richard and Harry, both described by teachers as making less than satisfactory progress.

For Richard, who has a diagnosis of ASD, processing and organisational difficulties were identified as a particular challenge. At the first school visit he was reported to have made progress, especially in number recognition and writing, although this was not sustained at the second visit. His mother expressed misgivings and was uncertain of Richard's future capacity to cope with a mainstream post primary education. The academic emphasis has been changed for Richard whose targets within his IEP have changed from an academic to an increased focus on life skills. This change was also noted in provision for Harry, who was similarly struggling with the more academic demands of school since he moved up the classes.

School 6 had a specific unit for children on the autism spectrum. This was attended by Eva who was reported on the first school visit to be creative but reticent. Her teacher reported that she needed support with acquiring new concepts but that she had performed well in standardised Micra T assessment on the first visit. Eva's class teacher referred to her results by stating that:

> … she's fared top notch in that … Eva would be as good as, she'd be on the same level as people in second class. (Class teacher, student with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

On the second visit she was reported to be working efficiently and had made excellent progress. Her mother was very happy with her overall progress despite earlier misgivings about placement in a specialist unit, saying:

> I couldn't see past the autistic unit … It made a huge difference. It did, it made a huge difference to them, because they didn't think anything of it. It made a difference too, it kind of, what would I say, kind of normalised them, but then it also, with the other children, it normalised the whole autistic, because the other kids in the school don't see anything wrong with it. (Parent 5, child with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

7.6.2 Engagement

Two first class pupils had poor attendance records associated with ill health. In the case of Bill this was not seen as having been detrimental to his ability to engage with schooling. For Harry however, it was reported to have caused major difficulties in his ability to sustain relationships and become an integral part of his class group. Richard and Adam, two pupils on the autism spectrum, also had difficulty relating to others in class and were often seen as lacking the engagement necessary for successful learning. Andrew was noted to disengage from academic learning on the first visit. He also displayed comprehension and attention difficulties and issues with awareness and understanding. On the second visit he was reported to have continuing difficulties with maths and required high levels of support to sustain focus.

Christopher, another pupil with ASD, was described as responding well to challenges. His teacher reported that he enjoyed academic work as it progressed in terms of difficulty. His sociability was limited but he was clearly focused on his work and had the ability to concentrate on this while not fully engaged with his peers. Eva was also seen to be well engaged in class with teachers describing her high level of personal motivation as key to her success.

7.6.3   Happiness

By the second visit half the sample had indicators of having attained satisfactory levels of happiness with schooling. Five of these showed evidence of the development of social skills, many were developing friendships. For the pupils who had made less than satisfactory progress, difficulties with social skills, behavioural challenges and interaction with peers were identified as contributing factors. Eva, who has ASD, was notable for her consistency in all aspects of learning. Teachers described her as comfortable and happy in school. She had low anxiety levels, was participating well in class and appeared to have developed improved coping skills.

7.6.4   Independence

Most pupils in the first class sample demonstrated satisfactory levels of independence by the second visit. Jessica, who has a hearing impairment, had gained in independence since she joined the school and moved to the language unit. This unit provides specialist support and access to regular speech and language therapy seen as essential for meeting her specific needs. Jessica's independence continued to improve though not as rapidly as had been hoped following initial success, and her concentration and retention were poor.

The challenges faced by Richard in all areas of his development meant his independence was very limited. High dependency on SNA support meant he was often isolated from his peers and had little opportunity to learn independence through interaction with his classmates.

7.7   Second Class

Eight pupils were in second class in five different schools.

Table 17: Second class in five different schools

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
8	Dylan	MGLD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	VS	S
3	Tommy	SLD	S	S	S	S	VS	S	S	S
3	Mike	ADHD	S	LS	LS	S	S	S	S	LS
8	Hannah	ADHD	LS	S	S	S	S	VS	VS	S
3	Billy	ASD	S	LS	LS	S	LS	VS	LS	S
9	Isabel	PD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S
10	Harrison	SLD	LS	LS	S	LS	S	S	S	LS
5	Erin	PD	LS	VS	S	S	S	S	VS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

7.7.1   Attainment

On the first visit just three second-class pupils with special educational needs were described as making satisfactory progress. This had increased to five by the second visit.

On the second school visit parents and teachers said Erin, a pupil with a physical disability, had made very satisfactory progress. Erin's teacher, support teacher, and parent agreed she was progressing well academically; her English skills remained above average and her maths skills were progressing. Erin continued to have visual and co-ordination difficulties though her handwriting was improving. She regularly took part in a talented youth programme. Her class teacher said of her progress:

> I felt she did really well last year, because third class is a huge jump from second, and you would expect an awful lot of children to drop a little bit in scores and things like that, and I know in English she was up there in the kind of high 90s, 98th percentile. (Teacher, student with PD, school 5 mainstream primary)

Teachers described Mike, a pupil with ADHD, as bright though he struggled with behavioural and emotional challenges. He had progressed since the first visit though not at a rate his teachers would like to have seen. He had reduced SNA support which, his class teacher believed, had potentially negative outcomes. His class teacher felt he could attain average achievement and his parent, teacher, and SNA believed his current poor academic performance was leading to lower self-confidence. On the second visit he was performing at a level that might more realistically have been expected of first class.

7.7.2   Engagement

The importance of differentiated teaching was evident through discussion with several teachers. An example of this could be seen in the case of Tommy who was said to have maintained satisfactory engagement with learning. He continued to require differentiation and support without which his engagement would have been precarious. Improvements in maths were excellent, though Tommy had been experiencing difficulties with classwork despite his evident oral ability. The school responded by securing a psycho-educational assessment which identified him as having dyslexia. Tommy displayed eagerness to learn and his class teacher described him as 'an absolute delight' to have in the class. She was, however, concerned about his vulnerability and potential for low self-esteem due to his increased awareness of his disability. His resource teacher described the complexity of his inability to transfer success at resource level to the classroom and the potential challenges that the transition to secondary school may present.

Of those in this cohort who made little progress, Harrison seemed able to participate in class activities though, according to his parent he, did not enjoy his new class because he felt he could not keep up. Despite this his speech and language teacher encouraged integration with his class group:

> I think it is extremely important, to go on trips with their class, they go on nature walks, they eat lunch with their class, they do different things. (Speech and language unit teacher, student with SSLD, school 10 mainstream primary)

According to her mother, Isabel's stubbornness and social awkwardness were potential obstacles to engagement. Her difficulty discerning personal boundaries was also problematic and she required ongoing intensive support. Dylan withdrew to avoid classroom disruption and noise.

7.7.3   Happiness

All second class pupils in this sample appeared to have gained a satisfactory level of happiness by the second visit.

A particularly interesting situation within this cohort relates to Billy, a boy with ASD. While he appeared to have friends there had been some evidence of bullying. His support teacher believed this was because Billy was misreading social situations. Billy described friendships as follows:

> Well, I get to hang out with all my friends and some people understand me better than others, because sometimes people just don't understand me that well. (Student 7, student with ASD, school 3 mainstream primary)

An increasing awareness of his own SEN along with increased understanding from his peers appeared an essential factor in his progress.

7.7.4   Independence

In the second class sample all but two pupils were seen to have gained a satisfactory level of independence by the second visit.

Dylan, who has MGLD, was recorded as satisfactory but reported by school staff to have struggled to maintain his performance at the second visit. According to his class and support teachers he worked well when assisted but struggled without additional help. This was problematic for Dylan as he had lost SNA support since the first visit. His resource teacher was implementing paired work, group work and, more recently, peer tutoring. These strategies had been seen to support him in maintaining his current independence, but should they be removed, it was suggested he would struggle to maintain progress.

Billy, who has ASD, had full-time SNA support and an escort who helped him on the bus in the mornings. He had an individual work station though it was suggested he needed encouragement not to become dependent on this system. Billy's SNA hours were reduced though his class and resource teachers suggested he needed his SNA to help him sustain focus. Billy himself felt his SNA was useful and helped him a lot. He expressed sadness at having these hours reduced. He continued to use an independent work station but disliked being alone. His independence as a learner was described as satisfactory though it was evident this was being judged in relation to his special educational need; he was perceived to have done well for a pupil with ASD, though his independence compared to that of others in the class was more limited.

7.8   Third Class

Ten pupils were in third class from nine different schools.

Table 18: Third class from nine different schools

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
5	Bill	EBD	LS	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S
9	Ewan	EBD	LS	S	S	LS	S	LS	S	S
10	Jade	PD	LS	S	S	LS	S	LS	S	S
8	Harriet	SLD	LS	LS	S	LS	LS	LS	S	S
6	Bradley	ASD	S	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	S
2	Lisa	SLD	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S
1	Tom	SSLD	LS	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	S
2	Anna	SLD	LS	LS	LS	S	S	S	LS	VS
4	Aron	EBD	S	VS	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S
7	Daniel	SLD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

7.8.1   Attainment

In the third class sample most pupils were described as having reached satisfactory levels of attainment by the second visit, with five of the ten recorded as moving from less than satisfactory to satisfactory status.

Sustaining satisfactory attainment was seen as a challenge for some pupils, For example, on the first visit Bradley had become dependent on one-to-one teaching, particularly in maths where he often forgot how to perform basic functions. Art and drama were his strengths and he had reached the 80th percentile in reading. His class teacher described his needs:

> Bradley needs … he likes to think out loud. Which is fine, but obviously if you've got 29 other children he can't think out loud. He needs to see, he needs to touch, he needs to feel, which takes a huge amount of time, and for the child who is way above that, they're bored. (Class teacher, student with ASD, school 6 mainstream primary)

On the second visit Bradley was reported to be participating well in class-wide activities. He had become accustomed to presenting a topic to his mainstream class. A class-wide strategy of a 'topic board' allowed for presentations on 'special interests' at lunchtime which suited his needs. Bradley experienced persistent difficulties with maths and had difficulty sustaining attention. He continued to require 'think out loud' strategies and multimodal learning in the mainstream class setting which, according to his classroom teacher, posed difficulties. His general adoption strategies fit well into the class as a whole and enabled him to sustain his current levels of attainment in most subjects, however.

Pupils who presented with difficult behaviours were seen as problematic in terms of reaching satisfactory attainment. An inability to maintain concentration or function effectively as part of a group was seen as a major obstacle to progress.

7.8.2   Engagement

The ability to collaborate in group learning situations was seen as a pre-requisite for success by teachers working with second class pupils. Harriet, who has SLD and associated communication difficulties, demonstrated where peer interaction had led to less than satisfactory outcomes. On the first visit her progress in engagement was described as satisfactory, but by the second visit she continued to experience challenges with her language difficulties that caused problems in engaging in classroom activity. Her resource teacher reported that she thrived on one-to-one teaching but found it hard to work in groups and therefore had become less engaged with many learning situations.

By the second visit most pupils were recorded as having made satisfactory progress in engagement. The three who had not all presented with social challenges that caused difficulties in relationships with their peers.

7.8.3   Happiness

It is notable that the three pupils described as less than satisfactory in their engagement were also recorded as less than satisfactory in terms of happiness. However, evidence suggested some pupils had made progress in this area.

On the first visit Bradley was reported to have experienced low self-esteem and had little belief in his own ability. It was reported that he had been traumatised by a bullying incident involving another child. On the second visit Bradley was happier engaging with other pupils. He now played soccer with other class pupils in the yard, whereas he had previously spent most of his time alone.

Communication problems, sometimes accompanied by behaviour difficulties, were an inhibiting factor in pupil ability to make and maintain relationships. In the cases of Ewan and Harriet this was seen as a significant factor in their ability to maintain satisfactory levels of happiness.

7.8.4   Independence

All pupils were reported to have satisfactory levels of independence at the second visit. This indicated progress since the first visit, where five pupils were seen as achieving less than satisfactory levels of independence.

SNA support enabling pupils to gain independence appeared to have been regarded as a critical factor. Of those who had made very satisfactory progress there was evidence of consistent provision in terms of SNA support. Ewan and Bill had mixed feelings about SNA support, which was provided discreetly to avoid isolatory associations. The importance of SNAs in promoting independence is an interesting perception as it might be assumed that SNAs would be more likely to increase dependency. Teachers indicated that SNAs provided an essential role, however, in encouraging and motivating pupils to remain on task and to persevere, eventually leading to increased independence.

While Anna had lost SNA support since the first visit and still needed consistent support with sentence creation and utterance formation, teachers and parents reported she had made excellent progress in her independence. Teachers reported, however, that though she was performing well, her work needed monitoring and support. Her applications for SNA support and for assistive technology were refused, Because of Anna's epilepsy she found it difficult to participate in class and struggled to interact with her classmates. Her support teacher reported the need for more individual attention for Anna:

> I would have loved to have spent more time with her, you know, because she needs it, she needs it, and she does love being on a one-to-one, because she's such a quiet child … (Teacher and learning support teacher, student with SLD, school 2 mainstream primary)

The perception was that Ann would make more attainment progress if SNA and information technology support were available. She was independent, sociable and, in the views of her teachers, could have progressed more than she had already done.

7.9   Fourth Class

Eleven pupils were in fourth class from the five different schools below.

Table 19: Fourth class from the five different schools

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
8	Edward	EBD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	VS	S
5	David	EBD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	VS	S
8	Grace	MGLD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
2	Rose	EBD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
2	Amy	HI	LS	S	S	S	S	S	VS	S
10	Finley	ASD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	VS	S
8	Declan	MD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	VS	S
2	Chloe	Dyslexia	S	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
2	Alice	ASD	S	S	S	S	S	S	LS	S
1	Leo	MGLD	LS	*	S	*	S	*	VS	*
10	Georgina	ASD	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

* = Student left the country

7.9.1   Attainment

All but one pupil in the fourth class sample was reported to have made satisfactory gains in attainment, which may be seen as remarkable progress when considering that nine were recorded with less than satisfactory progress at the first visit. One pupil from this sample left the country between first and second visits meaning that the overall sample for this cohort is ten pupils.

The one pupil seen to be making less than satisfactory gains in attainment at second visit was Georgina who has ASD. Georgina sustained little progress and was reported by her class teacher to be very weak at maths and also requiring a carefully differentiated curriculum. Georgina's support teacher reported that she could see the gap widening between Georgina and her peers and that she was performing at a third class level with frequent support while attending fourth class.

Her teachers considered Alice, who has Asperger's syndrome, to be a very bright pupil, capable of performing well though this depended on her motivation and application. Initially she experienced a lot of difficulties settling in to the school and coming to class. Accommodations made by the school in terms of facilitating alternative entrance times benefited her. Since settling, she was coping well with class work.

7.9.2   Engagement

While most pupils were reported as having satisfactory engagement at the second visit those who did not were pupils with a diagnosis of either EBD or ASD. David, who has EBD, appeared to isolate himself from his class. He had difficulties with attending and struggled to remain focused. According to his class teacher he tended to withdraw from classmates. His behavioural outbursts were generally well controlled or contained, according to his support teacher, but it was clear his behavioural difficulties contributed to his less than satisfactory engagement.

As with other samples in this research fourth class students with less than satisfactory gains in engagement tended to have social and communication difficulties which made it difficult for them to relate to their peers and participate in collaborative learning activity.

7.9.3   Happiness

Despite some difficulties with engagement all pupils were reported as happy in school. Although the data were positive in this area teachers were often aware of the potential for situations to break down. Alice, who has a diagnosis of ASD, had social difficulties in the schoolyard and originally experienced a difficult transition to her classroom. She had difficulties sitting beside other children, sharing and working in groups and had tantrums at home during the daily transition to school. Her teacher recognised the need for vigilance to maintain stability in school stating that:

> I would always be afraid that she would be a target let's say for being bullied, and not all her own fault, just even sometimes her appearance in ways, even though she's a beautiful little child, but you'd know by her once you start talking to her that she is on a different level than the other children. And that would worry me really … (Class teacher, student with ASD, school 2 mainstream primary)

7.9.4   Independence

During the second visit all pupils in the fourth class sample were deemed to have made satisfactory progress in independence, although several were seen to be slightly less confident than on the first visit.

Of those who had made very satisfactory progress on the first visit and failed to sustain this level, Edward expressed happiness about the support he received from his family but desired more support in class especially for subjects such as maths, geography and history.

> Well someone to help me with my maths and all that would be better. Someone to help me with geography, and history. (Student 7, student with EBD, school 8 mainstream primary)

A common theme among teachers and parents of this cohort was the continued need for appropriate levels of support. This group of pupils shared a need for support which schools were trying to reduce. Of the five pupils who had made satisfactory progress four experienced difficulties with attention to task and focus – requiring more individualised attention to their support. Rose had a tendency to hyperactivity and Alice benefited from support with self-regulation.

7.10   Summary of the Outcomes for Pupils in Primary Schools Across the Four Domains

Table 20 summarises the outcomes for pupils across the four domains of attainment, engagement, happiness, and independence. The table below indicates that most pupils are well supported in schools and make progress in terms of their outcomes in these four areas.

Table 20: Progression of primary school pupils during two school visits

Year Group	Visit	Attainment			Engagement			Happiness			Independence		
		LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS
Junior Infant	First Visit	1	4	0	2	3	0	1	3	1	2	3	0
	Second Visit	0	2	3	0	4	1	0	4	1	1	4	0
Senior Infant	First Visit	8	1	0	4	5	0	1	8	0	3	6	0
	Second Visit (one pupil left the sample)	1	6	1	1	6	1	2	6	0	3	4	1
First Class	First Visit	8	4	0	3	8	1	5	7	0	3	8	1
	Second Visit	0	9	3	7	2	3	6	5	1	2	9	1
Second Class	First Visit	5	3	0	2	6	0	1	6	1	1	4	3
	Second Visit	3	4	1	3	5	0	0	6	2	2	6	0
Third Class	First Visit	8	2	0	3	7	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
	Second Visit	3	6	1	3	7	0	3	7	0	0	9	1
Fourth Class	First Visit	9	2	0	1	10	0	1	10	0	5	0	6
	Second Visit (one pupil left the country)	1	9	0	4	6	0	0	10	0	0	10	0
Total	First Visit	39	16	0	15	39	1	14	39	2	19	25	10
	Second Visit	8	36	9	18	30	5	11	38	4	8	42	3

The outcomes for primary school pupils with special educational needs in the case study schools are summarised in Table 21.

Table 21: Outcomes for primary school pupils with special educational needs in case study schools

	Progress from less Than Satisfactory to Satisfactory in Respect of Outcomes from Visit 1 to Visit 2	Achieved Satisfactory or Very Satisfactory Achievement in Respect of Outcomes by Visit 2	Less than Satisfactory Progress in Respect of Outcomes at Visit 2
Attainment	31/53	45/53	8/53
Engagement	5/53	35/53	18/53
Happiness	3/53	42/53	11/53
Independence	18/53	45/53	8/53

The data indicate that in the four areas of attainment, engagement, happiness and independence most pupils were seen to achieve satisfactory level outcomes. In engagement and happiness, however, some had made less than satisfactory progress. Those who had achieved less than satisfactory outcomes in these two areas are summarised in Table 22 according to their designated special educational need.

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Table 22: Pupils achieving less than satisfactory outcomes in engagement and happiness

	Engagement	Happiness
PD	3	2
ASD	5	3
MD	1	1
HI	1	2
MGLD	2	0
SLD	2	1
EBD	3	1
MGLD/ADHD	1	1

The data indicate that pupils likely to have difficulties with communication and forming relationships – such as those with a diagnosis of ASD, ADHD, HI, or EBD – are most vulnerable in attaining satisfactory levels of engagement with learning. It is also clear that lack of engagement, however, does not necessarily equate to being unhappy in school. While some pupils with ASD or EBD achieve less than satisfactory levels of engagement, some were recorded as happy in their schooling.

The research findings suggest that:

- Although there was evidence that pupils with special educational needs achieved positive outcomes as they progressed through their education, it was also evident that as they got older and were presented with more formalised learning they fell behind their peers.

- Social outcomes appeared to be more positive as children got older though difficulties persisted for some particularly those with a diagnosis of EBD or ASD. Teachers were aware of the importance of achieving social outcomes as well as those related to academic performance and in some instances had put into place support such as buddy systems and mentoring to help pupils at risk. These were not apparent in all schools, however, and this is an issue that would benefit from further attention.

- From first class onwards anxieties began to emerge among parents and teachers about transition to post primary. Schools were aware of these anxieties and there were good examples of support systems available in most schools for ensuring the effective transition from primary to post primary.

- Behaviour difficulties presented a major challenge to attainment and engagement in learning. Examples were seen of a range of effective behaviour management approaches, including use of rewards and sanctions and differentiated teaching that took account of pupil interests. However, these were not seen in all schools and in some instances were inconsistently applied. Where NEPS or by SESS had given advice this was seen to have had a positive impact on behaviour management.

- Behaviour and/or communication problems were an inhibiting factor in pupil ability to make and maintain relationships. As a result of their SEN some pupils, particularly those with ASD or EBD, could at times become isolated. In some instances this isolation appeared to cause no anxiety for pupils with ASD, some of whom made good progress in attainment and independence. Programmes that fostered collaboration between adults and children and promoted the necessary skills for relationship building were not a strong feature in schools, however.

- School initiated strategies such as peer tutoring had a positive impact on inclusion of pupils in peer relationships. Instances of formalised approaches to peer tutoring were rarely seen during the study and this is an area needing further development.

- SNAs were seen to contribute to independence by helping pupils to stay on task thus enabling them to be more ready for working independently. In a few instances they were seen to have become over dependent on SNA support, and on some occasions pupils preferred to work without this support.

- For pupils with emotional and behavioural problems SNAs were observed to be a vital regulatory factor in their management of behaviour and participation in learning. SNAs were seen to provide routine at the beginning of the day and at other potentially difficult times for these pupils.

- Although differentiation was inconsistent, where used consistently there was evidence that it appeared to have a positive impact on learning outcomes. A limited range of differentiation approaches was in evidence in most schools.

- For a few pupils, withdrawal from class had become an issue with their expressed desire for more appropriate in-class support. Instances were seen of well-structured group support provided in some withdrawal situations and resource teachers demonstrated good pedagogical skills for a diverse range of pupils. Because of the focus on offering support in a separate environment, however, some class teachers had not developed the skills and confidence to provide a similar level of pupil engagement in class.

- Having friends and sustaining friendships was not necessarily an indicator of happiness with some pupils on the autism spectrum expressing a desire to be on their own. Similarly, there was evidence that some pupils not fully engaged with learning were happy in school and developing appropriate social skills.

7.11 Special School Outcomes

This section considers the outcomes for pupils attending special schools in Ireland based on research findings. At the outset, five case study pupils attended school 11, five attended school 12, six school 13 and six pupils attended school 14 (n=22). At the second visit to the schools two pupils in school 14 had left to attend adult services and we were unable to make contact with two pupils in school 13 due to changes in their living circumstances. This left 18 pupils available for analysis of outcomes data. These data will be presented on an individual pupil basis but also on a school-by-school basis based on their performance under the outcomes headings: attainment, engagement, happiness and independence as in the sections addressing primary and post primary outcomes. Pupils attending these special schools were assigned class designations where determination of grade was somewhat equivalent to the primary system – pupils were assigned to classes with age compatibility. It was evident also that these classes were designated not only in terms of age but according to type and incidence of SEN. This section describes pupil outcomes by providing nuanced information based on individual progress.

As with the sections addressing primary and post primary outcomes each pupil will be described individually under the attainment, engagement, happiness, and independence rubrics. Outcomes of all pupils will be described in sequential order according to school visits as the number is small compared with those of the primary and post primary contexts.

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Table 23: Special schools outcomes sources of evidence

Attainment	Engagement	Happiness	Independence
Focused on academic achievements, in particular, literacy and numeracy at primary level and a variety of forms of accreditation of learning at senior level.	The regularity of school attendance, remaining in school as well as the quality of pupil engagement with classroom learning tasks.	The development of social skills, confidence and the ability to build and sustain relationships.	The ability of the pupil to work independently. Pupil not over dependent on SNA support.
Sources Of Evidence			
School-based assessments and award bearing assessments	Attendance records	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)
Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers
IEPs*	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	School reports	School reports
Pupil records			IEPs*
School reports			

* not all pupils have IEPs

NB: A sample of parents, teachers and pupils were interviewed during both school visits. Interviews with HSE and other outside agencies were conducted only once, either on the first or second visit.

7.12   Infant Classes

Table 24: Outcomes in infant classes

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
11	Dale	ASD	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S
11	Mollie	CD	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S
11	Evie	DD	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	S	LS	LS
11	David	MGLD	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	S	LS	LS
13	Roger	ADHD	LS	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS	LS

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

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7.12.1   Attainment

On the first visit teachers and parents reported that all five pupils were making little progress. Dale, the youngest in this group, appeared to be making some progress in concentration. He was reported to be a tactile child and sensitive to noise. According to his teacher, he was experiencing difficulties in toileting, personal care, danger awareness, mobility, and sensory integration and responses. Mollie, who has a chromosomal disorder, had transitioned from a mainstream school. Her parent noted that she had experienced very little success in the mainstream and her behaviours had become increasingly more challenging. At the first visit to the special school Mollie had made little progress in attainment. She was described as a visual learner and had a picture schedule to help her communicate. Evie, who experiences muscular spasms and is prone to minor seizures, was reported to have difficulties with feeding and required regular speech therapy support. Evie's parent said her health strongly influenced her academic ability. According to David's parent he had no speech or communication though he appeared to be advancing in this area. His teacher described David's needs as predominantly sensory and activity based, that he enjoyed school and was responding to behaviour programmes. He also noted Roger's reading and attention difficulties – and lack of focus.

On the second visit teachers and parents deemed three pupils (Dale, Mollie, and Roger) were making satisfactory progress. Two were making little progress. According to his teacher Dale continued to have significant sensory needs. His parent and teacher agreed that he was benefiting from the Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) programme. Dale's life skills were ascertained to be a priority. According to Mollie's teacher her communication had improved as had her confidence, though she was prone to occasional violent outbursts. Mollie mostly communicated through hand gestures and signs. Evie continued to have issues with her health. Though her communication skills were improving she was reported to have difficulties with motor control and was finding it difficult to hold objects, or focus on these. David's intense sensory needs presented a challenge to learning with success being achieved through a multi-sensory approach. He also appeared to have had some behavioural difficulties and mood swings, though he was now on medication that appeared to be having a positive effect. His teacher reported David to have regressed academically since the last visit. At the second visit his class teacher reported that Roger may have been a candidate for return to mainstream, if he could be provided with adequate support in that environment. His behavioural issues were largely resolved.

7.12.2   Engagement

On the first visit five pupils had made satisfactory progress in engagement. Dale was reported to engage predominantly with the sensory world of the classroom. Behaviourally, he had improved and according to his SNA he had become accustomed to routines within his preschool environment. This had become apparent in personal care activities as well as social routines. He joined in briefly during circle time through use of scaffolding and gesture by his teacher. According to her teacher Mollie was interacting with the people around her well though she had become over attached to her SNA. Evie's mother referred to her frequent ill health as well as her stubbornness as a deterrent to her engagement. David's teacher described his lack of engagement and a tendency to participate on his terms only. Roger's progress was quite dependent on whether his teacher could implement the occupational therapist's recommendations.

On the second visit, parents and teachers stated that three pupils had made satisfactory and two had made little progress. Dale had become more vocal and was making intentional vocalisations. He was enjoying language sessions and becoming more accepting and less resistant towards table top activities. Overall, interest and tolerance had improved. At the second visit teachers said Mollie was participating in class activities and did not appear to have many difficulties during group work. She had recently contributed to the school's version of the musical, Grease. Evie was engaging at a more personal level with her classmates. David's teacher described his recent regression. She referred to having to alter his IEP and summon a crisis meeting to address his changing needs. Roger's occupational therapist reported progress in attention.

7.12.3   Happiness

On the first visit parents and teachers suggested three pupils were making satisfactory progress and two were making less than satisfactory progress. Dale displayed evidence of attachment with his teacher and SNA though preferring this attention when immersed in sand or tactile stimulation. Mollie appeared to be happy and her SNA reported she had developed a sense of trust with school personnel. Evie was reported to have friends and her social skills appeared to be developing appropriately. Though he had made little progress socially David appeared happy.

On the second visit parents and teachers stated that four pupils were making satisfactory progress in happiness with one making less than satisfactory progress. While Dale's progress was slow, his teacher said he was interacting more often with his classmates. At the second visit his SNAs reported that he continued to be interactive:

> Dale was always interactive. Dale came in two years ago and he was always sociable, I've never had a problem there. (SNA 4, student with MGLD, school 12 special school)

His mother was content with his social progress. Mollie's teacher said she was slow to develop trusting relationships though her teacher and parent agreed she was progressing socially. Evie's teacher reported her to be happier. She was now interacting with friends inside and outside school. David's social skills remained poor. Roger's teacher confirmed his success in happiness and behaviour management:

> He's just a really happy little boy who comes to school. (Class teacher, student with ADHD, school 13 special school)

7.12.4   Independence

On the first visit it was stated that all five pupils were making less than satisfactory progress in independence. Dale enjoyed intensive one-to-one interaction with his SNA and was reported to have started participating in extracurricular activities such as horse-riding. Mollie was supported by two different SNAs during the day. She had become overly dependent on her original SNA and often sought reassurance. Evie, who required intense support in physical and medical terms during the school day, began each day with a routine specifically designed to address these. Though relatively independent, David required considerable support. He experienced difficulties staying in the classroom, exhibiting a tendency to flee. At the first visit his SNA said Roger needed a lot of support. She supported him by repeating the content and expectations in lessons, thus accommodating his poor attention span.

On the second visit to the schools it was ascertained that all five pupils were making less than satisfactory progress in independence. Dale's life skills were reported to have been progressing and had been prioritised in his IEP. According to his teacher Dale had to be withdrawn much less from class as he had improved capacity to manage his own behaviour. Dale was also participating in extracurricular activities such as drama. Mollie continued to have her own SNA though her teacher and SNA were attempting to make her more independent. Evie had experienced little progress. David's teacher emphasised his continued need for one-to-one support. Currently he was receiving SNA support for half of each day. Roger's teacher spoke of the need for continuous monitoring and support.

7.13   Early Primary Level Classes

Table 25: Outcomes in early primary level classes

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
14	Karl	SLD	LS	S	S	LS	S	S	LS	S
14	Skye	ADHD/EBD	LS	S	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	S
13	Jenson	MGLD	S	S	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	LS
12	Blake	MGLD	S	VS	VS	VS	S	S	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

7.13.1   Attainment

In terms of attainment on the first visit it was agreed by parents and teachers that all four pupils were making satisfactory progress. Karl loved school and enjoyed studying maths. Karl's teacher described his progress in the following terms:

> He's working at first class. But everything else he'd be working in junior or senior infants. His reading would be at a junior infant level. But I think that's more to do with in a mainstream school it was just going too fast for him. (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

At the first visit Karl's teacher described his classroom interaction:

> Academically he's fine but he needs to be focused a lot of the time. He will talk for Ireland for you. (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

His teacher said that Jenson enjoyed reading. Blake's mother was pleased with his progress since arriving at the school. He had spent two years in mainstream with minimal academic achievement beforehand.

On the second visit parents and teachers suggested that three pupils had maintained their level of progress and one pupil, Blake, had made very good progress. Karl, who was reported to be making satisfactory progress, was described by his SNA as imaginative and bright academically though sometimes slow at homework. Skye's teacher described reported that while there was evidence of progress since the first visit, Skye continued to experience difficulties with concentration, reading and writing. Jenson's teacher described his strength in auditory terms:

> In an environment where he can just learn by hearing, he thrives, you know, so we do a lot of that as well, just remembering … (Class teacher, student with MGLD, School 13 special school)

Blake's parent and teacher reported very satisfactory progress on the second visit noting improvements in concentration and writing. Blake could now spell his name and draw which he was unable to do during the first visit.

7.13.2   Engagement

On the first visit parents and teachers said one pupil had maintained very good progress, two pupils were making satisfactory progress and one was making little progress. Karl's teacher described his classroom interaction as:

> He's very polite, he's a nice young lad. It's just that if you have to listen to him. You have to be very quiet and kind of direct to him. Say, "Right, now Karl enough", basically. But other than that he's a nice young lad, he is. (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

Jenson's teacher reported his difficulty engaging with the curriculum. She noted that he preferred to relate to adults rather than his peers. Skye's teacher reported significant difficulties engaging with classroom activities. In the past the teacher reported that Skye had threatened and been violent with other children. Blake's parent described very satisfactory progress and the difference in her child since he started attending the special school:

> Like he's just ever since he's here, try to stop him from going to school! And he's like a completely different child … he was so depressed, he wanted to … you know, when he's going to be off for the two months, he's just going to be … (Parent 4, child with MGLD, school 12 special school)

At the second visit parents and teachers felt three pupils had made little progress and one had made very good progress. Karl's teacher reported that occasionally he had difficulties engaging in classroom tasks. His teacher advocated close collaboration with Karl's mother in terms of behavioural approaches which had contributed to his progress. Skye's teacher reported continuing difficulties in engagement and interaction with other pupils in his class. Jenson's resource teacher described his difficulties engaging with curricular content. She reported his relative success with oral engagement, but expressed concern relating to his poor acquisition of literacy skills. Jenson's teacher reported an association between Jenson's difficulties engaging with learning and his behaviour. He himself expressed a need to engage through physicality as is exemplified in his wish to be outside:

> Yeah. There hasn't been like a change in like class, like, like we don't play out loads, I just really want to just get outside and play a lot. It really pulls me down and that's really nearly … well we have exercises in the morning and stuff … (Student 4, student with MGLD, school 13 special school)

7.13.3   Happiness

On the first visit it was stated by parents and teachers that three pupils had made little progress and one pupil had made very good progress in terms of happiness. Blake's parent reported a significant difference in her child since he started attending the special school recalling how depressed he had been previously. Karl's teacher described his progress as adequate. She commented on his potential to improve with maturity. Skye's teacher reported that his class were barely tolerating Skye's behaviour. Jenson reported feeling negative while in school:

> I don't like it cause everyone keeps putting all of the stress on me. I just get really sad and stress all over me. No, this is the only first time I've been able to talk. All I like is the friends I have at the school … (Student 4, student with MGLD, school 13 special school)

On the second visit it was stated by parents and teachers that all four pupils – Karl, Blake, Skye and Jenson – had made satisfactory progress socially. According to Karl's class teacher he had a wider group of friends and

> … has begun to differentiate the social behaviour of peers … (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

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Jenson's class teacher reported Jenson's interactions with other pupils tend to be combative though he has developed close relationships with two of his classmates. Jenson's interactions with staff and pupils were antagonistic compromising his ability to be happy and infusing a negative social tone into his school experience. His teacher described the effects of his personal life:

> I discovered yesterday how very upset he is about family circumstances because he just broke down crying about his past, and I always wonder, is that why he cries so easily? (Class teacher, student with MGLD, school 13 special school)

7.13.4   Independence

On the first visit to the schools parents and teachers stated that all four pupils had made less than satisfactory progress in relation to independence outcomes. Karl's SNA described his need for support:

> Karl works quite independently on his own, he loves encouragement, like once you to tell him he's doing good he'll keep going, he loves the praise. You've to watch for little signs of irritation. (SNA 6, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

Skye needs help to stay on task. His SNA reported his resistance to learning and his need for close monitoring and support:

> He will try and tell you that he can't read but he's a perfectly bright child… (SNA 3, student with ADHD/EBD, school 14 special school)

At the first visit Blake's parent mentioned being fearful of his return to mainstream where both she and her son were without support. She also expressed a need for support during the summer months when he was not at school. At the second visit three pupils (Karl, Skye, and Blake) had made satisfactory progress and one pupil Jenson had made little progress. Karl's SNA reported the strategies she uses to encourage his work but also his independence. She described how they worked together:

> Well I do all his academic work with him, and we do group work together. (SNA 6, student with SLD, School 14 special school)

His teacher reported that Jenson required ongoing substantial support to his academic difficulties with reading and maths. Skye had made satisfactory progress though class teacher highlighted his need for individual attention and to withdraw from the classroom regularly Blake's class SNAs reported his lack of dependency. Blake had become quite independent in class:

> So once he's confident with stuff and knows he has the ability to do his work and he's quite happy doing it he wouldn't be looking for as much attention as others in the class. (SNA 4, student with MGLD, school 12 special school)

7.14   Middle Primary Classes

Table 26: Outcomes in middle primary classes

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
12	Rory	SLD	S	S	LS	S	S	LS	LS	LS
12	Cameron	SLD	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	LS
14	Felix	HI	S	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

7.14.1   Attainment

Parents and teachers stated on the first visit that two pupils (Rory and Felix) had made satisfactory progress and one pupil, Cameron, had made limited progress. His mother described how her son transitioned from mainstream to the special school. She was pleased with the move but unsure about his academic progress:

> Not really with the progress, because I find that, we've been doing something for a year, and he's still at it. So obviously there's some, I don't know what, there must be some other way to do it, or for it to click in his mind … (Parent 5, child with SLD, school 12 special school)

Rory's teacher reported satisfactory academic progress suggesting he was performing at a high level in phonics and was showing an aptitude for maths. At the first visit Felix's teacher describing his progress suggested he was one of the brightest in the class but his performance could be unpredictable.

At the second visit two pupils were deemed to have made satisfactory progress and one had made limited progress. Cameron's mother and SNA reported little progress, both confirming his poor short-term memory. Rory had made satisfactory progress at the second visit, his teacher reporting this specifically in maths. Phonics was a weakness for Rory. Felix's teacher reported satisfactory success, the emphasis for Felix was a functional curriculum and this was being differentiated.

7.14.2   Engagement

On the first visit it was clear that two pupils (Cameron and Rory) had poor attendance records and both had made little progress in engagement. One pupil, Felix, was making satisfactory progress. Cameron's mother explained her frustration concerning her son's ability to engage with learning and that he appeared to be relearning material already covered. Rory's teacher reported the use of strategies to increase his poor school attendance. To encourage his engagement she provided a highly desired activity for the first ten minutes of class and he had responded positively to this. Felix was reported to be a quiet, enthusiastic student but his teacher explained his difficulties with engagement that may be associated with hearing loss and memory issues.

On the second visit two pupils were deemed to be making satisfactory progress and one had made limited progress. Rory had internalised the behavioural strategies implemented by his teacher on the first visit demonstrating improved involvement in classroom activities. Cameron's teacher reaffirmed limited progress and mentioned strategies being enforced to help him engage with his environment including visual checklists. Felix's parent reported that he was enjoying school more and fitting in better with his class. His class teacher reported, however, that he was experiencing some difficulties in his class placement and that the senior class curriculum might be too challenging for him.

7.14.3   Happiness

On the first visit parents and teachers stated that two pupils (Cameron and Felix) had made little progress in terms of happiness and one pupil, Rory, had made satisfactory progress. Cameron's mother explained her son's progress in terms of his ability to play on his own though, according to his teacher, he required visual scheduling to prompt interaction. Rory's parent reported that he had made friends since attending the special school:

> Brilliant, he's got good friends here. He does, he has loads of friends. Where we're living is full of children. (Parent 2, child with SLD, school 12 special school)

Felix's teacher reported little progress and a tendency to interact with adults only.

At the second visit to the school it was reported that two pupils (Cameron and Felix) had made satisfactory progress and one pupil, Rory, had made little progress. Cameron had developed relationships in the classroom, particularly with one other child, but his teacher reported a tendency to mimic inappropriate behaviour. Rory's teacher reported little progress in happiness-related outcomes suggesting that:

> He gets on great with most of the children in his class, although he tends to get very withdrawn and upset easily, he's quite a sensitive child … (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 12 special school)

Felix's teacher reported that he had developed one friendship in class. His mother affirmed his improved social competence in general.

7.14.4   Independence

On the first visit all three pupils were reported to have made little progress in terms of independence. Cameron's parent explained her son's ongoing need for therapeutic support and intervention including speech therapy and physiotherapy as well as one-to-one support in class. At the first visit Rory's parent reported that he received substantial support in speech and language therapy. His parent also mentioned that there was ample support for him in the classroom. Felix's teacher reported a continuous need for support. It was observed that he displayed a preference for working with his teacher and resisted SNA help.

At the second visit two pupils (Cameron and Rory) were assessed to have made limited progress and one pupil, Felix, was making satisfactory progress. Cameron's teacher described a lack of independence in his academic work. His SNA reported that he had become dependent on praise and acknowledgement to encourage his participation in class. Rory's teacher reported his continued need for support with communication. Without this he would have variable success with his phonics programme.

7.15   Senior Primary Classes Inclusive of Junior Certificate

Table 27: Outcomes in senior primary classes inclusive of Junior Certificate

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
11	Juan	DS	S	VS	S	S	LS	S	S	VS
12	Heidi	ASD	LS	S	S	S	LS	LS	LS	LS

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

7.15.1   Attainment

On the first visit it was recorded that one pupil, Juan, was making satisfactory progress and another, Heidi, had made limited progress. Juan had attended a mainstream primary school until age 13 where he had been bullied. His teacher estimated him to be the most able in his class. According to his speech and language therapist his language skills were good and the main focus of her work was on his social and pragmatic communication. Juan mentioned future aspirations:

> I'd love to be a guard. I'm tired of people being bullied and all that, so I would be a guard.' He also thought of other alternatives: 'I think I might go to college. I'd love to go on work experience. (Student 5, student with DS, school 11 special school)

Her mother explained that Heidi had developmental delay, mild cerebral palsy and visual impairment. Before the first school visit she had just received a diagnosis of autism. Heidi previously had attended a mainstream school.

At the second school visit Juan, was assessed to be making very satisfactory progress and Heidi, was making satisfactory progress. Juan had moved on to a second class reader, according to his mother. Heidi was reported to be interested in visiting the library, was performing well in maths, had a reading age of 7.5, a spelling age of 6.5 and was working on tens and units in maths.

7.15.2   Engagement

Both pupils had good attendance records and were described as making satisfactory progress in engagement. On the first visit Juan was deemed by parent and teachers to be engaging at a successful level. Heidi's mother referred to the small class size as conducive to her success in the special school.

On the second visit both pupils were making satisfactory progress. Juan was reported to enjoy attending the local secondary school for a few hours per week to engage in science classes there. It was ascertained that Heidi's ability to engage varied. Her teacher reported her ability to waver in engagement and academic performance. Heidi was responding to a visual reward system.

On the first visit it was assessed by parents and teachers that one pupil, Juan, had made satisfactory progress and another little progress. Juan was reported by his class teacher to resort to verbal aggression when he disliked someone. In her day-to-day life Heidi had minimal experiences of friendship according to her mother. She was beginning to show potential in school, however.

On the second visit to the schools Juan was deemed to have made satisfactory progress and Heidi, had made little progress. Juan was described by his teacher as a very social student with a tendency to be slightly inappropriate or immature occasionally. His teacher felt he had interacted positively with a potential peer group among the transition year pupils in the local secondary school. Heidi had developed two friendships with peers that were unfitting, one of them, a boy with whom she related inappropriately.

7.15.3   Happiness

On the first visit parents and teachers reported that Juan had made satisfactory progress and Heidi less than satisfactory progress. Juan was reportedly very independent. He was now distributing the school menu around the school unaided. At the second visit Heidi's difficulties were based predominantly on transitioning from one environment to another and during unstructured activities. Heidi's class teacher reported her high level of need for support but also the need for parental support achieved through weekly meetings with Heidi's mother. Heidi continued to require support from her SNA during transitions. On the second visit Juan's independence was reaffirmed by his teacher and parent.

7.16   Senior Classes Inclusive of Leaving Certificate

Table 28: Outcomes in senior classes inclusive of Leaving Certificate

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
13	Owen	OCD	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S	LS
14	Mason	AS	S	VS	VS	VS	LS	S	S	VS
12	Kian	MGLD	S	LS	S	VS	S	S	LS	S
13	Ewan	EBD	LS	LS	LS	S	S	S	LS	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

7.16.1   Attainment

Of the four in this group three pupils (Mason, Kian, and Owen) were deemed by parents and teachers to have made satisfactory progress in attainment. All four had transitioned from a mainstream school. Mason had been subjected to bullying before this and, according to his class teacher, his confidence was low. Mason articulated the teacher support he appreciated.

> If I don't understand something they'll explain it slowly. And if I still don't understand it they'll simplify it for me. (Student 4, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

His class teacher reported his success in the Junior Certificate since he transitioned:

> … yes he got a B in his art in the very first year that he was here. That was his Junior Cert art. And then he studied his maths, he got a B in his maths Junior Cert as well. He got a C in his English, Junior Cert, which is why we want to keep him here, to finish off on the Leaving Cert Applied. So he's doing very well. (Class teacher, student with SLD, school 14 special school)

Kian was a child who had been made a ward of the State. At the first visit Kian's foster parent found the school experience very positive in terms of Kian's recent attainment. He reported satisfactory academic progress and achievements in reading. Ewan described his previous difficulties with learning:

> I was young, I didn't understand. I couldn't do English, I couldn't do maths; I couldn't do … that's all … I couldn't do. (Student 2, school 13 special school)

Owen's teacher reported that he had settled well after some initial difficult behaviour and his SNA confirmed that this had lessened considerably.

On the second visit one pupil, Mason, was said to be making very satisfactory progress, two (Kian and Ewan) had made limited progress and one pupil, Owen, had made satisfactory progress. According to his class teacher, Mason had made very satisfactory progress academically, particularly in English. His teacher also stated that academically Mason was a capable student. His parent and teacher described him as bright with strong comprehension and mathematical abilities. At the second visit Kian's foster parent continued to feel positively about Kian's progress although he acknowledged that this was rather slower than he would have liked. Ewan's SNA reported minimal academic progress while Owen was very positive about his academic accomplishments.

7.16.2 Engagement

All pupils had good attendance records with the exception of Kian who encountered great difficulty with this for long periods. On the first visit one pupil, Mason, was assessed as making very satisfactory progress, two (Ewan and Owen) had made little progress and another, Kian, had made satisfactory progress in engagement. Mason described how he best engaged:

> And I can learn at my own pace … That is very important to me. (Student 4, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 14 special school)

Mason was determined he would have input into his learning. Initially Kian could not cope with inclusion in the classroom. A gradual introduction to classroom activities was instigated by the school. According to his foster parent, Kian was responding well to a reward system where he received certificates for reading achievement. Ewan's behaviour was reported by his teacher and SNA to be an impediment to his engagement. He needed to develop trust before engaging. Owen's attendance record was poor and he spent very little time in school.

At the second visit it was evident that one pupil, Mason, had made very satisfactory progress, two (Kian and Owen) had made satisfactory progress and one, Ewan, had made little progress. Mason's teacher described his attributes and contribution to class:

> Mason's delightful to work with. He's very resourceful but if you do ask Mason to do something he does it with his – the best of intentions and to the best of his ability. (Class teacher, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 14 special school)

Kian's foster parent reported very satisfactory progress and the benefits of the school's support to him and his family. He felt Kian was far more engaged and responding positively to the school's approaches. He also explained that mainstream school would not achieve this level of engagement for Kian:

> If he was in mainstream school it would probably cause an awful lot of conflict between me and Kian which isn't good … (Parent 3, child with MGLD, school 12 special school)

Ewan's teacher reported an improvement in his classroom engagement. Ewan described how school personnel provide work to engage him:

> They do just flick through pages and look for something that I can do. And then just put it on my desk. (Student 2 with EBD, school 13 special school)

When asked if he could participate in decisions about his learning Ewan replied:

> No. They just give it to me and I do it. Because they're the teachers, I can't do anything. I wish though … (Student 2 with EBD, school 13 special school)

7.16.3 Happiness

On the first visit, parents and teachers ascertained that two pupils (Mason and Ewan) had made little social progress and two (Kian and Ewan) had made satisfactory progress. Mason explained his social difficulties:

> I have difficulty talking to new people but in school I'm very confident here. (Student 4, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 14 special school)

His foster parent reported Kian's difficulties interacting; however he also described improvements including new friendships after a recent house move. His class teacher affirmed Ewan's recent relative happiness relating to his home environment. According to Owen's SNA, he had persistent difficulties interacting with others appropriately and was reported to be very introverted.

At the second visit it was clear that two pupils (Mason and Kian) had made satisfactory progress. Mason's parent reported that he had school friends despite being shy; his class teacher who was also the LCA coordinator questioned the quality of these friendships, though. His foster parent reported Kian to be feeling happy and safe in his new environment. Ewan's class teacher reported his difficulties engaging appropriately with others. He also referred to his shyness. Owen's teacher reported that he had become more inhibited and, according to his teacher, appeared to have serious issues.

7.16.4   Independence

On the first visit to the schools parents and teachers stated that two pupils (Mason and Owen) had made satisfactory progress and two had made limited progress in independence. Kian's SNA reported that when he started attending school he required the support of one teacher and two SNAs. He attended class initially for very short periods of time (ten minutes). Mason was seen as very independent by his teacher so much so that he could support other pupils. Initially Ewan received a lot of support due to behavioural issues. Owen had made satisfactory progress. According to his class teacher he had developed a very trusting relationship with his SNA who regarded him as bright, creative and willing to please.

On the second visit, it was suggested by parents and teachers that two pupils (Ewan and Kian) had made satisfactory progress, one, Mason, had made very satisfactory and another, Owen, had made little progress. His class teacher reported Mason's potential to become a leader in the class group. According to Kian's SNA he did not require intense support and could cope with one-to-one though this level of support was not always needed. His foster parent hoped Kian would cope more independently and become more socially integrated. Ewan's SNA reported he was working more independently. For Owen little progress was evident, according to his SNA. He required ongoing intensive support.

7.17   Summary of the Outcomes for Pupils in Special Schools across the Four Domains

Table 29 summarises outcomes for pupils across the four domains of attainment, engagement, happiness, and independence.

Table 29: A summary of outcomes for pupils in special schools across the four domains of attainment, engagement, happiness, and independence

Year Group	Visit	Attainment			Engagement			Happiness			Independence		
		LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS
Infant	First Visit	5	0	0	5	0	0	3	2	0	5	0	0
	Second Visit	2	3	0	2	3	0	0	5	0	3	2	0
Early Primary	First Visit	2	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	4	0	0
	Second Visit	0	3	1	3	0	1	0	4	0	1	3	0
Middle Primary	First Visit	1	2	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	3	0	0
	Second Visit	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	2	1	0
Senior Primary	First Visit	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	0
	Second Visit	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Senior	First Visit	1	3	0	2	1	1	1	3	0	2	2	0
	Second Visit	2	1	1	0	2	2	0	4	0	1	2	1
Total	First Visit	10	8	0	11	5	2	10	8	0	15	3	0
	Second Visit	5	10	3	6	9	3	2	16	0	8	8	2

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

Table 30 summarises outcomes for special school pupils in the case study schools.

Table 30: Outcomes for special school pupils with special educational needs in case study schools

	Less than satisfactory to satisfactory progress re outcomes from Visit 1 to Visit 2	Satisfactory or very satisfactory achievement re outcomes by Visit 2	Less than satisfactory progress re outcomes at Visit 2
Attainment	5/18	13/18	5/18
Engagement	5/18	12/18	6/18
Happiness	8/18	16/18	2/18
Independence	7/18	10/18	8/18

The data indicate that in three of the four areas of attainment, engagement, independence and happiness most pupils made progress over the two visits. While many gained satisfactory levels of independence, however, some found particular difficulty in this area.

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Over the two visits there was evidence that:

- Pupils who had moved from mainstream to special schools had settled well into schooling. Their parents expressed satisfaction with resourcing in the special schools compared to their experience in mainstream. This was seen as critical in enabling pupils to make progress.

- For some pupils, the use of augmentative systems of communication was seen to have been beneficial and had enabled pupils to gain confidence and make progress, academically and socially. This depended on teacher familiarity with these systems and in some instances maintaining a consistent approach was difficult because of variable staff knowledge and expertise in using devices.

- Availability of speech and language therapists was important in pupil progress in their communication. Speech and language therapists provided advice to teachers and where implemented this was seen to aid progress.

- SNAs played a critical role in managing behaviour and assisting pupils to gain independence in social skills. They developed close working relationships with pupils and teachers and demonstrated a good understanding of individual needs. Pupils' behavioural and social outcomes were often promoted through SNA intervention in class.

- There were many instances of close collaboration between teachers and parents in ensuring consistent management and implementing learning programmes for pupils. Both parties saw these as instrumental in pupil progress.

- Poor attendance, often associated with health problems, impeded the progress of some pupils. Schools were supportive of those periodically absent from school and endeavoured to put into place processes that aided readmission.

- Special schools appeared effective in dealing with a wide range of needs and abilities. They emphasised pupils' pastoral needs. In some instances this resulted in improved attendance by those who exhibited tendencies towards disaffection and withdrawal.

7.18   Post Primary Outcomes

This section reports the findings on social and academic outcomes for students with special educational needs in post primary mainstream schools. It considers specific students seen during the data collection phase the research over three years. Conclusions are drawn from student experiences and from analysis of a wider sample of school documents to provide a picture of post primary outcomes.

Fifty-six pupils, their families, their teachers and support personnel participated in the post primary section of this study for the academic years 2010-12. Eight pupils were involved in moving either to another school (one) or to a post school placement (seven). Their experiences have been documented in the section on transition so are omitted from this section. The outcomes data for the 48 pupils are presented on a cohort basis beginning with first year pupils, followed by second years, third years and senior cycle. This approach has been adopted as it became evident that learning outcomes varied according to the year of study involved.

As with the primary section of this report, tables and discussion in this section are based on several sources of evidence gathered by the research team over the two school visits. On the first visit, interviewees were asked to comment on pupil progress in the four domains since entry into school and during movement between classes. This enabled the research team to establish a baseline from this visit against which progress could be assessed at visit two.

7.19   Sources of Evidence

Table 31: Post Primary outcomes – Sources of evidence

Attainment	Engagement	Happiness	Independence
Focused on academic achievements, in particular school and national exams at post primary level.	Regularity of school attendance, remaining in school, as well as quality of pupil engagement with the learning tasks in the classroom.	Development of social skills, confidence and the ability to build and sustain relationships.	Pupil ability to work independently. Pupil not over dependent on SNA support.
Sources of Evidence			
School and national exams	Attendance records	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)
Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers	Observations conducted by researchers
IEPs*	Interview data (parents, teachers, pupils, principals, resource teachers, SNAs, HSE professionals)	School reports	School reports
Pupil records			IEPs*
School reports			

* not all pupils have IEPs

NB: A sample of parents, teachers and pupils were interviewed during both school visits. Interviews with HSE and other outside agencies were conducted only once, either on the first or second visit.

7.20   First Years

On the first visit six pupils were in first year from three schools as outlined in Table 32.

Table 32: Post Primary outcomes – First years

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
18 (boys)	James	MGLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	VS	VS
18 (boys)	Jamie	HI/SSLD	S	S	VS	VS	VS	VS	LS	S
23 (mixed)	Phoebe	ASD	S	S	S	S	S	S	LS	LS
23 (mixed)	Naomi	Dyspraxia	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
24 (boys)	Logan	Assessed syndrome	LS	S	LS	LS	LS	LS	VS	VS
24 (boys)	Louis	EBD	LS	S	LS	LS	S	S	VS	VS

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; LS=Less than satisfactory; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory.

7.20.1 Attainment

On the first visit four pupils were assessed as having made a satisfactory transition to post primary schooling while two (school 24) had made a less than satisfactory transition. Likewise the same four pupils were making satisfactory progress in attainment while the two pupils who had experienced transition difficulties (Logan/Louis) had not made satisfactory progress in academic attainment. Logan had definite strengths in learning and an ability to engage with a subject but his behaviour constituted a major learning barrier. Louis had been diagnosed with EBD and this appeared to be a major obstacle to his learning as he had difficulties taking direction in class and found many literacy based subjects difficult. On the second visit the four pupils deemed to have made satisfactory progress on attainment on the first visit had maintained that profile. Logan and Louis, who had a less than satisfactory progress profile on the first visit, were now assessed as making satisfactory progress, both having demonstrated improved academic attainment particularly in maths. Teachers and parents attributed this to factors that included SNA support in helping them to stay on task and the support teacher devising manageable learning goals that encouraged a positive approach from both to learning.

7.20.2 Engagement

All six pupils had a satisfactory attendance record. On the first visit, however, three were assessed as making satisfactory progress in attendance and engagement with classroom activities, one had made very satisfactory progress while the two who had a difficult transition to post primary had made less than satisfactory progress. By the second visit there appeared to be no significant differences in pupil engagement with school and class activities. Logan and Louis remained disaffected and disengaged despite the school's focused efforts to encourage engagement, efforts readily acknowledged by the boys' parents. On the second visit Louis had been temporarily suspended because of a series of incidents culminating in verbal abuse of peers and teachers. The remaining four pupils had maintained their engagement with school and class activities and teachers commended Naomi and Jamie for retaining their wholehearted participation in school work.

7.20.3 Happiness

All pupils, apart from Logan and Louis to a lesser extent, had made a smooth transition to post primary and all apart from Logan were assessed as making satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes. By the second visit all pupils, apart from Logan, were assessed as making satisfactory or more than satisfactory progress in happiness related outcomes. Phoebe, who found transition difficult, had maintained the positive social interaction evident on the first visit and had established friendships, though mainly with younger pupils. Despite Louis's behaviour difficulties his teachers regarded him as sociable and he had developed friendships. On the first visit Logan's tendency to 'fly off the handle' appeared to alienate his peers and this had not substantially changed by the second visit – he remained quite isolated within the class.

7.20.4 Independence

Three pupils were assessed as making more than satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes while one was making satisfactory progress and the remaining two less than satisfactory progress in this area. Five pupils were assessed as making satisfactory progress on the independence-related measure on the second visit. Phoebe, on the second as on the previous visit, was reported to be struggling to attain independence and still required substantial support with everyday activities. Her mother was particularly disappointed that she did not pay more attention to her appearance. Jamie, on the other hand, between the first and second visits had been supported by his teachers in developing an improved capacity to work independently.

7.21   Second Years

Sixteen pupils from eight post primary schools were in second year during the first research visit.

Table 33: Post Primary outcomes – Second years

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
15 (Mixed)	Henry	Assessed syndrome DS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	LS
16 (Mixed)	Max	SLD/MGLD	LS	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
16 (Mixed)	Nathan	SLD/Dyspraxia	LS	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
18 (Boys)	Jake	SLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
19 (Mixed)	Jordan	BMGLD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
19 (Mixed)	Joseph	SSLD	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
19 (Mixed)	Josh	MD	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
19 (Mixed)	Kian	Physical/dyspraxia	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
20 (Mixed)	Kieran	Physical/dyspraxia	S	S	S	S	LS	LS	S	S
21 (Mixed)	Katie	SSLD	LS	S	LS	S	S	VS	S	VS
21 (Mixed)	Aidan	ASD	S	VS	S	S	S	S	S	S
21 (Mixed)	Zoey	SLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	VS
21 (Mixed)	Ace	PD	S	S	S	S	S	VS	S	VS
22 (Mixed)	Mollie	Assessed syndrome	S	S	S	S	S	S	LS	VS
22 (Mixed)	Jennifer	SLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
23 (Mixed)	Nicole	SLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

7.21.1   Attainment

On the first visit parents and teachers assessed 11 pupils as making satisfactory progress in attainment while five had made less than satisfactory progress. On the second visit parents and teachers deemed 14 pupils had made satisfactory progress. One, Henry, had made less than satisfactory attainment and another, Aidan, had made very satisfactory progress. Nathan, who has dyspraxia and dyslexia, was reported on the first visit by his teachers to be inattentive in class and to have made limited progress. By the second visit his maths teacher reported that he was performing satisfactorily at the upper end of ordinary level and was expected to achieve well in the Junior Certificate. Aidan, who has ASD, was perceived to be making good academic progress and was taking a mixture of higher and ordinary level subject in Junior Certificate. His improved organisation skills were attributed to focused efforts by the SEN team. On the second visit he had maintained and improved his academic attainment. One of his teachers was quite surprised to be informed that Aidan had special educational needs:

> I suppose I was actually quite shocked when I was told that Aidan had special educational needs because he's a very, very good history student, and is very, very interested. And he always produces top notch work. (Teacher 3, student ASD, school 21 mainstream post primary).

7.21.2   Engagement

All pupils had satisfactory attendance records over the two research visits with the exception of Ace whose absences were due to medical issues associated with his physical disability. On the first visit parents and teachers deemed ten pupils to have had satisfactory engagement and six had less than satisfactory engagement. Across a number of schools teachers commended six pupils for their strong work ethic despite their academic difficulties. The four pupils reported to have made very limited academic progress were also deemed to have less than satisfactory engagement with class activities.

On the second visit, 15 pupils were deemed to be engaging in a satisfactory manner with class activities and one, Henry, was assessed as not engaging satisfactorily. Five of the six reported as not engaging satisfactorily with class activities in the previous year had demonstrated an improvement. Of the group of pupils whose engagement had improved, Josh, assessed with having multiple disabilities (including ADHD), was making good progress in maths and science and was expected to take both subjects at higher level in the Junior Certificate. Nathan, for example, in school 16 who has dyslexia and dyspraxia was reported to be participating very effectively in his maths class and making academic progress in English and geography though he was reluctant to participate openly in class. While Katie continued to be challenged by academic difficulties she remained enthusiastic and her mother observed that she was more confident about her future:

> To be honest with you, this time last year, she was kind of saying, "I can only do hairdressing", and she was kind of, "oh I'm not good at this and I can't do that", and so it was hairdressing. Whereas now she feels, she has a lot more open to her. She's ruled out medicine! So she's not limited in what she can do, so that's a good thing. (Parent 2, child with SSLD, school 21 mainstream post primary)

7.21.3   Happiness

On the first visit all pupils, apart from Henry and Kieran, were deemed by teachers and parents to have made satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes. For example, Kieran in school 20 was observed to be socially isolated with some incidents of bullying recorded. Henry, in school 15, appeared to have no friends and behaved inappropriately towards teachers, according to his English teacher. On the second visit all pupils apart from Kieran were reported to have made satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes. Henry, in school 15, who had been reported to have made less than satisfactory progress in the previous year, was now deemed to be making satisfactory progress. Teachers and parents attributed some of this to strong peer support in his class. Kieran, in school 20, was deemed to have made minimal progress in happiness-related outcomes and one teacher described him as timid and socially awkward while his support teacher referred to his poor social skills and immaturity.

7.21.4   Independence

Parents and teachers deemed all pupils, apart from Henry and Mollie, to have made satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes on the first visit. Mollie, who has Down syndrome, school 22, was reported to be outgoing though there were concerns that she was behaving inappropriately for her age. Mollie's independence skills also appeared to be regressing:

> Now, I noticed a big change in her compared to last year over the summer. She's relying on people an awful lot more, an awful lot more. Like say, for example, putting on her coat. She could put on her coat at the end of last year. She totally forgot about it in September. (Resource teacher, student with AS, school 22 mainstream post primary)

On the second visit, nine pupils were deemed to be progressing satisfactorily in independence-related outcomes; six were assessed as making very good progress in this area while one, Henry, was reported to be making less than satisfactory progress. Of those deemed to have improved in independence Katie, according to her mother, was beginning to develop more independence and acceptance of her need for support with her learning while Mollie, who has Down syndrome, had become more independent as a result of focused programmes prioritising the development of these skills.

7.22 Third Years

Ten pupils from six post primary schools were in third year during the first research visit.

Table 34: Post Primary outcomes – Third years

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
15 (Mixed)	Katherine	DS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	S	LS	LS
16 (Mixed)	Poppy	SLD	S	S	LS	S	S	S	S	S
17 (Girls)	Lydia	PD	S	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	LS
18 (Boys)	Jacob	BMGLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
18 (Boys)	John	MGLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
20 (Mixed)	Kyle	AS	S	S	S	S	LS	S	LS	S
21 (Mixed)	Alexa	EBD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
22 (Mixed)	Leo	AS	VS	VS	S	S	LS	S	S	S
22 (Mixed)	Leon	MGLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
22 (Mixed)	Lewis	SLD	S	S	LS	S	S	VS	S	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory

Academic attainment for all ten pupils was assessed in relation to the upcoming national Junior Certificate examination. In some cases, pupils had completed their trial examinations popularly known as 'mocks' and these were used as a guide to assessing individual progress. Three pupils who are in DEIS schools – Katherine in school 15; Leon and Lewis in school 22 – participated in the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP).

On the first visit, teachers and parents assessed eight pupils as making satisfactory progress in academic attainment, Leo who has Asperger's syndrome was making very satisfactory progress while Katherine was deemed to be making less than satisfactory progress. His teachers regarded Leo as very knowledgeable and despite his difficulties in completing tasks on time he was making progress as observed by his resource teacher:

> ... he is excellent in communication skills and reasoning and he is always on time he follows everything he is asked to do he is very good at maths, current affairs he knows everything that is going on, politics and he is big on technology as well, huge interest in that. (Resource teacher 2, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 22 mainstream post primary).

Katherine, who has Down syndrome, participated in JCSP though her teachers and parents reported that she struggled with the academic workload required and one teacher questioned whether this was appropriate for her.

On the second visit a year later all ten pupils had progressed into senior cycle education. Their Junior Certificate results are set out in Table 35 below:

Table 35: Results achieved by the ten pupils in the Junior Certificate

School	Pupil	SEN	SC	JC pass	Higher	Ordinary	Foundation	Common
15 (Mixed)	Katherine	DS	LCA	7/7	0	4	2	1
16 (Mixed)	Poppy	SLD	LC	10/10	5	4	0	1
17 (Girls)	Lydia	PD	TY	10/10	2	7	0	1
18 (Boys)	Jacob	BMGLD	LC	8/9	5	2	0	1
18 (Boys)	John	MGLD	LCA	3/7	0	2	0	1
20 (Mixed)	Kyle	AS	TY	10/10	1	8	0	1
21 (Mixed)	Alexa	EBD	TY	8/8	0	7	0	1
22 (Mixed)	Leo	AS	LC	8/9	5	2	0	1
22 (Mixed)	Leon	MGLD	LCA	8/8	0	6	1	1
22 (Mixed)	Lewis	SLD	LCA	8/8	0	7	0	1

Key: LCA=Leaving Certificate Applied; LC=Leaving Certificate; TY=Transition Year.

All bar one pupil passed at least seven subjects in the exam. Three had managed to pass most of their subjects at higher level while six passed most of their subjects at ordinary level. Very few pupils (n=2) had taken subjects at foundation level. One pupil (John, passed only three subjects and teachers regarded his results as disappointing. It was believed he had been unwise to take two subjects at higher level which he subsequently failed. Overall apart from John two pupils had failed a subject at higher level.

Four pupils (Katherine, John, Leon and Lewis) were taking the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, three (Poppy, Jacob and Leo) were enrolled in the traditional Leaving Certificate programme and three others (Lydia, Kyle and Alexa) had entered transition year on completion of junior cycle. On the second visit, teachers and parents deemed eight pupils had made satisfactory progress in attainment. Three of the four pupils (John, Leon and Lewis) who had progressed to the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme were reported by parents and teachers to be making satisfactory progress while one, Katherine, was deemed to be struggling academically. Her support teacher believed Katherine was finding the LCA programme tougher than the Junior Certificate though specific SNA support was provided. The LCA co-ordinator observed that the programme was appropriate to John's and Leon's academic needs. Two of the three pupils who had progressed to the traditional Leaving Certificate were deemed to be making satisfactory progress while one, Leo, was reported to be making very good progress. All three pupils in transition year were assessed as making satisfactory progress.

7.22.1 Engagement

On the first visit all ten pupils were reported to have a satisfactory attendance record at school while teachers and parents deemed seven to have engaged satisfactorily with class activities. Three pupils (Katherine, Poppy and Lewis) were assessed as not engaging in a satisfactory manner. Lydia, for example, whose engagement would exemplify the satisfactory rating, had a physical disability and could struggle to keep up with the class work but her teacher reported her to be a very hard worker:

> … her strength really is that she is such a great worker, I mean she would like hours and hours of work. She gives everything her absolute utmost, she will not give in, if she's work to do she will go to the very last. (Resource teacher 4, student with PD, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Lack of engagement was reported for three pupils (Katherine, Poppy and Lewis). Poppy and Lewis have dyslexia. Poppy was reported to lack confidence and resist support while his teachers saw Lewis as a pupil who did the bare minimum to survive and lacked interest in his work.

On the second research visit all ten pupils had a satisfactory attendance record and all apart from Katherine were deemed by parents and teachers to be engaging satisfactorily with class activities. Three of the four pupils who had moved to the LCA programme were deemed to be engaging satisfactorily with class activities. While Katherine was in a small group (n=6) which apparently suited her, her teachers reported that she was reluctant to contribute to class activities. Leon's LCA coordinator reported that while Leon struggled with some academic subjects he could engage effectively with the maths curriculum as it was practical and easily accessible. Lewis, in the same class, was reported to have made a substantial improvement in school engagement. All three pupils (Poppy, Jacob and Leo) were reported to be engaging satisfactorily with class activities during the first year of the traditional Leaving Certificate programme. While Poppy's teachers and her parents recognised she was a hard worker – her English teacher commented on her passivity in class and her reluctance to provide feedback. All three pupils in transition year had made satisfactory progress in engaging in class activities.

7.22.2   Happiness

Parents and teachers deemed six pupils to have made satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes while four had made less than satisfactory progress in this area. Of the pupils deemed to have made less than satisfactory social progress there were reports of increasing isolation in Lydia's case. Lydia had a physical disability and attended an all girls' school and her support teacher attributed this isolation at least partially to the presence of full-time SNA support. Kyle, who had Asperger's syndrome, was reported by his class teacher to struggle socially and to be vulnerable to teasing by his peers which he found difficult to deal with.

On the second visit parents and teachers assessed all four pupils now in LCA as making satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes. Katherine in school 15 who was struggling academically was reported by her teachers and her mother to have retained friends and was happy in school. John in school 18 had struggled academically up to Junior Certificate but his mother reported that he was much happier in LCA. Lewis was reported to have become more mature and was supporting children in organised games outside school. Lewis himself confirmed his enjoyment of the opportunities available in LCA:

> It's not all work at times, they give you a bit of creativity at times, so it's not all pressure, allowing you a bit of time for yourself. (Student 4, student with SLD, school 22 mainstream post primary).

All three pupils in the traditional Leaving Certificate programme were deemed to be making satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes. Leo and Kyle, both with Asperger's syndrome, were reported by their teachers to have made progress in acquiring social skills and ability to interact with a larger class group.

7.22.3   Independence

On the first visit seven pupils were deemed to have made satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes while three (Katherine, Lydia, Kyle) had made less than satisfactory progress. Kyle, who has Asperger's syndrome, was perceived by his teachers and his SNA to be overly reliant on his SNA. Katherine, with Down syndrome, had not developed independence skills as illustrated by her SNA:

> She doesn't like coming into class on her own … she may not go into the class. You know, she doesn't like coming in on her own. You know, she loves to have somebody with her. (SNA 4, student with DS, school 15 mainstream post primary)

Leo, who had Asperger's syndrome, in contrast to the previous pupil discussed above, was keen to assert his independence from the beginning of post primary and was adamant that he did not need SNA support.

On the second visit all LCA pupils in the study, apart from Katherine, were deemed by teachers and parents to be making satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes. While Katherine had access to SNA support she needed continuous reassurance of this support. All three pupils on the traditional Leaving Certificate programme were deemed to be making satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes. For example, his teachers reported Jacob was completing tasks independently and keeping up with the class pace. His mother observed that he was quite independent and about to apply for his provisional driving licence. Leo's relationship with his SNA was problematic at first, but he was now dependent on scribing assistance. Lydia like Kyle on the first visit had been perceived to be overly dependent on her SNA; however, unlike Kyle, Lydia appeared not to have made much progress in achieving greater independence.

7.23   Senior Cycle

On the first research visit 15 pupils were in the senior cycle phase of their post primary education. Thirteen were in the first year of the two-year Leaving Certificate programme, two pupils were in transition year and the remaining pupil, Jay, was in the first year of the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Table 36: Post Primary outcomes – Senior cycle

School	Pupil	SEN	Attainment		Engagement		Happiness		Independence	
			V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2	V1	V2
15 (Mixed)	Kate	Dyspraxia	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
16 (Mixed)	Nicholas	AS	S	S	S	S	LS	LS	S	S
17 (Girls)	Lauren	MD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
17 (Girls)	Libby	DS	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
17 (Girls)	Louise	AS	S	S	LS	LS	S	S	LS	LS
17 (Girls)	Madeline	MGLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
18 (Boys)	Jay	SSLD	S	S	S	S	VS	VS	S	S
20 (Mixed)	Megan	SLD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
20 (Mixed)	Mia	EBD	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
20 (Mixed)	Millie	AS	S	S	S	S	S	S	LS	LS
21 (Mixed)	Lucy	VI	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
24 (Boys)	Matthew	Dyspraxia	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
24 (Boys)	Lucas	Dyspraxia	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
24 (Boys)	Mason	Dyspraxia/ MGLD	LS	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
16 (Girls)	Ruby	HI	LS	LS	LS	S	S	S	S	S

Key: V1=Visit 1; V2=Visit 2; S=Satisfactory; VS=Very satisfactory; LS=Less than satisfactory.

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Twelve pupils were in the first year of their Leaving Cert programme on the first research visit. Of these, eight were deemed by teachers and parents to be making satisfactory progress and four were assessed as making unsatisfactory progress in academic attainment. Kate (school 15) was fairly typical of the nine pupils who had made satisfactory progress according to their teachers. Kate, who has dyspraxia, had achieved well in her Junior Certificate was reported to be making academic progress in her Leaving Certificate subjects.

Of the four pupils (Ruby in school 16; Matthew, Lucas and Mason in school 24) who were deemed to have made less than satisfactory progress by teachers and parents on the first visit, Matthew, Lucas and Mason had improved to a satisfactory rating for academic attainment by the second year of the Leaving Cert programme. Matthew, for example, was taking honours English and his teacher reported that he had made academic progress:

> They're banded, but they're an honours English class, and I would have a group of boys at the top end that would be very very good. And Matthew would have found that very tough initially, incredibly tough initially. But funny enough this year he seems to be coping pretty well. (Teacher 5, student with dyspraxia, school 24 mainstream post primary)

On the first visit it was noted that Ruby, who has a hearing impairment, was challenged by difficulties with generalising concepts and long-term memory. Ruby continued to struggle academically and had ongoing difficulties with spelling and vocabulary.

On the first visit to the schools two pupils (Lauren and Libby) in school 17 were in transition year and teachers and parents assessed both as making less than satisfactory progress in academic attainment. By the second visit they were reported to have improved their academic attainment from less than satisfactory in transition year to satisfactory in first year of the Leaving Cert. Lauren, who has multiple disabilities including dyspraxia, had found it difficult to keep up with the pace of learning in her class though there had been a definite improvement by the second visit. Similarly Libby, who has Down syndrome, was reported by her resource teacher to be experiencing great difficulties in learning at the same rate as her peers but was now participating in the ASDAN programme, a UK accredited course focusing on developing literacy, numeracy and life skills. She continued to pursue foundation level maths and English with French and home economics at ordinary level. Her support teacher observed the appropriateness of the ASDAN programme in its practicality and ability to suit Libby's needs. Jay was deemed to be making satisfactory academic progress in the first year of the Leaving Cert Applied.

7.23.1 Engagement

On the first visit, all 16 pupils were reported to have a satisfactory record in school attendance. Eleven were active participants in class activities and fully engaged with academic work despite the difficulties many experienced in learning. Louise, who has Asperger's syndrome, was reported to have minimal involvement in class activities and a tendency to focus on self defined interests. On the second visit, all 16 pupils in senior cycle were reported to have a satisfactory record of school attendance. Ten pupils in second year Leaving Cert had maintained their satisfactory rating in engagement in class activities while one pupil, Ruby, despite ongoing academic difficulties was assessed as making satisfactory progress compared to an unsatisfactory rating the previous year. Ruby's subject teacher attributed her progress to her incessant hard work. Louise was still deemed to be making less than satisfactory progress in participation in class activities and was reported to have minimal involvement and a tendency to focus on self defined interests. Her mother reported a pattern of opting out, being very disorganised, missing class and also being quite confrontational. Louise was aware of her difficulties in following instructions as she reported:

> I'm not really, I'm not up to date with what the various subjects are doing, but like I just find it really difficult, because my main problem is when they hand us the questions or like projects, I don't actually know exactly what angle I'm meant to take on them, because oh yes, you do a project on this, nine times out of ten when I do a project, I get told "that wasn't what you were meant to do, why did you do this". (Student 3, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 17 mainstream post primary)

Two pupils Lauren and Libby in the first year Leaving Cert in school 17 had both maintained an active engagement with class activities as reported during their transition year. On the second visit her teachers reported that Lauren was working well in class though producing homework continued to be an issue. Lauren was aware of how her organisational difficulties affected her engagement with all class activities. Jay, in his second year of the LCA programme, continued to engage at a satisfactory level.

7.23.2   Happiness

Fourteen of the 16 pupils in the senior cycle were deemed by parents and teachers to be making satisfactory progress in happiness-related outcomes on the first research visit. On the second visit 11 pupils in second year Leaving Certificate had retained a satisfactory rating in these outcomes but Nicholas (school 16), who has Asperger's syndrome, was assessed on the first visit as making less than satisfactory progress and continued to have considerable difficulties in this area. His English teacher affirmed Nicholas's ongoing difficulties and the potential for peer group apathy. Nicholas was quite self-aware and conscious of his profile within the class grouping:

> … but as my mother says, I'm not on many people's wavelengths. I have already planned; I'm not going to go out when I get to college. But that's the whole reason why you go to college! Socially there's a huge range of kids and I try my best to get into as many nooks and crannies as possible and it has been difficult to an extent. But overall most people kind of accept there's this one image of Nicholas and they're not going to change. I mean, how are you supposed to develop in that sort of mentality? (Student 5, student with Asperger's syndrome, school 16 mainstream post primary)

Two pupils (Lauren and Libby), in school 17 who were in transition year on the first visit, had both retained a satisfactory level in happiness-related outcomes on the second visit. Lauren had maintained her friendships and was socially adept. Libby had developed more social skills in relating to her peers and her teachers though it was reported that her peers did not regard her as an equal. Jay, who was now in second year of LCA in school 18, was reported to have an engaging personality and was very competent socially and willing to help out.

7.23.3   Independence

Fourteen pupils were deemed to be achieving a satisfactory level of independence on the first visit and all had retained this rating on the second visit. One pupil, Louise, was deemed to have remained at a less than satisfactory level in independence-related outcomes. Louise, according to her mother, refused to accept any support for study planning and her teachers said she required extensive one-to-one support to make progress. They commented that this level of support was not always possible. Millie who has Asperger's syndrome had made little progress in achieving greater independence over the two visits. Some of this was attributed to the withdrawal of SNA support which she and her mother believed had a detrimental effect on her ability to work independently. The SNA had provided the following class support:

> It would have been from, mainly in the classroom, she couldn't hear properly because she wears the hearing aid as well, so the SNA would repeat to her, like what the teacher said, or basically, you know, like if she couldn't keep up with the handwriting or stuff, if she'd take stuff off the board. (Parent 5, child with Asperger's syndrome, school 20 mainstream post primary)

On the first visit seven pupils had some level of SNA support. This was considered valuable though there were no indications that pupils were becoming overly dependent on the SNA. Two, Lauren and Libby in school 17, were deemed by teachers and parents to be making satisfactory progress in independence-related outcomes though at different levels. Both pupils required high levels of support during transition year. On the second visit Lauren demonstrated her independence through being consulted about her needs by her support teacher. Libby, who has Down syndrome, continued to require substantial support but was reported to be more confident. She had been encouraged to carry out assigned tasks independently. Jay, in the second year of the LCA in school 18, was reported to be capable of carrying out assignments independently in class. He said that he appreciated how the teachers treated the pupils more as equals and listened to their concerns in LCA.

7.24 Summary of the Outcomes for Pupils in Post Primary Schools across the Four Domains

Table 37: Progression of post primary school pupils during two school visits

Year Group	Visit	Attainment			Engagement			Happiness			Independence		
		LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS	LS	S	VS
First Years	First Visit	2	4	0	2	3	1	1	4	1	2	1	3
	Second Visit	0	6	0	2	3	1	1	4	1	1	2	3
Second Years	First Visit	5	11	0	6	10	0	2	14	0	2	14	0
	Second Visit	1	14	1	1	15	0	1	13	2	1	11	4
Third Years	First Visit	1	8	1	3	7	0	4	6	0	3	7	0
	Second Visit	1	8	1	1	9	0	0	9	1	2	8	0
Senior Cycle	First Visit	6	10	0	2	14	0	1	14	1	2	14	0
	Second Visit	1	15	0	1	15	0	1	14	1	2	14	0
Total	First Visit	14	33	1	13	34	1	8	38	2	9	36	3
	Second Visit	3	43	2	5	42	1	3	40	5	6	35	7

The outcomes for post primary school pupils with special educational needs in the case study schools are summarised in Table 38 below.

Table 38: Outcomes for post primary school pupils with SEN in case study schools

	Progress from less than satisfactory to satisfactory re outcomes from Visit 1 to Visit 2	Satisfactory or very satisfactory achievement re outcomes by Visit 2	Less than satisfactory progress re outcomes at Visit 2
Attainment	11/48	45/48	3/48
Engagement	8/48	43/48	5/48
Happiness	5/48	45/48	3/48
Independence	3/48	41/48	6/48

The data indicate that most post primary pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in the four areas of attainment, engagement, happiness and independence. It is important to recognise that some pupils who experienced the greatest challenges with learning because of their special educational needs at primary level transferred to special schools and were not admitted to post primary mainstream schools. Had they been included in post primary schools their performance may have affected the data reported here.

Over the two visits there is evidence that:

- Most pupils with special educational needs made progress in all aspects of their learning in post primary; in general they enjoyed schooling and were well engaged with opportunities provided.

- The attendance records of pupils with special educational needs, apart from a few with medical difficulties, were good and they had excellent opportunities to engage with the full range of school activities.

- Pupils with ASD and some with EBD had particular difficulties in making progress because of poor communication skills and issues of sociability. In some cases pupils achieved satisfactory attainment despite these difficulties. For some a lack of socialisation skills did not affect their happiness in schools with some preferring their own company or content to remain on the periphery of groups.

- Where provided, support from SNAs was helpful in enabling pupils to remain focused on their work. Some were a little ambivalent, however, about this kind of support. Some schools had enabled SNA support to be delivered in a flexible manner which did not appear obtrusive to the individuals receiving help. Many pupils seemed keen to demonstrate their independence as learners and at times were reluctant to be seen receiving individual support.

- In the third years sample most pupils (nine out of ten) had passed their Junior Certificate mainly at ordinary or foundation level, where appropriate. Pupils, parents and teachers appeared keen to ensure that opportunities were provided for this level of accreditation. Teachers saw attainment in the Junior Certificate as an indicator of likely future achievement.

- Most pupils in second year Leaving Certificate were studying subjects at ordinary level and teachers expected them to pass the exam.

- For one pupil, the ASDAN programme (UK) was adopted at the appropriate level. Alternative forms of accreditation such as this are the exception rather than the norm, however. This meant some pupils could not demonstrate their skills, knowledge and abilities or gain formal recognition of these.

7.25   Overall Summary

All pupils had made the transition from primary school to a post primary placement. In general there was evidence that post primary schools and their primary counterparts liaised closely in organising the transition of pupils with special educational needs.

First year head and SENCO in post primary schools had a critical role in facilitating support for pupils with special educational needs and ensuring that teachers were informed about their learning needs.

Generally post primary support personnel knew the importance of responding appropriately to the social needs of pupils with special educational needs though in one school this was less evident.

Transition to a special school for one pupil had proved successful, academically and socially.

Most pupils achieved the transition to post school placement though it was not always evident this placement was appropriate.

8   Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings related to the seven research questions presented to the Project IRIS research team by the NCSE. The findings presented in Chapters 4 to 7 discuss SEN provision regarding the four key themes – policy, provision, experience and outcomes – used throughout the research to interpret those procedures and practices seen in case study schools and in the context of the national survey. These provided an appropriate framework within which to consider the research questions in a holistic manner and to provide those insights discussed in this report. This chapter is followed by a series of conclusions and recommendations for further development based on the findings regarding the seven research questions and the four key themes which inform this report.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings within the context of the relevant literature related to each research question. In the findings chapter a disaggregation of SEN data gathered through fieldwork in Ireland was provided through the use of the four overarching categories of policy, provision, experience and outcomes. This has enabled the researchers to use the data to address the key research questions. Each of these is addressed below and key findings are presented at the beginning followed by a discussion of their significance in relation to relevant literature. On the basis of the findings and discussion, conclusions have been drawn and recommendations for further actions made which are presented in Chapter 9.

Research Question 1

What are the educational experiences of pupils/students and their parents with a variety of special educational need in the classroom in different cycles of education and school type?

Parental perspectives of pupil experiences

The data from Project IRIS indicate that most parents in primary, special and post primary schools are satisfied with the SEN provision for their children. Despite this overall satisfaction, however, there is strong evidence that many parents have significant reservations about assessment procedures and access to therapeutic services where required. Most were positive about the quality of home-school communication though it was evident that at post primary level interactions had become more formalised compared to the informal and more spontaneous nature of contact at primary. The Project IRIS findings reinforce the results of the national study of parental perspectives and experiences of SEN provision in Ireland conducted by Armstrong *et al* (2010) In which a majority (80 per cent) of parents reported that their child's education was well matched to their needs and their progress was good. Parents of post primary age children were reported to be less satisfied than their primary age counterparts. This was not evident in Project IRIS and the concerns parents expressed at primary and post primary levels appeared to reflect the wider anxieties shared with all parents at critical stages in their children's educational careers (e.g. transition to post primary schooling, achievement in examinations within post primary). It has been reported in the literature that parental satisfaction tends to vary depending on the child's special educational need (Whitaker, 2007) but Project IRIS data indicate parental satisfaction with SEN provision did not appear to vary in this way.

The significant level of parental frustration with the current assessment system reported in the national study conducted by Armstrong *et al* (2010) was also apparent among Project IRIS participants. Several features of the current assessment system were highlighted as unsatisfactory including waiting lists, time taken for educational psychology assessments, use of private assessments and the quota based referral system. Parents in the Project IRIS study who had to pay for private assessments believed they had little choice and many interviews with school principals underlined the inequity of their situation. Concerns about the equity of

the current assessment procedures have been expressed in NCSE policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills (2013) and the subsequent Working Group Report (NCSE 2014) has set out detailed proposals to establish a resource allocation model that will provide equitable access to educational supports for all children with special educational needs. This report, currently the subject of further consultation with stakeholders, if implemented in full, will address the inequity of parents having to pay for private assessments. It has the potential to establish a consistent resource allocation model that delivers resources equitably.

Positive home-school relationships are considered essential in developing effective SEN provision (Armstrong *et al*, 2010, O'Connor, 2003) and the findings from Project IRIS indicate that parents valued a supportive school ethos, good understanding of their child's needs and regular communication with school personnel. Some parents particularly appreciated strong school advocacy in accessing therapeutic services. Shortages in availability of speech and language and other therapists were reported to be a common feature in mainstream schools. It was apparent that of those parents within the study who decided to send their children to special schools at post primary age, some were influenced by the perception that these had greater availability of therapeutic services. Difficulties accessing such services have been acknowledged (HSE, 2009) and a network of school age interdisciplinary teams is currently being established. There is no indication that additional resources to those currently available will be assigned to this initiative, however.

Within a national survey (Armstrong *et al*, 2010) it was evident that 10-20 per cent of parents consistently reported concerns about the educational provision for their child. In the main, they attributed this to their belief that teachers did not have the requisite knowledge and skills to address their child's needs. A few parents of pupils with complex needs, such as ASD who were attending mainstream schools, within Project IRIS indicated concerns that teacher knowledge of the most appropriate ways of addressing educational needs was limited. This finding has implications for CPD programmes for all teachers as well as established school support services.

Transition from primary to post primary schooling is of particular concern to parents of children with special educational needs (Barnes-Holmes *et al*, 2013). In the Project IRIS study most parents were satisfied with the quality of transition arrangements between primary and post primary phases. Many of their initial fears about this period of their children's lives, including those related to the potential for bullying, did not materialise. In the case study sample, parents whose children had transferred from mainstream primary to special schools were also satisfied that the arrangements made and support provided had enabled a smooth transition. Effective communication between schools and with parents was critical in ensuring successful transition, a finding consistent with that reported by Barnes-Holmes *et al* (2013). Peer support systems established in four of the case study post primary schools were perceived to be helpful in facilitating transition for children with special educational needs. While there are examples of developing practice in relation to facilitating parental participation during transition – pre-transition meetings with support personnel in the post primary school for example – this was not consistent across the case study schools.

A small number of pupils in the Project IRIS study were involved in transition to post school provision. It was apparent that those completing State accredited programmes at senior cycle did progress to post school education and training. A few pupils with intellectual disabilities, however, did not make a smooth transfer and parents were heavily involved in negotiating with service providers to access provision. Post school transition is an area of particular concern for these parents. They indicated that this process required greater structure and support for parents, a finding also reported in the Irish studies conducted by O'Brien *et al* (2011) and McGuckin *et al* (2013). The recent booklet outlining post school education and training options and supports for pupils and adults with special educational needs (NCSE, 2014) should prove useful for parents, pupils with special educational needs and guidance counsellors in planning post-school transitions.

Pupil perspectives on their experiences

Most pupils interviewed during visits expressed satisfaction with their experiences of school. Those at primary and post primary level could identify and discuss how provision for them supported their academic learning and social outcomes. Most pupils with special educational needs had developed friendships, though a few with ASD and/or behaviour difficulties appeared somewhat isolated, particularly at post primary level.

Most pupils in primary schools expressed appreciation for SNA support, that this enabled them to participate effectively in lessons. In the post primary years, however, some indicated a preference not to have this support as it singled them out as different from their peers.

Pupil interviewees who had transferred to special schools after primary indicated that they were pleased with the move and more confident in their learning.

Research Question 2

How do school policies and practices impact on the experiences of pupils/students with special educational needs?

Most case study schools had policies on inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. The national survey suggested that this was replicated in the country as a whole. Often they did not reflect recent developments in policy and legislation, however, and had often not been updated for many years. A failure to fully implement the EPSEN Act 2004 has had some impact here with schools awaiting further developments before moving forward to consolidate existing policies. Some implications of this situation on practice are reported later in this chapter.

While case study schools in this study acknowledged the importance of inclusion policy, the practical application of these within a school context remained something of a challenge. The school policies seen as part of the Project IRIS data collection process demonstrated a commitment to inclusion. It was evident that schools recognised the importance of moving towards the creation of more inclusive learning environments. A commitment to ensuring appropriate provision for pupils with special educational needs was stated within those school enrolment policies scrutinised. In some instances these reflected the school's Christian philosophy with a recognition of responsibility to create an inclusive learning environment that values the needs of each individual pupil. However, enrolment policies seen often contained clauses that indicated reasons why pupils might not be admitted to schools and contradicted statements made in support of inclusion. These statements usually referred to the necessity to ensure that appropriate resourcing was in place and that staff were adequately supported through training.

The international literature emphasises that policies to support the development of inclusive schooling should recognise the individuality of learners and be flexible enough to reflect national and regional needs (EADSNE, 2003). At school level the development of policies which build on collaboration between school staff, parents and other professional agencies has been seen to benefit cohesion across delivery of services and maintenance of provision (Ainscow *et al*, 2004). This has been recognised in Ireland with guidance provided to schools by the NCSE through the development of the Inclusive Education Framework (NCSE, 2011).

In some case study schools, special needs policies focused on operational matters surrounding provision for pupils. Specialist teacher roles are defined alongside procedures for assessment and deployment of support including small group provision. Similarly, approaches for SNA management were seen in most schools, though the findings from Project IRIS identified a tension between policy and practice in this area and reinforced the statement made in the Value for Money Review of Expenditure on the Special Needs Assistant Scheme (DES, 2011) that a wider interpretation has led to an expansion of the SNA role beyond that originally envisaged.

Research Question 3

How is the curriculum applied and delivered to pupils/students with special educational needs?

Visits to the case study schools indicated that many class/subject teachers lacked the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide effective curricular access for pupils with special educational needs in their classes. While they were committed to providing for pupils with diverse needs many felt they lacked the specific knowledge required to plan and deliver a well differentiated curriculum suitable for all pupils. The national survey conducted for Project IRIS indicated that while 58 per cent of respondents from primary schools felt confident in differentiating the curriculum this dropped to 55 per cent in special schools and 38 per cent in post primary schools. This situation is similar to what is reported elsewhere (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Florian & Becirevic, 2011) and is significant in developing teacher confidence and influencing teaching effectiveness in inclusive classrooms.

Differentiation by task and outcome was evident across the phases of education in the case study schools but little indication of wider forms of differentiation to enable greater access to pupils with special educational needs. This was apparent in whole class planning and in the IEPs prepared for some pupils. Teachers required support and training to gain confidence in differentiating learning and teaching. Where training had been provided it had often been accessed by support teachers and was reported by teachers interviewed to have been of good quality. Class teachers in the case study schools, however, had not often accessed opportunities for training and expertise appeared to reside only with specialist teachers.

Pupils with special educational needs in primary were seen to be withdrawn from the classroom for small group teaching, usually alongside pupils of similar needs and abilities. This practice continued at post primary, though individual tuition was also seen to be common when pupils were withdrawn from class. The national survey conducted through Project IRIS indicated that in primary 81 per cent were taught in withdrawn situations with this increasing to 90 per cent in post primary. Support for pupils in the primary case study schools was often provided by SNAs working under the direction of teachers. This often took place in withdrawal groups or in some instances in individually taught sessions. In many instances pupils with special educational needs were exempted from Irish lessons and this time was used to focus on SEN support. Few schools had outlined the implications of an exemption from Irish to parents and pupils around eligibility to undertake particular career paths, for example primary school teaching.

There was a distinctly different emphasis of curriculum in the case study special and mainstream schools, with the former placing greater emphasis on developing the social aspects of learning and a clear focus on education for independence. Here there was also greater use of information communications technology and personalised learning approaches to support the specific learning needs of individuals. The pupils attending special schools generally had complex needs which would account for this factor. The lack of collaboration between local mainstream and special schools visited for this project means this difference might continue to dominate the educational landscape. It has been suggested that there are likely to be pupils in mainstream and special schools who would benefit from the approaches commonly found in both settings and that greater collaboration might be advantageous in the future (Idol, 2006; Gibb, Tunbridge, Chua & Frederickson, 2007).

Implementation of the JCSP at junior cycle and the Learning Certificate Applied (LCA) in senior cycle of post primary education was seen to have significant benefits for pupils with special educational needs, in providing access and content well matched to the individual needs. Some special schools and a few mainstream schools had explored alternative forms of accreditation (such as ASDAN) to address the needs of those struggling to be accommodated within existing Leaving Cert programmes. There was evidence that pupils with special educational needs in all case study schools had opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities.

In the Irish literature on provision for pupils with special educational needs, discussions which focus on classroom practice have considered issues of classroom support (Logan 2006; O'Neill & Rose 2008; Keating & O'Connor 2012; Farrell & O'Neill 2012), differentiation (Coffey, 2004; Day, 2005) or the implementation of specialist programmes for pupils with diagnosed needs (Ware *et al* 2005; Scott 2009; Neville, 2012). Each issue was being implemented to some degree within the case study schools visited, but not with great consistency and sometimes within only single classes within schools. Where teachers were seen to use particular resources or approaches, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), this tended to be based on personal expertise gained through professional development and was not always reflected across the school.

The Irish literature on curriculum modification is somewhat limited and in many instances related to specific populations. For example, Ring and Prunty (2012) report on curriculum adaptations to meet the needs of pupils on the autism spectrum, while Walsh (2013) outlines a specific procedure of language intervention for a pupil with Down syndrome. However, these studies are invariably small in scale and provide no more than a snapshot of the issues faced by teachers in classroom management.

It is evident from the data collected for Project IRIS that there is good practice in terms of curriculum development, delivery and modification in Irish schools. However, the dissemination and evaluation of the efficacy of this practice has been limited and has therefore had less impact than could possibly be achieved.

Research Question 4

How does the school use special education resources and other support services in providing an inclusive education?

A high proportion of primary (87 per cent), post primary (87 per cent) and special schools (60 per cent) surveyed through Project IRIS indicated that resources allocated by the NCSE and DES were making a positive impact on teachers' ability to work with pupils with special educational needs. School personnel were also overwhelmingly positive on the benefits of consistent sustainable funding in developing special educational provision. Evidence showed that the general allocation model (GAM) and low incidence resourcing had enabled primary schools to establish dedicated SEN teams, though concerns were expressed about the equity of including pupils with MGLD within the GAM resourcing.

Resource teachers in primary and post primary schools had developed systems for managing SEN provision and established working relationships with classroom staff and parents. In primary case study schools they provided advice to staff and coordinated the development and delivery of specialist curriculum materials. Where IEPs were in place they oversaw the management of these and involved colleagues in setting learning targets for pupils with special educational needs. Dedicated SEN teams were less in evidence in case study post primary schools, many of which had allocated available resource hours across a number of teachers with subsequent difficulties in providing coherent co-ordinated provision. It was anticipated that the new resourcing model would enable the establishment of SEN teams.

Most schools had a range of commercial resources to support pupils with special educational needs, particularly in reading and maths. The availability of computer software aimed specifically at pupils with special educational needs was seen in some schools. In special schools good use was often made of augmentative systems of communication, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS. Schools valued additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs, for example assistive technology, where available though access to these additional resources was not always guaranteed.

Pastoral care teams in case study post primary schools were well developed with a high level of awareness of pupil needs. Guidance counsellors were particularly valued in these schools for their insights into pupils with special educational needs.

Examples were seen of a range of effective behaviour management approaches in some schools, including use of rewards and sanctions and differentiated teaching that took account of pupil interests. These were not seen in all schools, however, and in some instances where systems had been put into place these were inconsistently applied. Where advice and support had been provided by NEPS, NBSS or by SESS this was reported in interviews to have had a positive impact on behaviour management. SNA support was highly valued by teachers, parents, pupils and school managers. SNAs were seen to provide pedagogical support to pupils in class and in social situations. Evidence from interviews in post primary schools showed that as pupils got older they were more self-conscious of SNA support. Specialist teachers and SNAs reported that they benefited from accredited courses provided through higher education establishments and believed these courses had a positive impact on curriculum development and delivery.

A national study of parental perspectives and experiences of SEN provision in Ireland, conducted by Armstrong *et al*, (2010) reported that 10-20 per cent of participants experienced serious difficulties with such provision due to dissatisfaction with how their child was taught and lack of opportunities for parental involvement in their child's education. A larger proportion of participants (45 per cent) had difficulties accessing appropriate support for their child, especially in obtaining timely diagnosis and assessment of need. The findings of Project IRIS certainly concur with this latter point.

Withdrawal from class for individual or small group support was the most commonly seen form of intervention by specialist teachers in primary and post primary schools. There was some evidence, however, of increased attention to team teaching that utilised specialist teachers alongside their classroom colleagues. Evidence from Project IRIS suggests the current emphasis of resource teachers on providing support for individual pupils may be having the opposite effect to that anticipated when the role was established. In some instances this has led to an over dependency on these individuals by other class teachers. Use of classroom withdrawal and a focus on within-child factors may inhibit inclusion through the perpetuation of a deficit model. The literature surrounding classroom support in Ireland (Rose & O'Neill 2009; Farrell & O'Neill 2012) does indicate features unique to the country and distinctly different from practices elsewhere. This is especially in evidence when considering the role of SNAs.

Research Question 5

How are individual education plans developed and applied?

The national survey provides evidence that while mainstream schools were aware of IEPs' value there was little consistency in their use and deployment. This finding was further endorsed during primary and post primary visits. Special schools were more likely to follow a consistent approach to developing and implementing IEPs for their pupils than was the case in mainstream schools. It was evident that in special schools development of IEPs had been carefully considered over a number of years.

In the case study schools IEPs were generally overseen by resource teachers in consultation with teaching staff. However, there was less evidence of consistent involvement of parents and pupils in the process and in many instances the IEP process was not regularly reviewed.

Use of IEPs has become a feature of procedures to support the education of pupils with special educational needs in many jurisdictions (Lytle & Bordin, 2001). The perceived advantages of this approach include setting targets that can be regularly reviewed, opportunities for parental and pupil involvement and input into educational planning and providing a source of regular information on progress and academic and social achievement (Rose *et al*, 2012). Legislation has been enacted in Ireland to support development and implementation of IEPs. The section on such implementation in the EPSEN Act 2004 has not been enacted due to economic constraints. Interviews conducted for this research suggested that the consequent lack of clarity

on the status of IEPs was a source of confusion for schools and that limited data were available to schools on their effectiveness. SESS training has resulted in developing IEP formats in some schools that are detailed and helpful; but most case study schools in Project IRIS had not accessed training and there were few examples of consistent approaches to IEP development and implementation. The survey data collated for the project suggests most schools across phases have some IEPs in place, though these vary in format and content and in how they are deployed. Where studies into IEP development in Ireland have been conducted these have been small scale (Nugent, 2002; Ring & Travers, 2005) with little attention given to the roles of parents or pupils in their development and implementation.

Bergin and Logan (2012) in a mixed methods study of IEP development and management in Ireland suggested parents played a significant role in supporting implementation of their children's IEP. Their practical involvement in either setting targets or reviewing these through formal processes was limited, however.

Project IRIS findings reinforce the views expressed by previous researchers on inconsistent application of assessment practices to inform planning for individual pupils and the inconsistency of evaluation and review of IEPs. It is evident from data collected for Project IRIS in mainstream case study schools that the involvement of parents and pupils varied in developing and evaluating IEPs. Special schools were more likely to involve parents, though there was also limited evidence of pupil participation in IEP management within this type of provision.

Research Question 6

How does the school interact with other stakeholders and the community in the delivery of education e.g. health professionals?

A significant number of pupils with special educational needs require access to therapeutic services for assessment and intervention. Where these are available the establishment of collaborative partnerships between schools, health service professionals and parents have been seen to have a positive impact on children's development and welfare (Lacey & Ouvry, 2012). Data collected through Project IRIS, including the national survey, indicate that mainstream schools perceive access to therapeutic services as a major problem. Securing resources and, in some instances, the assurance of an appropriate school placement depends on provision of assessment information. Difficulties accessing assessments emerged as a major difficulty for parents and schools who often had to undertake an advocacy role to secure appropriate assessments for the specific needs of the pupil concerned. Evidence from Project IRIS indicates that parents, in a few cases, accessed and paid for an occupational therapy assessment and continued to pay for regular sessions with an occupational therapist.

Case study schools had built relationships with professional agencies and organisations and work with them to develop provision for their pupils. Where therapeutic services were available parents appreciated them and found them of good quality. However, accessing support through local clinics could be problematic because of distances involved and in some socio-economically disadvantaged households due to limited transport options. Special schools had established particularly positive working practices with HSE service professionals with whom they had regular contact. Where therapists worked in these schools staff described them as having established effective partnerships with teachers and programmes created for individual pupils. This model of in-school support operating in specials schools visited for Project IRIS promoted access and found favour with parents and professionals. It is worth noting that the availability of therapeutic services in special schools influenced parental decisions to move from mainstream to special schooling as reported in other studies (Kelly & Devitt, 2010).

The National Reference Group on Multi-disciplinary Disability Services for Children aged five to 18 (2009) acknowledged that school access to therapeutic services was problematic. It recommended creating school age inter-disciplinary teams to provide specialist services for children with all disabilities and produce a joint service plan for each child. The report, in the process of being implemented, also indicated that support should be available within the school when appropriate to meet the child's needs. However, there is no indication that additional resources will be available to support this service model. There is little evidence of attempts to evaluate the efficacy of partnerships between Irish schools and external agencies being reported in the literature. While Project IRIS identifies many positive features of collaboration in this area, there is a shortage of empirical evidence to inform a view of the efficiency of services provided.

Case study schools valued the input from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), where available, and principals interviewed commended the quality of assessment reports. School personnel interviewed perceived this service was overstretched and under resourced, however, and the emphasis on conducting assessments reduced the capacity of NEPS to help schools in supporting pupils with complex needs. Schools recognised that SENOs had a challenging role, particularly during a time of limited resources. The SENO role is well defined but not all schools had the same expectation of what they might effectively deliver. Where good relationships existed between schools and SENOs, effective lines of communication were developed and professional dialogue assured. In some instances this had not been achieved, resulting in frustrations around decisions made.

Some case study schools appeared to work effectively with charitable organisations and support groups to provide facilities for pupils with special educational needs and their families. These organisations often provided resources and support beyond the school's reasonable remit such as breakfast and after school clubs.

Social and academic advantages are to be gained when special and mainstream schools work together (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Monsen, 2004). Very little interaction between mainstream and special schools was reported during the national survey, a factor also apparent in case study schools, even when schools were in close proximity. Some special school pupils were transported a considerable distance and had little contact with their peers in their immediate neighbourhood and opportunities for post school extra-curricular activities were limited.

Research Question 7

What are the outcomes (including formal and informal outcomes) and associated benefits and drawbacks for the pupils/students from their educational experiences?

Douglas *et al* (2012) in their review of measuring and assessing the progress of pupils with special educational needs observed that building up a better knowledge base on their outcomes remained a challenge in Ireland and internationally. Within the Irish context the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) contains a derogation for pupils with special educational needs not to be included in the nationally standardised tests administered in schools. Considering the lack of nationally validated data on attainment of pupils with special educational needs, Douglas *et al* (2012) recommended that school and classroom-based assessments of pupil attainment needed to be examined. Analysis from this review also revealed variability between and within schools on assessment practices and policies with some children with special needs benefiting from having their progress monitored and assessment results informing their IEPs, while others did not. The authors argue that assessments should be appropriate and accessible for those being assessed and that broader aspects of the curriculum should be considered not just those which are traditionally assessed through examinations and attainment tests. Inclusive assessment of progress for pupils with special educational needs, as recommended by these authors should, therefore, include happiness- and independence-related outcomes alongside measures of academic attainment and curricular engagement.

In making these observations on pupil outcomes within Project IRIS the report authors are conscious that given the small numbers of pupils involved, the variety of school settings, the socio-economic demographics and family factors these findings have to be treated with caution. Pupil progress and outcomes were assessed under the four domains of attainment, engagement, happiness and independence. The following key themes emerged around pupil outcomes over their school careers: persistent difficulties in academic attainment; engagement with class activities required constant attention; social skills capacity often determined levels of friendship established; independence increasingly prioritised as pupils move towards post primary schooling.

All primary case study schools make use of a wide range of standardised, whole school screening and diagnostic tests. There was limited evidence, however, that these were used in a systematic formative manner to inform planning and evaluation of the efficacy of teaching approaches. There was evidence in the case study schools that sustained teacher and often SNA interventions were required to address pupil difficulties with attention, fine motor skills and language proficiency early in primary school. There was also evidence that while pupils made progress in attainment they often fell behind their peers particularly when academic challenges increased towards the upper end of primary school.

Pupils who had made the transition to post primary were usually studying subjects at either ordinary or foundation level (where available) and the support from the JCSP intervention was particularly valued in DEIS schools. Pupils appeared to be achieving a measure of success, based on the Junior Certificate performance of a cohort of pupils in the study. Those who participated in the transition year programme reported personal benefits, in particular in participation in work experience. Most pupils with special educational needs in the study were studying subjects at ordinary level for the Leaving Certificate or participating in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Those pupils undertaking the Leaving Certificate at ordinary level were expected by their teachers to be successful. The LCA programme appeared to suit the learning requirements of the pupils involved and there was no evidence that pupils and/or their parents felt they had been misdirected by the school into taking the programme as reported by Banks *et al* (2010). Small numbers of Project IRIS pupils were involved in the LCA programme so any comments are tentative; however, these pupils appeared to enjoy the smaller class sizes, more individual attention and group based project work, a finding also reported by Banks *et al* (2010). There was some evidence that pupils with an intellectual disability were struggling with both junior and senior cycle courses and in some cases an alternative programme was provided. The proposed development of NFQ Level 2 qualifications (NCCA, 2009) within junior cycle has the potential to address the difficulties experienced by some pupils with intellectual disabilities in achieving nationally recognised certification. Developing appropriate programmes and associated nationally recognised awards within Leaving Certificate represents an urgent task particularly as more pupils with intellectual disabilities complete post primary schooling in mainstream environments.

Pupils in the case study primary schools required considerable facilitation for engagement in class activities including motivational strategies. Engagement in class activities was often negatively affected by behaviour difficulties experienced by pupils and for others the inability to sustain concentration impeded participation in class activities. SNA support was often deemed essential to help pupils with self-regulation, particularly those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, a finding also reported by Rose and O'Neill (2009). At post primary level in the case study schools SNA support was often focused on enabling pupils to participate in class activities through note taking, for example. There was no evidence that pupils with special educational needs in junior cycle became progressively disengaged from school, though the authors were aware that the Smyth *et al* study (2007) strongly indicated that disengagement was an issue for all pupils in junior cycle, particularly in second year. Attendance at primary and post primary levels, apart from those with serious medical difficulties, did not appear to be a major issue for pupils with special educational needs in case study schools.

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Discussion of Findings

School personnel and parents were particularly anxious that pupils developed social skills and establishing friendships was a major priority especially in primary. Most pupils, over time, developed age appropriate social skills and establish viable friendships. However, pupils experiencing behaviour difficulties, problems with attention and those with ASD appeared to have the greatest difficulties in the social domain. Social difficulties appeared to persist over time for many of these pupils. Pupils with ASD tended to have limited behavioural repertoires which affected their ability to engage in successful interactions with their peers. There was some evidence that pupils with ASD in the post primary case study schools were not overly concerned about their limited social interaction with their peers. As these pupils grew older it appeared their peer group had become more tolerant and accepting of them.

School personnel, parents and pupils in all case study schools considered achieving independence was a crucial outcome of schooling for those with special educational needs. At the upper end of primary school pupils were encouraged to become more independent in preparation for transition to post primary schooling. In some post primary schools peer mentoring programmes were useful in facilitating the transition to post primary and helping pupils to become more self-reliant. There was a keen awareness among school personnel that pupils who required full-time SNA support could easily become over-dependent and fail to develop an appropriate level of autonomy. By post primary most pupils had developed the requisite level of independence skills to participate in post primary schooling though a small number continued to have difficulties developing their autonomy despite attempts by school personnel to facilitate this process.

Within the special school sample visited for data collection some pupils had transferred from mainstream schools in the main at late primary or at post primary age level. Parents interviewed perceived that special schools were better able to provide additional resources and smaller classes were more conducive to meeting the social needs of their children. Given the small numbers involved it is evident that many pupils had made satisfactory academic progress, were engaged with class activities and were happy in school. Achieving appropriate levels of independence appeared to be the major ongoing difficulty for a substantial number of pupils.

All four domains of pupil outcomes were closely inter-related and it was evident that difficulties with pupil behaviour, for example, affected engagement with class activities and academic attainment. Happiness in school was also closely related to academic success in and participation in class activities. Within the Project IRIS case study schools it was evident that most pupils had experienced a degree of academic achievement, were engaged in class activities and had established friendships. It was apparent, however, that achieving these outcomes was a constant struggle for the pupils involved and required considerable personal effort combined with extensive support to enable them to experience success in learning.

9 Recommendations

The research evidence from Project IRIS presented a mixed picture of the special education system in Ireland but indicated that schools generally demonstrated a commitment to providing an inclusive learning environment for children with special educational needs. The establishment of skilled resource teachers and learning support teachers ensures that most of these pupils receive high levels of support. Communication between schools and parents was generally positive and there were many examples particularly at primary school level of effective home and school liaison. Transition planning between primary and post primary schools for this cohort was generally well organised with clear, established pathways. This research also revealed significant barriers, however, which if not addressed could undermine the substantial progress achieved over the past 20 years in developing inclusive learning environments. These include: inadequacy of current assessment procedures; limited access to therapeutic services; insufficient teacher knowledge and expertise; inconsistencies in development and implementation of IEPs; exclusionary clauses in school enrolment policies.

Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to inform established and emerging policies and support development of inclusive learning environments as envisaged in Irish legislation and policy. The researchers are aware of and acknowledge the potential of a series of current policy initiatives to address a number of the barriers to the establishment of inclusive learning environments documented in this longitudinal study. The recommendations from this study are designed to be read within the context of these major policy initiatives, more specifically the Working Group (NCSE, 2014) proposals to radically alter the current resource allocation system and the proposed School Admissions Bill (2013) promoting fairer more transparent procedures governing school enrolment. The recommendations are organised to address structural barriers at the systemic level; barriers to access at the level of service providers; school level issues regarding knowledge and expertise; development of a support infrastructure for professional development of personnel involved in delivery of special educational provision.

On the basis of this research evidence it is evident that a number of actions are urgently required to fully establish a coherent response to the needs of pupils with special educational needs in Irish schools, their families and the professionals working in this area. Our recommendations are therefore set out below.

At systemic level

The failure to fully implement the EPSEN Act 2004 despite repeated recommendations from policy makers, researchers and practitioners has resulted in several difficulties for schools, parents, pupils and support services including major problems in obtaining timely and detailed assessments and uneven and inconsistent development of IEPs.

In developing inclusive learning environments it is important to be able to assess pupil progress in relation to learning targets and over time. However, while a broad battery of test and assessment procedures are used in schools, these are not always fit for purpose in recording academic progress for those with special educational needs. National policy makers in pupil assessment need to recognise the particular complexities associated with documenting the progress of this cohort and develop appropriate mechanisms to address this issue. Academic progress for these pupils was evident though usually at a slower pace than their peers and most achieved national certification at junior level in post primary schools. However, a smaller number of pupils with an intellectual disability were unable to access the curriculum at junior and senior cycle and in some cases alternatives programmes were provided. The development of NFQ Level 2 proposed for the new junior

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cycle, while welcome, needs to be supplemented with a Level 1 certification to enable all pupils whatever their educational need to achieve nationally recognised certification. Senior cycle education for these pupils will also require additional levels of certification.

We therefore recommend that:

- As a matter of urgency the EPSEN Act 2004 is fully implemented.
- An inclusive assessment approach is adopted at national and school level that measures and reports progress across the breadth of the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs. The NCCA should consider developing NFQ Level 1 programmes within the new framework for junior cycle to cater for those pupils who experience major difficulties accessing the current curriculum or do not have the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised certification. Follow on programmes with an appropriate level of certification should also be made available in senior cycle for these pupils.

At school level and continuing professional development

While school policies appeared to be generally supportive of the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools there was evidence that exclusionary clauses existed which could prevent such access. While some had highly developed individual education plans, few were involving parents or pupils in setting targets, and processes for review were seldom well established. While the NCSE has produced guidelines and SESS has offered training in IEP development and management, lack of clarity on the legal status of IEPS has resulted in an uneven and disjointed approach across the country.

In most schools pupils with special educational needs were withdrawn from class for support in small group or individual sessions. The dominant use of withdrawal has been identified in the literature as a limiting approach to provision of effective support. While quality of support provided in these sessions was often good, pupils sometimes missed out on subject time and opportunities for interaction with their peers.

Strategies for the promotion of differentiated teaching were seen to be limited in most schools and teachers often reported their knowledge of specific teaching approaches was limited. Where teachers had received further professional development in SEN and inclusive teaching they were more adept at providing well differentiated modes of teaching and assessment. While there was evidence of well co-ordinated and consistent approaches to behaviour management in some schools, in many this was not the case.

SNAs demonstrated commitment to the pupils with whom they worked and teachers, parents and pupils asserted that they made a significant contribution to their learning. It was also clear that SNAs were undertaking a pedagogical role not envisaged in DES circulars and that joint planning between the SNA and the classroom teacher generally ensured the pupils' support needs were met. There was also evidence that as children got older SNA support needed to be offered flexibly to respect their need to develop independence skills.

We therefore recommend that:

- Schools should ensure that their enrolment policy reflects an inclusive approach to pupils with special educational needs and that these pupils and their families are not denied access to their chosen school because of the nature of their learning needs.
- Guidance should be provided to schools to enable them to develop effective procedures for informing parents of pupils with special educational needs of the availability of support and resources for their children particularly at critical transition stages. Further guidance should be provided to support this cohort in preparing for leaving school and transition into adult life. Pupils and their teachers and parents need to be informed of the implications of exemption from Irish lessons for future career opportunities.

- A review of the use of withdrawal of pupils from the mainstream classroom as a method of support and its impact on the learning and socialisation of pupils should be undertaken and alternative approaches such as team teaching promoted and developed.
- Schools should ensure that SNAs are included in the SEN team and enabled to participate in planning to support pupils with special educational needs. As children grow older the types of support offered by SNAs and mode of delivery need to be kept under constant review.
- A co-ordinated approach to behaviour management which brings current external support services together to increase school capacity to address the needs of pupils with EBD and some with ASD should be prioritised.
- Further professional development should be structured to ensure that greater numbers of classroom/ subject teachers acquire the necessary pedagogical skills and knowledge to enable pupils with special educational needs to access the curriculum. As a matter of urgency all members of SEN teams in schools should be enabled to access appropriate training for this role.
- Focused continuing professional development should be made available to support the development of IEPs and the establishment of differentiated teaching in mainstream schools.
- Demonstration sites are developed where good practice in team teaching is exemplified and opportunities are created to enable this type of practice to be disseminated within the school system.

At the level of support to schools from external sources

Relationships with support services, including HSE professionals and NEPS, were generally positive and their contribution appreciated by schools and parents. It is also evident that access to these critical professionals could be extremely limited and difficult to obtain and influenced by demographic and geographical variables. The limited availability of therapeutic services combined with restricted access to psychological assessments had a negative impact on school capacity to respond appropriately to the learning needs and support requirements for pupils with special educational needs.

We therefore recommend that:

- As a matter of urgency a review should be undertaken on enhancing collaboration between education and health services to guarantee the accessibility of therapeutic services provided for children with special educational needs and their families. Adequate resources are necessary to ensure that the proposals establishing school age interdisciplinary teams (Progressing Disability Services, 2009) can make a significant contribution to establishing an accessible therapeutic service at school level.
- As a matter of urgency procedures for managing and delivering SEN assessments should be reviewed in line with the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group (2014). This should take account of those issues that affect equal opportunities and should ensure that all families have access to appropriate and timely assessment procedures.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Focus Group Questions (Primary School Principals)

Section 1: Policy

Q1 How would you describe an inclusive learning environment?

Q2 What do you understand to be the purpose of the EPSEN Act?

Prompts:

2.1   The EPSEN Act mandates the development of inclusive learning environments, how do you interpret this policy?

2.2   What do you consider to be the positive aspects of the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

2.3   What do you consider to be the negative aspects of the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

2.4   Are there aspects of special education that should have been included in the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

Q3 Has the EPSEN Act had any impact on your work (Please provide examples)?

Prompts:

3.1   In terms of future policy initiatives what contribution could Principals have in the development of ongoing special needs policy?

3.2   Are here any changes that you would like to make but are unable to do so in your current context?

Q4 What are your views about the resource allocation model?

Prompts:

4.1   Resource allocation is based upon categories of SEN. Is this appropriate?

4.2   Are there any students whom you feel are excluded from resource allocation?

Q5 What impact has the Disability Act had on your work?

Section 2: Provision

Q6 How do you interpret your role with pupils with special needs and inclusion issues?

Prompts:

6.1   Do you believe that this is the best focus for your work in relation to SEN?

Q7 How does the work of other professionals (e.g., health service) link to your role within the school?

Prompts:

7.1   What assists you in providing an effective service?

7.2   Are there any barriers to you providing an effective service for pupils with SEN? If so, how can these be overcome?

7.3   How would you like to see your role in support of SEN three years from now?

Q8 What level of interaction do you have with parents of children with SEN (How does this inform your practice?)

Prompts:

8.1   If little or none how would you address this?

8.2   If lots, how has this been developed?

Section 3: Outcomes

Q9 What do you believe to be the main impact of your role in supporting those who work with pupils with SEN (eg: teachers, SNAs)?

Prompts:

9.1   How does your work impact upon school capacity to respond to SEN?

9.2   How does your work impact upon teacher skills, knowledge and understanding about SEN?

9.3   How would you maximise your impact on schools?

Q10 How fit for purpose is the current system of assessment and identification of pupils with SEN?

Prompts:

10.1   If considered fit for purpose, what are the most positive aspects?

10.2   If considered not fit for purpose, what would you change? What model would you suggest?

Q11 How do you assess the impact of your work upon the progress and attainment of pupils?

Section 4: Experience

Q12 In what ways, if any, should provision for pupils with SEN change?

Q13 What is the most rewarding aspect of your work in relation to pupils with SEN?

Prompt:

13.1   What is the most frustrating aspect of your work in relation to pupils with SEN?

Closing/optional questions

Q What is your vision for the future development of inclusive education in Ireland?

Q What are the greatest successes of SEN provision in Ireland?

Initial Teacher Trainer Focus Group Questions

Section 1: Policy

Q1 What do you understand to be the purpose of the EPSEN Act?

Prompts:

The EPSEN Act mandates the development of inclusive learning environments, how do you interpret this policy?

1.2   What do you consider to be the positive aspects of the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

1.3   What do you consider to be the negative aspects of the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

1.4   Are there aspects of special education that should have been included in the EPSEN Act? (provide examples)

Q2 Has the EPSEN Act been incorporated into your work with students (Please provide examples)?

Q3 What impact has the Disability Act had on your work?

Section 2: Provision

Q4 How do you prepare your students to work in an inclusive classroom with a diversity of learner needs?

Q5 How do you prepare students to work in collaboration with professionals from other agencies?

Q6 How do you prepare students for collaboration with other teachers to address SEN within the classroom?

Q7 How do you prepare students to work with SNAs?

Prompts:

- What assists you in providing this training for student teachers?
- Are there any barriers to you providing an effective training for your students in relation to SEN? If so, how can these be overcome?
- How would you like to see your role in training student teachers to work with pupils with SEN three years from now?

Section 3: Outcomes

Q8 What level of knowledge of the NCSE categories of SEN do your students have on leaving the course?

Prompts:

- If little or none how would you address this?
- If extensive, how has this been developed?

Section 4: Experience

Q9 In what ways, if any, should provision of training of teachers in preparation for teaching pupils with SEN change?

Q10 How does your own experience of working with pupils with SEN impact on the courses you provide?

Closing/optional questions

Q11 What is your vision for the future development of inclusive education in Ireland?

Q12 What are the greatest successes of teacher education provision in relation to SEN in Ireland?

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Primary Electronic Survey

Please respond to all the statements below and feel free to expand on your answer, or add a comment, in the boxes provided.

Part 1: Demographics

1. **School roll number** ☐

2. **Current position in school**

Principal ☐   Deputy Principal ☐   Other, please specify ☐

3. **Number of years in teaching**

0-5 years ☐   6-10 years ☐   11-15 years ☐

16-20 years ☐   More than 20 years ☐

4. **Number of years in current position**

0-5 years ☐   6-10 years ☐   11-15 years ☐

16-20 years ☐   More than 20 years ☐

5. **Have you undertaken Special Education Training?**   YES ☐   NO ☐

If YES, please specify ☐

6. **Number of pupils in the school** ☐

7. **Number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN)**

High incidence ☐

Low incidence ☐

8. **If the school has disadvantaged status please indicate the category below, otherwise select N/A**

Urban band 1 ☐   Urban band 2 ☐   Rural ☐   N/A ☐

9. **School context**

Urban/city ☐   Urban/small town ☐   Rural ☐

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Part 2: Experience within this school

10. **To which classes are pupils with SEN allocated for most of the day?**

Regular/mainstream classes ☐

Special classes ☐

Other, please specify ☐

11. **Which of the following approaches is used to provide support for pupils with SEN? (Please tick all that apply)**

Support from the mainstream/regular classroom teachers ☐

Withdrawal from regular class for extra support ☐

Taught in special/separate classes for the whole school day ☐

Taught in special/separate classes for part of the school day ☐

Extra support within the classroom from learning support/resource teachers ☐

Extra support within the classroom from a special needs assistant ☐

Visiting teacher ☐

Other (please specify) _____

12. **Is the current provision for pupils with SEN in your school satisfactory?**

YES ☐   NO ☐

Please explain your answer.

_____
_____
_____

13. **The work conducted by other professionals (e.g. health services etc) with pupils with SEN is communicated effectively to class teachers.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. **The school has contact with a local special educational needs organiser (SENO).**

Very often ☐ Often ☐ Seldom ☐ Never ☐ Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

15. **The resources allocated by the NCSE have a significant impact on the work of teachers with pupils who have SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐ N/A ☐

Please explain (Optional)

Part 3 Provision within this school

16. **Please rate access to the following services in relation to the school**

Service	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Don't know
National Education Psychology Service (NEPS)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speech and language therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Occupational therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Behaviour support service	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Work Services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Additional Comments (optional)

17. **The school liaises with a local special school in relation to the movement of pupils between schools.**

Regularly ☐   Occasionally ☐   Never ☐

Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain (optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

18. **Teachers have received appropriate professional development in relation to SEN and inclusion.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

19. **Access to professional development for our teachers in relation to SEN is good.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

20. **Would you like additional training/professional development in relation to SEN for teachers in your school?**

YES (High Priority) ☐   YES (Medium Priority) ☐   NO (Low Priority) ☐

21. If YES (High or Medium Priority)

Please list your top 3 priorities for professional development for teachers in relation to SEN

1. [   ]
2. [   ]
3. [   ]

22. Special needs assistants (SNAs) have received professional development specific to SEN and inclusion.

Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Disagree [ ]

Strongly disagree [ ]   Don't know [ ]

Additional Comments (optional)

[   ]
[   ]
[   ]
[   ]

23. Access to professional development for our special needs assistants (SNAs) in relation to SEN is good:

Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Disagree [ ]

Strongly disagree [ ]   Don't know [ ]

Additional Comments (optional)

[   ]
[   ]
[   ]
[   ]

24. Would you like additional training/professional development in relation to SEN for SNAs in your school?

YES (High Priority) [ ]   YES (Medium Priority) [ ]   NO (Low Priority) [ ]

25. If YES (High or Medium Priority)

Please list your top 3 priorities for professional development for SNAs in relation to SEN

1. [   ]
2. [   ]
3. [   ]

26. **Guidelines for the provision of access to the Primary School Curriculum for pupils with SEN are being implemented by all teachers in the school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

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| |

27. **Teachers have received professional development in relation to curriculum access for pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please explain

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28. **Teachers are confident in their ability to differentiate lessons to address diverse needs in the classroom**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

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| |
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29. **There are well developed teaching resources within the school to support teachers working with pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

```
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
```

30. **The school includes pupils with special educational needs in extracurricular activities.**

Regularly ☐   Occasionally ☐   Never ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain (Optional)

```
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
[                                                        ]
```

Part 4 Policy within the school

31. **Does the school have a written special educational needs policy?**

YES ☐   NO ☐

32. **To whom are copies of the policy provided? (Please tick all that apply)**

Specialist teachers (learning support/resources) ☐

Regular classroom teachers ☐

Parents ☐

Pupils ☐

SNAs ☐

Substitute teachers ☐

Visiting teachers ☐

SENOs ☐

Other (please specify)

```
[                                                        ]
```

33. **The school has a separate policy with regard to the Inclusion of pupils with SEN.**

YES ☐   NO ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

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| |
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| |

34. **The EPSEN Act (2004) makes a significant contribution to the development of inclusive education policy in the school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

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35. **The school's Admissions Policy provides clear criteria on the admission of pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

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36. **Procedures for the transition of pupils with SEN from primary to post primary schools are well established within the school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

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37. **The school has a parent information guide relating to supports and services available to pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

Part 5 Outcomes within the school

38. **Teachers have clearly defined learning targets for individual pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

39. **Pupils with SEN are involved in setting their own learning targets.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

40. **Parents collaborate in the setting of learning targets for their own child.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Comments

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41. **The school has well defined procedures for measuring the academic progress of pupils with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Comments

| |
| |
| |
| |

42. **Pupils with SEN work towards clearly established learning targets across the curriculum.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Comments

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| |
| |
| |

43. **Do pupils with SEN have individual education plans (IEPs)?**

YES (ALL) ☐   YES (SOME) ☐   NO ☐

Please Explain (optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

44. **The use of individual education plans (IEPs) is an effective means of ensuring that the needs of pupils with SEN are addressed fully.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

45. **Which of the people listed below is included in the development of IEPs (check all that apply).**

– If no pupils have IEPs currently, please check 'Not Applicable' at the end of the list

Regular classroom teacher ☐   Substitute teachers ☐   Parents ☐

SNAs ☐   Pupils ☐   SENOs ☐   Not Applicable ☐

Visiting teachers ☐   Specialist teachers (learning support/resources) ☐

Other (please specify)

☐

46. **If there are any comments you wish to make relating to SEN within your school and which have not been covered already in this survey feel free to enter them in the box below.**

Comments

☐
☐
☐
☐

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Project IRIS Post Primary School Survey

Please respond to all the statements below and feel free to expand on your answer, or add a comment, in the boxes provided.

Part 1: Demographics

2.   **School roll number –** [   ] (Mandatory response)

10.   **Current position in your school –** [   ]

11.   **Have you undertaken special education training?**   YES [ ]   NO [ ]

        If YES, please specify the nature of the training, its duration, and any qualification you received –

        [   ]
        [   ]
        [   ]
        [   ]

12.   **Number of students attending your school –**

        Male students [   ]   Female students [   ]

13.   **Number of SNAs at your school –**

        Full time [   ]   Part time [   ]

14.   **Number of students with low incidence special educational needs (SEN) –**

        Male students [   ]   Female students [   ]

15.   **Number of students with high incidence special educational needs (SEN) –**

        Male students [   ]   Female students [   ]

16.   **Number of students with special educational needs (SEN) who have been assigned an SNA –**

        Full time SNA [   ]   Part time SNA [   ]

17.   **If your school has disadvantaged status please indicate the category below, otherwise select N/A**

        Urban band 1 [ ]   Urban band 2 [ ]   Rural [ ]   N/A [ ]

18.   **How would you describe your schools context**

        Urban/city [ ]   Urban town [ ]   Rural [ ]

Part 2: Experience within your school

19. **Does your school use mixed ability classes for all subjects? (Please tick all that apply)**

First year ☐　　　Second year ☐　　　Third year ☐

Fourth year ☐　　　Fifth year ☐　　　Sixth year ☐

20. **Does your school use mixed ability classes for some subjects? (Please tick all that apply)**

First year ☐　　　Second year ☐　　　Third year ☐

Fourth year ☐　　　Fifth year ☐　　　Sixth year ☐

21. **Which of the following approaches is used to provide support for students with SEN? (Please tick all that apply)**

Support from the regular classroom teachers ☐

Withdrawal from regular class for extra support ☐

Taught in special/separate classes for the whole school day ☐

Taught in special/separate classes for part of the school day ☐

Extra support within the classroom from learning support/resource teachers ☐

Extra support within the classroom from a special needs assistant ☐

Input from a visiting teacher ☐

Other, please specify

☐

22. **How many resource/learning support hours were allocated to your school this year –**

Total hours allocated ☐

23. **How were these hours allocated?**

Small group teaching hours ☐

Co-teaching in classroom hours ☐

One-to-one support hours ☐

Other (Please specify)

☐

24. **The current provision for students with special educational needs in your school is satisfactory.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please explain your answer (Optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

25. **The work conducted by other professionals (e.g. health services etc) with students with special educational needs is communicated effectively to class teachers**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

26. **Your school has contact with a local special education needs organiser (SENO)**

Very often ☐   Often ☐   Seldom ☐   Never ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

27. **The resources allocated by the NCSE have a positive impact on the work of teachers with students who have SEN**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain (Optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

Part 3 Provision within your school

28. **Please rate access to the following services in relation to your school**

Service	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Don't know
National Education Psychology Service (NEPS)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speech and language therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Occupational therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical therapy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Special education support service	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Behaviour support service	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Work Services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

29. **Your school liaises with a local special school in relation to the movement of students between schools.**

Regularly ☐   Occasionally ☐   Never ☐

Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain (optional)

30. **Subject teachers have received appropriate professional development in relation to SEN and inclusion.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

31. **Teachers supporting students with SEN have received appropriate professional development in relation to SEN and inclusion.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

---

32. **Access to professional development for our teachers in relation to SEN is good.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

---

33. **Would you like additional training/professional development in relation to SEN for teachers in your school?**

YES (High Priority) ☐   YES (Medium Priority) ☐   NO (Low Priority) ☐

34. **If YES (High or Medium Priority)**

Please list your top 3 priorities for professional development for teachers in relation to SEN

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

35. **Access to professional development for our special needs assistants (SNAs) in relation to SEN is good:**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

36. **Would you like additional training/professional development in relation to SEN for SNAs in your school?**

YES (High Priority) ☐   YES (Low Priority) ☐   NO ☐

37. **If YES (High or Medium Priority)**

Please list your top 3 priorities for professional development for SNA's in relation to SEN

1.
2.
3.

38. **Guidelines for the provision of curriculum access for students with SEN are being implemented by all teachers in your school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

| |
| |
| |
| |

39. **Teachers have received professional development in relation to curriculum access for students with SEN.**

Yes (all) ☐   Yes (some) ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain

40. **Teachers are confident in their ability to differentiate lessons to address diverse needs in the classroom**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

41. **There are well developed teaching resources within your school to support teachers working with students with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

42. **Your school includes students with SEN in extracurricular activities.**

Always ☐   Regularly ☐   Occasionally ☐

Never ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please explain (Optional)

Part 4 Policy within your school

43. **Does your school have a written special educational needs policy?**

YES ☐   NO ☐

Additional comments (Optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

44. **To whom are copies of the policy provided? (Please tick all that apply)**

Specialist teachers (learning support/resources) ☐

Regular classroom teachers ☐

Parents ☐

Students ☐

SNAs ☐

Substitute teachers ☐

Visiting teachers ☐

SENOs ☐

Other (please specify)

☐

45. **Does your school have a separate policy with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN?**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

☐
☐
☐
☐

46. **The EPSEN Act (2004) makes a positive contribution to the development of inclusive education policy in your school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

47. **Your school's admissions policy provides clear criteria on the admission of students with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

48. **Procedures for the transition of students with SEN from post primary school to higher education and/or the world of work operate effectively within your school.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

49. **Your school has a parent information guide relating to supports and services available to students with SEN.**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

Part 5 Outcomes within your school

50. **Subject teachers have clearly defined learning targets for individual students with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

```
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
```

51. **Students with SEN are involved in setting their own learning targets.**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐   N/A ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

```
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
```

52. **Parents collaborate in the setting of learning targets for their own child.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (optional)

```
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
```

53. **Your school has well defined procedures for measuring the academic progress of students with SEN.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Comments

```
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
[                                              ]
```

54. **Students with SEN work towards clearly established learning targets across the curriculum.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional comments (Optional)

☐

☐

☐

☐

55. **Do students with SEN have individual education plans (IEPs)?**

YES (ALL) ☐   YES (SOME) ☐   NO ☐

Please Explain (Optional)

☐

☐

☐

☐

56. **The use of individual education plans (IEPs) is an effective means of ensuring that the needs of students with SEN are addressed fully.**

Strongly agree ☐   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐   Don't know ☐

Additional Comments (Optional)

☐

☐

☐

☐

57. **Which of the people listed below is included in the development of IEPs (check all that apply). (If no students have IEPs currently, please check 'Not applicable' at the end of the list).**

Specialist teachers (learning support/resource) ☐

Principal/Deputy principal ☐

Subject teachers ☐

Parents ☐

Students ☐

Year head ☐

Health services personnel ☐

SNAs ☐

Substitute teachers ☐

Visiting teachers ☐

SENO ☐

Not Applicable ☐

Other (please specify)

| |
| |

58. **If there are any comments you wish to make relating to SEN within your school and which have not been covered already in this survey feel free to enter them in the box below.**

Comments

| |
| |
| |
| |

Case Study Data Collection Interview Schedule Teachers

1.   Could you tell me about your class? (pupil profiles/what they enjoy)

2.   How does XXX fit into the class socially/academically?

3.   How do you feel about having XXX in your class? (right place for her?)

4.   What do you think are XXX's major learning needs?

5.   How do you plan for XXX's learning?

6.   Do you discuss XXX's learning needs with her support teacher/SNA/parent(s)?

7.   What progress do you think XXX has made socially/academically this year?

8.   Have you received any SEN training?

9.   What would help you in working with XXX?

10.   Anything I should have asked you about?

Case Study Data Collection Interview Schedule Parents

Preamble

Tell us a little bit about your child

Provision

1.   How do you define inclusion in the context of this school?

2.   How accessible is the school for your child?

Prompt: not just physical access or physical environment

3.   Does you child have access to support from specialist resources,(SLT/OT/CAMHS/PT)?

3a.   How adequate is the support provided for your child?

Prompt: does this help?

4.   Does your child have access to support from external agencies?

Prompt: Dept. of Health and Children; Brothers of Charity? Enable Ireland? COPE Foundation/HSE?

5.   Does your child have access to assistive technology?

5a.   How appropriate is the technology?

5b.   How adequate is the assistive technology?

6.   How does the school work with the SENO?

6a.   How does the SENO work with you as a parent?

Prompt: Do you have a relationship with the SENO?

7.   Does the school have IEPs for pupils with SEN?

7a.   Does the school have an IEP for your child?

7b.   How are you involved in the development of the IEP?

Experience

8.   How is the curriculum differentiated to address your child's needs?

Prompt: How is your child doing in school?

9.   What extra curricular activities are provided in the school? How does your child access these?

Prompt: Can you give an example

10.   Are there some pupils with whom the school feels more comfortable than others in respect of meeting their needs?

Prompt: Why do you think this is?

11.   From where does the school get the most effective support for addressing the needs of your child?

Prompt: Has this made a difference?

Policy

12.   When your child was identified as having difficulties what happened next?

Prompt: can you tell us more about his/her schooling then?

13.   How is transition of your child between classes as they progress through the school managed?

14.   How is transition between primary and post-primary provision organised for pupils with SEN?

Prompt: Can you describe how this is working for your son/daughter? (optional/age dependent)

Outcomes

15.   How do you define success in terms of academic outcomes for your child?

16.   How do you define success in terms of social outcomes for your child?

Prompt: Does your child have friends?

17.   Are you involved in monitoring the progress of your child?

Prompt: how are you involved?

18.   How is your child's IEP monitored and revised?

18a.   Who is involved?

19.   If we came back in two years time, what would you hope we would see had changed for the better for your child?

Case Study Data Collection Interview Schedule Pupils

Preamble

Tell us something about yourself

Tell us something about your school

Provision

1. How easy is it for you to get around the school?

    Do you find it easy to participate in lessons?

2. Do you use any assistive technology at school? (provide examples)

    How appropriate is the technology?

    How adequate is the technology?

3. Do you have an IEP? (an individual educational plan is one that helps you with learning in school)

    Do you contribute to the development of this plan?

Experience

4. What support do you get to help you in school?

5. What are the best things that the school does to help you?

6. What things could the school do better to help you?

7. Do the teachers prepare work especially for you?

8. Do you join in with school clubs and other activities?

9. Do all pupils in the school fit in well?

10. Do you think there might be some pupils who dont fit in to school (why)?

11. Who helps you in school?

12. Are there things you find difficult in school?

13. Who is involved in planning what you do at school each day?

Policy

14. The ASSESSMENT PROCESS? (HOW)

15. What happened to your support when you changed classes?

16. (If the child is in the last year of primary) What kind of support will you need when you change schools?

Outcomes

17. In terms of your school work, what would mean that you are successful?

18. In terms of your friendships at school, what would mean that you are successful?

19. Are you making good progress in school?

20. How would you know if you are doing as well as everyone else at school?

21. Is your IEP monitored?

    Does it get revised/changed?

    Who is involved in changing the IEP?

22. What things at school do you really enjoy?

23. If we came back to see you in 2 years time, what would you hope we would see had changed for the better with pupils with SEN in your school?

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Case Study Data Collection Interview Schedule Special Needs Assistants

1. Could you tell me about your work with XXX?

2. Could you take me through your day?

3. Could you tell me a little about XXX – his/her likes/dislikes?

4. How does he/she feel about having an SNA?

5. How do you feel about working with XXX?

6. What do you think is your contribution to his academic/social learning?

7. Has your role with XXX changed over time?

8. Are you involved in planning for XXX with his/her classroom/support teacher?

9. What progress has XXX made academically/socially? (evidence)

10. What (if any) training have you had? (past/current)

11. Has this training been adequate/appropriate? (in what ways?)

12. Anything I should have asked you about?

Code of Ethics for Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools)

This Code is informed by the principles established in the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA)*

1.   All researchers participating in this project will be required to sign a declaration of their agreement to abide fully by this ethical code.

2.   The researchers† recognise the rights of all professional colleagues, parents/carers and students who participate in the research to have their confidentiality protected at all times.

3.   Voluntary informed consent will be sought before any interviews are conducted with any respondent as part of the research process. In the case of school students this consent will be sought through schools and obtained in writing before any direct contact is made with the student. Parents and carers have the right to refuse participation and will not be pressured or coerced into taking part in the research.

4.   Participants in the research have a right to withdraw from the process at any time and will be informed of this right.

5.   The researchers will work in accordance with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and will ensure that the best interest of children is served at all times. Children will be facilitated to give informed consent and this will be in addition to the consent given by parents or carers.

6.   In circumstances where children or adults use non traditional orthography or alternative modes of communication, the researchers will take full account of this in seeking informed consent and will endeavour to provide support and full access to information.

7.   The researchers are under an obligation to describe accurately, truthfully and fairly any information obtained during the course of the research.

8.   There is an obligation to incorporate accurately data collected during the course of this research into the text of any report or other publication related to the research, and to ensure that individual opinions and perceptions are not misrepresented.

9.   The researchers will protect the sources of information gathered from interviews, focus groups, document scrutiny, observations and other data collection methods.

10.   The researchers will communicate to the research sponsors (NCSE) the extent to which their data collection and analysis techniques and the inferences drawn from these are reliable, valid and generalisable.

11.   Data collected as part of the research process will be securely maintained and will be accessible only to the researchers engaged in this project.

12.   The researchers will report the procedures, results and analysis of the research accurately, and in sufficient detail to allow all interested parties to understand and interpret them.

13.   The researchers will inform the NCSE through its representatives and the study schools of any intention to publish findings from the research through journals, books, or any other publication, and will discuss the proposed content of any such publication before proceeding.

14. The researchers will make themselves available to discuss the procedures, conduct, or findings of the research with any party involved in the research process.

15. A research report will be produced and will be made available in both paper and electronic format to the NCSE. This report will be the property of the NCSE.

16. Data collected during the course of the research project which names individuals or institutions will be available only to the researchers and will be made secure both during and after the term of the project.

17. The researchers are obliged to communicate the findings of their research to other members of the educational research community through research seminars, conference presentation and proceedings and publication taking account of all issues of confidentiality and protection of research participants.

18. The researchers assert their right to participate in any publication of the research findings in academic journals or other media, which may ensue from the research.

19. As this ethical code relates to a longitudinal study, it will be reviewed annually in order to take full account of any changes in procedure or legislation which may impact upon the conduct of the study.

* BERA (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Researchers. Southwell: British Educational Research Association.

† The term researchers refers to those individuals named as part of this research process and will include academic and research staff from the universities named in the research proposal along with a university administrator.

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School Case Studies – Observation Record

School name:

Observation context (e.g. details of class, pupil age, staffing etc):

Name of Observer: **Date:**

Duration of observation:

Event	Coding

Appendix 2

Coding for Transcripts of Interviews and Focus Groups

Themes:

PROVISION: **PR**, POLICY: **PO**, EXPERIENCE: **EX**, OUTCOMES: **OU**

1st LEVEL CODES:

All transcriptions should be blind coded by two researchers and where differences of coding are identified these should be discussed between the two researchers and where necessary by consultation with a third

Code definitions

Access	Reference to provision of access (physical or otherwise) to the environment or to learning	**ACC**
Advocacy	An individual or group advocates on behalf of either a pupil with SEN or their parent/carer	**AD**
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	Reference to a the condition	**ADHD**
Augmentative communication	Reference to non traditional orthography (e.g. signs or symbols) implemented to support either oral or written communication skills in pupils with SEN	**AUG**
Autistic spectrum disorder	Reference to the condition – includes Asperger's syndrome	**ASD**
Assessment	Reference to any form of assessment or diagnosis of a child	**ASS**
Attitudes	Identification of attitudes or beliefs that impact upon the child with SEN or their inclusion in school	**ATT**
Behaviour	Reference to negative behaviour and its impact in schools	**BE**
Curriculum	Reference to the curriculum as delivered to pupils or its modification.	**CR**
Diagnosed condition (e.g Down Syndrome)	Reference to any named condition or syndrome other than ASD, Dyslexia or ADHD	**DC**
Differentiation	Reference to differentiation of the curriculum or learning for children with SEN.	**DIF**
Disability Act	Reference to the Act	**DA**
Dyslexia	Reference to the condition	**DYS**
Enrolment	Reference to school or other official policy with regards to enrolment in school	**EN**
EPSEN Act	Reference to the Act	**EPS**
Exclusion	Reference to children being either removed from school or from an aspect of learning as a result of their SEN or behaviour	**EXC**
General allocation model	Reference to the official model	**GAM**
Group size	Reference to either the number of children within a class or the size of group within which a pupil with SEN is educated	**GS**
Home school liaison	Reference to liaison between school and home	**HSL**

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Inclusion	Reference to definition or opinion about inclusion	**IN**
Inclusive practice	Reference to practice which is seen as promoting inclusion in school	**IP**
Individual education plans	Reference to formulation or implementation of an IEP	**IEP**
Inspectorate	Reference to the role of the inspectorate in relation to special educational needs	**INSP**
Intervention	Reference to specific teaching interventions for pupils with SEN	**INT**
Mainstream school	Nursery, primary, or post primary education that is not provided in a special school	**MS**
Medical needs	Reference to conditions which require specific medical interventions in school	**MN**
Mental Health	Reference to mental health difficulties in pupils in school or the ways in which this is treated within school	**MH**
Mild general learning disability	Reference to children with this assessment	**MGLD**
Multi-agency	Reference to work across education, social services or health services (HSE) or between any of these	**MA**
National Educational Psychology Service	Reference to NEPS psychologists	**NEPS**
Parents:	Reference to parents in relation to school	**PA**
Partnership (mainstream and special schools):	Reference to any collaboration established between mainstream and special school.	**PAR**
Physical disability	Reference to pupils with physical disability in school	**PD**
Placement	Reference to discussions about where pupils with SEN should receive their education	**PL**
Resource allocation model	Reference to the official model whereby resources are allocated	**RAM**
Resource teachers	Reference to specifically designated resource teachers	**RT**
Resources	Reference to specific equipment, materials or facilities designed to enable access to learning for pupils with SEN	**RES**
Severe and profound learning difficulties	Reference to this assessed condition	**SPLD**
Special Education Support Services	Reference to this service	**SESS**
Special educational needs officers	Reference to SENOs	**SENO**
Special needs assistants	Reference to SNAs	**SNA**
Special schools	Reference to schools other than mainstream schools	**SS**
Speech and language problems	Reference to pupils who have difficulties with oral communication	**SLP**
Support role	Reference to adults other than SNAs who provide support in schools	**SPR**
Target (for pupil)	Reference to learning targets (maybe referred to as goals) set for an individual pupil with SEN	**TG**

Teacher Stress	Reference to stress in teachers which may be attributed to working with pupils with SEN	TS
Therapy	Reference to any therapeutic intervention with a chid, e.g speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy	THER
Training (includes reference to CPD)	Reference to the training related to SEN either provided to, or required by teachers or SNAs.	T
Transition	Reference to transition either between school phases or from school to post school provision.	TRAN
Voluntary bodies	Support of intervention from voluntary bodies or charitable organisations.	VB

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Project IRIS Focus Group and Interview Secondary Codes

Code Name	Primary Codes Incorporated	Code
Access & Curriculum	Access **(ACC)**	**A&C**
	Augmentative Communication **(AUG)**	
	Curriculum **(CR)**	
	Differentiation **(Dif)**	
	Inclusion **(IN)**	
	Inclusive practice **(IP)**	
	Intervention **(INT)**	
	Resources **(RES)**	
Support Infrastructure	Group size **(GS)**	**SI**
	Home school liaison **(HSL)**	
	Inspectorate **(INSP)**	
	Multi-agency **(MA)**	
	National Educational Psychology Service **(NEPS)**	
	Partnership **(PAR)**	
	Resource teachers **(RT)**	
	Special Education Support Service **(SESS)**	
	Special Educational Needs Organisers **(SENO)**	
	Special needs assistant **(SNA)**	
	Support Role **(SPR)**	
	Therapy **(THER)**	
	Voluntary Bodies **(VB)**	
Special education processes	Advocacy **(AD)**	**SEP**
	Assessment **(ASS)**	
	Enrolment **(EN)**	
	Exclusion **(EXC)**	
	Individual education plans **(IEP)**	
	Placement **(PL)**	
	Target **(TG)**	
	Transition **(TRAN)**	

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Specified special educational needs	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder **(ADHD)**	SSEN
	Autistic spectrum disorders **(ASD)**	
	Behaviour **(BE)**	
	Diagnosed condition **(DC)**	
	Dyslexia **(DYS)**	
	Medical needs **(MN)**	
	Mental Health **(MH)**	
	Mild General Learning Disability **(MGLD)**	
	Physical Disability **(PD)**	
	Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties **(SPLD)**	
	Speech and Language Problems **(SLP)**	
Teacher Variables	Attitudes **(ATT)**	TV
	Teacher Stress **(TS)**	
	Training **(T)**	
Policy	Disability Act **(DA)**	PLY
	Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs ACT **(EPS)**	
	General Allocation Model **(GAM)**	
	Resource Allocation Model **(RAM)**	
School Type	Mainstream school **(MS)**	ST
	Special School **(SS)**	
Parents	Parents **(PA)**	PA

General Consent Form

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes as appropriate:

		Yes	No
1.	I have been fully informed as to the nature of the research	☐	☐
2.	I understand my role in the interview	☐	☐
3.	I understand that no names (individual or school) will be used in the final report	☐	☐
4.	I understand that the findings may be published in academic journals and presented at conferences and to the NCSE	☐	☐
5.	My participation in this interview is entirely voluntary	☐	☐
6.	I understand that I can withdraw from this research project at any time without adverse consequences.	☐	☐

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date: ☐ D ☐ D / ☐ M ☐ M / ☐ 2 ☐ 0 ☐ Y ☐ Y

School Name (please print):

My role(s) (e.g.: School principal; teacher; career guidance; etc.):

Name(s) of students with SEN with whom I work (list only those involved in the research):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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Parent Consent Form

Please read the statements below and return the completed form to your child's school:

a)   I have been informed fully as to the nature of the project.

b)   I understand that no student names will be used in the final report.

c)   I understand that my child's participation is voluntary.

d)   I understand that my child can withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

e)   I understand that I can withdraw my child at any time without adverse consequences.

f)   I understand that information gathered will be used to report to the National Council for Special Education.

g)   I understand that information may be used for academic articles and conference presentations.

		Yes	No
1.	I have read the statements above and give consent to my child's participation in the project.	☐	☐
2.	I am interested in being interviewed as part of Project IRIS.	☐	☐

Parent/Guardian Name (please print):

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Date: D D / M M / 2 0 Y Y

Student's Name (Please print):

School Name (Please print):

Year student is attending:

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes as appropriate:

Student Consent Form

		Yes	No
1.	I have been told what this research is about	☐	☐
2.	I know what to do in the interview	☐	☐
3.	I understand that my name will not be used in the final report	☐	☐
4.	I understand that the research findings from the school may be written and talked about with other researchers and the NCSE.	☐	☐
5.	I am happy to take part in this interview	☐	☐
6.	I know that I can leave at any time without any problem	☐	☐

Student Name (please print):

Student Signature:

Year student is attending:

Date: D D / M M / 2 0 Y Y

School Name (Please print):

Data Collected and Analysed for Each Phase of Education

PRIMARY SCHOOLS DATA SET

School code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Interviews	40	40	50	48	56	32	35	31	28	33	393
Documents	66	39	49	47	53	84	14	26	22	57	457
Observations	5	9	9	5	7	8	3	7	8	8	69
Photographs/pictures	21	0	0	0	21	6	9	0	5	10	72
Video	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Website	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	8
Total Data Set											999

SPECIAL SCHOOLS DATA SET

School code	11	12	13	14	
Interviews	37	34	30	36	137
Documents	98	6	68	26	198
Observations	6	2	0	6	14
Photographs/pictures	17	16	15	7	55
Video	5	0	0	0	5
Website	1	1	1	1	4
Total Data Set					413

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS DATA SET

School code	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
Interviews	40	40	34	47	39	48	49	50	34	32	413
Documents	20	35	15	31	111	54	79	53	34	64	496
Observations	3	4	4	7	6	5	5	6	4	7	51
Photographs/pictures	0	27	24	16	0	18	19	9	10	10	133
Video	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Website	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	15
Total Data Set											1112

TOTAL DATA SET COMBINED PRIMARY, SPECIAL AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Interviews	943	Photographs/pictures	260
Documents	1151	Video	9
Observations	134	Website	27
Total Data Set			2524