Inclusive Research in Irish Schools

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Research aims

• Provide an understanding of how inclusive education policy is being implemented
• Examine the provision made by schools in addressing special educational needs of pupils
• Investigate experiences of pupils and families in relation to provision and outcomes
Key research questions

• What are the educational experiences of pupils/students with a variety of SEN in the classroom in different cycles of education and school type?
• How do school policies and practices impact on 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 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?
Methods

• Review of Irish and international literature
• National electronic survey
• Focus groups with service providers and support groups
• Case studies developed in 10 primary, 10 post-primary and 4 special schools
## Primary & Special schools

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Key findings

• Policy
• Provision
• Experience
• Outcomes
Policy

• Most schools have special needs policies
• Very variable & little indication of how school is moving towards more inclusive provision
• School admission and enrolment policies recognise need to make provision for diverse learners
• These policies often have clauses limiting access for those with complex needs
Provision (1)

- Dedicated SEN teams – less in evidence in post primary schools
- Assessment process problematic
- Withdrawal model of support most in evidence
- SNAs seen as valuable resource by schools and parents
- As pupils get older support from SNAs needs to evolve
- Therapeutic provision where available valued by schools and parents though access problems
- Special schools very positive relationships developed with therapeutic services
Provision (2)

• Behaviour support from national support services valued and seen as effective

• Many class/subject teachers unsure about how to support children with SEN

• Limited differentiation of curriculum in evidence

• Many pupils exempted from Irish but little discussion of future implications
Provision (3)

• Strong emphasis on social aspects of curriculum in special schools
• Difficulties accessing appropriate accreditation for some pupils with ID in Senior Cycle
• Many schools have developed IEPs but huge variation in quality and implementation particularly in pupil/parental involvement
• Special schools highly developed IEPs
• CPD provided by national support body highly valued where accessed by schools
• Limited interaction special and mainstream schools
Experiences

- Majority of parents satisfied with academic/social experiences of their children
- Home-school interactions generally seen as positive particularly in primary schools
- Some evidence of parental dissatisfaction with mainstream expressed in transfer to special provision at post primary age
- Transition primary to post-primary well managed
- Post school placement can be problematic particularly for some pupils with ID
- Pupils generally happy in school though increased awareness of challenges at post primary age
Outcomes

• Difficult to assess pupil progress given inconsistency in incorporating assessment results into IEPs and inappropriate nature of some assessments for these pupils
• While pupils make academic progress in primary it is evident that by end of primary they have fallen behind their peers
• Social outcomes appear more positive as pupils get older though some pupils with EBD or ASD experience persistent difficulties
• Most pupils in sample had achieved Junior Certificate certification (mainly at Ordinary level)
• Pupils who transferred to special from mainstream had settled well and parents were generally satisfied
Implications of research (1)

• At systemic level
• Failure to fully implement EPSEN Act (2004) causing serious difficulties at school level
• EPSEN Act needs to be fully implemented
• Difficulties with assessing progress and outcomes
• Inclusive assessment approach needs to be developed at national and school level
Implications of research (2)

- At school level
- Exclusionary clauses need to be removed
- Guidance for schools in providing appropriate information to parents particularly at crucial transition points
- Review of use of withdrawal as dominant model of support
- SNAs included as part of collaborative team and SNA support reviewed as children get older
Implications of research (3)

• At the level of Continuing Professional Development

• Ensure greater numbers of class/subject teachers can acquire necessary pedagogical skills

• Focused CPD to support development of IEPs and differentiated teaching approaches

• Demonstration sites where good practice in team teaching is evident
Implications of research (4)

• Support from external agencies

• Adequate resources provided to fully implement Progressing Disability Services in establishing school level therapeutic teams

• Management and delivery of assessments needs to be re-configured to support recommendations from Working Group (2014)

• Co-ordinated approach from agencies supporting interventions in schools particularly in the area of behaviour management
Final thoughts

• Recognition of
• Major policy initiatives and investment
• Greater school commitment to inclusive practice
• Current barriers to developing inclusive learning environments
• Are we as a society and more importantly we as education stakeholders prepared to take the next steps towards establishing inclusive learning environments as the norm?